

John Ellerman Foundation

Museums and Galleries Fund 10 Year Anniversary Review



Manchester Museum ©

Report authors:

Ciorsdan Brown, Head of Research and Impact until January 2024

Alice Thornton, Head of Research and Impact from May 2024

Sufina Ahmad, Director

1. Introduction	2
2. Background and context of the UK’s museums and galleries sector	8
2.1 Overview of 2023 – visitors, workforce, funding and multiple crises	8
2.2 Funding sources in the museums and galleries sector	9
3. Methodology	16
4. Key findings from the Museums and Galleries Fund to date	18
4.1 SWOT analysis of the Museums and Galleries Fund	18
4.2 Benefits of Museums and Galleries Fund funding	19
4.3 Challenges and opportunities facing the museums and galleries sector ..	21
4.4 The role of independent funders in supporting the museums and galleries sector.....	23
5. Conclusion	26
Appendix: Museums and Galleries Fund grants from 2014-2023	28

1. Introduction

This report presents the findings from a review of John Ellerman Foundation's Museums and Galleries Fund (MGF), which has been in operation from 2013 to present. It considers how the MGF has evolved, whether it is meeting its intended purpose, the impact of the work funded, and the successes and challenges it has supported. The review will summarise the background and operating context of the museums and galleries sector, particularly considering the challenges of the 'polycrisis' of the global Covid-19 pandemic, the nature and climate crises, cost of living factors, ongoing and deep funding cuts over multiple governments, as well as discussions around repatriation and decolonisation of collections and museums. The key findings are shared to support and inform internal discussions on the future of the MGF.

John Ellerman Foundation is an endowed grantmaker set up in 1971. We fund charities for work that has national significance in the fields of the Arts, Environment and Social Action (our three funding categories). We believe these can make an important contribution to our overarching aim to advance wellbeing for people, society and the natural world. Our MGF funding programme forms part of our Arts funding category.

The Fund aims to help strengthen museums and galleries in the UK, celebrating the unique assets that our regions possess and their benefit to us nationally. We want to help organisations enhance and sustain curatorial development to attract a broader and more diverse public. Now in its tenth year, the MGF launched in 2013 with the first grants made in 2014 to support curatorship in museums and galleries across the UK (particularly outside London), celebrating the unique assets that our museums and galleries possess and their benefit to us nationally by providing multi-year support for core curatorial work. Grants are directed towards helping organisations enhance and sustain their curatorial development to attract a broader and more diverse public.

The MGF was previously named the 'Regional Museums and Galleries Fund', however this was changed to 'Museums and Galleries Fund' from 2019 onwards. The change was made to reflect that organisations based in London would not be precluded from applying, provided they demonstrated that they work collaboratively with museums and galleries based outside of the capital and share their learning as widely as possible.

With the first grants made in 2014, the MGF has awarded 62 grants worth £5,393,403 to fifty organisations. **Table one** below provides an overview of the applications received and grants awarded from 2014 to 2023. A full list of the grants made through the MGF is shared in the **Appendix**.

Table one: Overview of MGF grants from 2014-2023

Number of applicants each year	Between 33 and 89, with the average number of applicants being 57.
Number of awarded grants, success rate	<p>From 573 applications, 62 grants have been made. The overall success rate is therefore 11%, making this a highly competitive funding programme.</p> <p>The majority of unsuccessful applications were declined at the first stage. From 573 applications, 72 applicants were invited to submit a second stage application, meaning the success rate at first stage was 13%.</p> <p>Of the 72 that were invited to submit a second stage application, 62 were successful, meaning the success rate at second stage was 86%.</p>
Repeat grant-holders	<p>50 organisations have been supported via 62 grants, therefore 12 are recurring grant-holders and of these, none have received more than two grants.</p> <p>Usually there is a gap of between 3-5 years from receiving the first grant to the second (bearing in mind some grants will be made over 3 years).</p>
Average length of grant	2.5 years.
Type of organisation	Independent charities and trusts are by far the dominant grant-holder type, with the rest a mixture of local authority museums, national museums and then lastly university museums. In line with our general policy, we favour organisations with an income between £100,000 and £10m.
Purpose of the grant (linked to theme/area of work)	<p>A very wide and interesting variety of themes have been funded, from gaining a deeper understanding of and strengthening existing collections, using new approaches to collections and their management as high quality training opportunities for early stage curators, to sharing deep expertise in niche areas with partners and networks beyond the museum, including through digital initiatives.</p> <p>Since 2019 these themes have continued though there has been more of an emphasis on partnerships and shared learning, i.e. not only enhancing curatorial skills and collections within museums and galleries but focusing on how this can contribute to wider learning and sharing of knowledge, to raise the quality of knowledge beyond the confines of one institution.</p> <p>Much of the work supported over the years has been centred on museums and galleries trying out new approaches towards curation, bolstering existing capacity or creating new roles. John Ellerman Foundation Trustees have demonstrated willingness to support work and projects which may once have been deemed more 'risky' due to being new and untested.</p> <p>The collection types range from natural history, military, craft, world cultures, ethnography, and visual arts.</p>
Purpose of the grant (linked to e.g. salary costs or other)	More than half explicitly mention salary costs, with several linked to specific new programmes of work.

The geographical spread of grants made through MGF is shown in the map below. It is good across England. There are places such as the East Midlands and other countries in the UK – particularly Northern Ireland and Wales – where fewer grants have been made. We have acknowledged this in our guidance and encouraged applicants from these areas to apply.

Map showing the geographical spread of current and former MGF grant-holders since inception, with the size of pin indicating amount of funding awarded to date.



Consultancy support for the MGF

In recognition of the fact that work in the museums and galleries sector benefits from specialist knowledge, the Foundation has benefitted from the insights and expertise of two consultants for the MGF. Caroline Collier – arts and cultural consultant and former Director of Programmes and Partnerships at the Tate - supported us from 2014 to 2019. Dr Virginia Tandy has worked with us on MGF from 2014 to present. Virginia is an experienced arts and heritage consultant with a wealth of experience in cultural development, having held senior leadership and governance roles in the museums and galleries sector, including Manchester City Council, National Lottery Heritage Fund, and National Museums Liverpool. She currently offers the Foundation one informal interview with each grant-holder approximately six months after receipt of their grant and an annual written report outlining grant-holder progress as well as comprehensive annual updates on sector developments. She also provides support for staff and Trustees in assessing first and second stage applications, feedback on grant-holder reporting and written reporting on the sector's operating context and needs.

Summary of the MGF grants process and funding approach

From the launch of the fund to awarding grants, the MGF application process takes around seven months. First stage applicants are invited to apply from mid-October to early January. Prior to 2020, the first stage applications window began in August. The Grants Team provide pre-application support in the form of online question and answer sessions, responding to email enquiries and one-to-one calls or meetings between October and January. One-to-one application support is particularly encouraged for those that have applied unsuccessfully in

the past, if their queries have not been responded to adequately through the online question and answer sessions.

There are two stages to the MGF which mirrors the Foundation's main funding application process. First stage applications are reviewed by the team and three Trustees in February, and those invited to progress to the next stage are given four weeks to complete their second stage written applications. These organisations are also asked to make themselves available for a visit by Trustees and staff after they have submitted their written application. These visits can be online, in person or hybrid, and they are an opportunity to learn more about the organisation, its work, including curatorial work, and their collection/s. Decisions as to whether funding will be awarded are made at the May Board meeting.

Our MGF Consultant Virginia produces a report which provides context on changes in the wider sector and updates on existing grant-holders, she also reviews progress reports and provides feedback and contributes to the first stage review meeting and second stage visits. The three Trustees and staff meet annually in April or May to consider any changes to the MGF guidelines and purpose, and these are reported back to the wider Board (with approval sought for any recommended actions).

Since 2014, the Fund has remained true to its original purpose and evolved incrementally, with minor adaptations made. Consistently positive feedback has been received by grant-holders on the MGF's flexibility around:

- Being non-prescriptive and led by applicants' funding need.
- A willingness to continue funding salary/core costs (in line with the Foundation's overall grantmaking approach and preferences for core costs funding).
- Accessibility in enabling non-accredited organisations to apply.
- Being open to all types and sizes of organisation (for example, those run by local authorities, to those which are independent or part of universities).

In addition to the consistent and rich feedback received during the lifetime of the MGF, John Ellerman Foundation conducted perception audits with all applicants and grant-holders in 2020 and 2023 to gain feedback on its application and grant management processes, alongside general reflections on the Foundation and its work overall. Both surveys have been delivered by nfpResearch and the findings are publicly available. The 2023 results of particular note from MGF applicants and grant-holders on the application process were:

- Overwhelmingly, respondents reported that the application process is clear and communication is good, which has parallels with the results from the 2020 perception audit.
- Some respondents felt it would have been helpful to be able to speak to someone ahead of submitting an application – and whilst this is offered, it denotes the need to ensure that this is communicated as clearly as possible externally.
- Less generic feedback in relation to declinations would be helpful.

One aspect of the funding approach that shifted slightly during the Covid-19 pandemic was that of the reporting requirements as well as even more flexibility around work being delayed or funding being used differently compared to that which had been expected. This has been warmly welcomed.

The perception audit responses offer us encouragement to continue providing funding in this area – especially in the form of core funding with flexibility around what it can be used for. It

was noted that our understanding of the sector was valued. In addition, the opportunity for networking and sharing learning amongst those who apply was noted by several as potentially very helpful. Out of 25 respondents, 19 said they would apply again, and the others were not sure. The demand for this type of funding is high and the pool of available funders small, but the recognition through the MGF of the need for curatorial skills development and resilience was noted very positively.

Summary of themes and key findings from Review of MGF published in 2019

The MGF review report from 2019, authored by Virginia and Dan Watson, is available to read on our website [here](#). The report was predominantly based on the evaluation work undertaken by Virginia as well as notes from internal meetings, site visits and a convening held in 2016. The report demonstrated the positive benefit funding for the curatorial core of a museum or gallery can have not just on the individual or organisation, but beyond. There was evidence that the grants had an impact on individual curators (in terms of knowledge development and early career opportunities), for the collections they work on (particularly in terms of getting them in better shape and being in a position to programme and share them more widely) and for the institutions they work for. The review noted that the MGF was unique among the funding schemes available as it offers core funding UK-wide, over a sustained period of time, for curatorial work across all disciplines in the context of the museum or gallery's own priorities.

There was also an emphasis on the benefits to the public of much of the work funded through MGF, which often had elements of community engagement in the projects, particularly through collaboration or co-curation with volunteers. The necessary but often invisible work of improving knowledge about or approaches to collections can be very powerful as it translates into better connections and ties with communities and improved public engagement.

In addition to the many positives, the evaluations conducted by Virginia over the years provided a set of key delivery issues that the Foundation is now aware of such as: delays and difficulties with recruitment; the challenges of recruiting and managing partners in a collective endeavour; expectations that big shifts and innovative approaches would be achieved through the hiring of junior curatorial staff; and the project management capacity of grant-holders.

The report also showed that the Foundation's grants up to 2019 were supporting the following kind of work: organisational development; leadership in geographic areas or specialist fields; programmatic work with links to capital projects; digital initiatives; new models of curating; and a deeper understanding of collections. It was noted that these were overlapping in several cases too. Three overarching outcomes for the MGF were also drawn out in the report, and Virginia has reported on these since then as part of her annual updates to Trustees and staff to support with decision making. These include: core curatorial benefits in terms of collections knowledge and skills development and exchange; organisational resilience through curatorial activity in terms of confidence and profile; and the impact of curatorial work beyond the museum through new networks and partnerships. In this review we will revisit the themes and outcomes highlighted by this 2019 report to understand whether these still hold true, or if there have been notable shifts in the types of projects and organisations which have been funded and the outcomes they seek to achieve.



The Metropolitan Arts Centre, Belfast ©

2. Background and context of the UK's museums and galleries sector

The MGF was launched to respond to the increasing challenges faced by museums and galleries in the UK due to a prolonged period of under-investment and consistent cuts to public funding, creating financial pressures and reductions in staff numbers, particularly impacting on curatorial roles and consequently eroding an important knowledge-base for the sector. In the last 10 years, museums and galleries have continued to face challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the nature and climate crises, cost-of-living and rising inflation, funding cuts (particularly local authority) and pressure to act on discussions around decolonisation and contested histories. At present, the outlook for the sector is mixed. Whilst visitor numbers have bounced back to near pre-pandemic levels and income has crept back up, energy costs, rising inflation and predicted cuts in public spending have served to temper any real wins from this.

2.1. Overview of 2023 – visitors, workforce, funding and multiple crises

In 2023, museums and galleries enjoyed buoyant levels of visitor numbers, with research by [Association of Leading Visitor Attractions](#) (ALVA), [South West Museums Development](#) (SWMD) and the [Audience Agency](#) indicating that visitor numbers to museums and galleries have much improved (with museums and galleries reporting 158% more visits in 2022 than in 2021). South West Museums Development indicated that museum visit numbers increased 27% on the previous year but are still 18% down on pre-pandemic levels which, alongside tackling the challenges of the cost-of-living crisis and inflation, has maintained pressure on the sector.

The higher numbers of visitors resulted in an increase in income, which is positive, but not enough to ease the pressure on resources caused by rising inflation and energy prices. On the latter, some museums benefitted from the Energy Bill Discount Scheme, after the Energy Bill Relief Scheme was extended for vulnerable sectors. In addition, geography and free access to many museums and galleries has had a bearing on visitor numbers and there are new approaches to the amount that is being charged for entry. For example, some museums have switched to a 'pay what you can' model in order to attract visitors. On this point of accessibility, the Audience Agency research showed that the barriers to those already less engaged in visiting arts and cultural spaces have been exacerbated by the cost of living crisis, so there is even more work to be done to make these spaces accessible, attractive and affordable to all.

Of note in the Audience Agency's research was the feedback that younger visitors to cultural attractions are more likely to visit if the organisation is aligned with their values, particularly on issues such as the nature and climate crises. It is important to them that institutions express publicly their aims and ambitions in tackling this. The nature and climate crises are dominating much literature and discussions in the museums and galleries sector at the moment, both in terms of decarbonising operations but also in terms of museums' role in educating and raising awareness of the issues. This is reflected in a number of reviews of funding programmes as well, with more detail below, but two examples include Wolfson Foundation's focus on making collections and museums more sustainable for the future, and National Lottery Heritage Fund's (NLHF) renewed focus on the environment, as a key pillar within their new strategy. The National Museums Director's Council has also set up a Museums Community of Practice which consists of different sub groups, including a funder sub group chaired by Caroline Mason of Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. John Ellerman Foundation is a member of the sub group, which is working to consider what, if anything,

fundings can do individually and collectively to support the nature and climate related ambitions of museums and galleries.

Research conducted by [Association of Independent Museums](#) (AIM) in September 2023 echoed the aforementioned findings on visitor numbers, albeit with a slightly more split picture. AIM's research highlighted that some smaller museums are managing very well after the pandemic, but that larger organisations seem to be struggling to get back on their feet. They found that there was a drop in organisations saying they were at risk of insolvency, with 95% saying they were not at risk, compared to 88% the year before. In terms of funding need for those responding to AIM's survey, there were echoes of pre-pandemic calls for capital funding for maintenance, and transformation projects which will put organisations on a more stable footing.

Many museums and galleries are investing, or seeking to invest, in programmes aimed at managing their fixed costs. This includes work to review collections, including ethical approaches to disposal, as this enables both reductions in the collections storage space required and creates opportunities to deliver collecting policies that reflect the diversity of local communities. Volunteer numbers have returned to pre-pandemic levels in the main, with the number of volunteers in museums just 5% down on the levels in 2019/20. However, those with the highest volunteer ratios are the smallest museums and those based in the least deprived areas, which gives an indication of volunteer profile.

Discussions on decolonisation are not entirely new, but have been given increased profile since the murder of George Floyd in May 2020. The museums and galleries sector's position is evolving and broad, and impacted by different internal and external pressures. A report by British Futures on [inclusive histories](#), argues that organisations in the arts and culture sector should not avoid debates for fear of sparking 'culture wars' challenge but rather embrace and support strategies which can help defuse 'unconstructive polarisation' and engage and lead national conversations. They say that avoidance has its own risks, as there is a growing and welcome appetite from the public to learn about these histories, and the sector has an important role to play in facilitating these discussions.

The repatriation of cultural objects from UK museum collections to their places of origin and communities is also becoming more common. The workforce in museums is still not representative of the population overall; however there are a number of initiatives endeavouring to encourage a more diverse range of entrants into the profession and there are a range of projects that support the contribution of relevant lived experience into the co-creation of exhibitions, collections and collections displays.

2.2. Funding sources in the museums and galleries sector

The funding make-up of organisations supported through the MGF is not straightforward and varies due to the type and size of organisations supported across all four nations of the UK. The MGF supports national, independent, local authority and university museums and these each have a range of earned and commercial income streams through visitor donations, catering, gift shops and event hire, as well as several having a philanthropy strategy aimed at trusts and foundations, corporates and high net worth individuals.

National grants in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland are modest. None of the national Arts Councils or equivalents in these countries have dedicated revenue or project funds for museums. In Northern Ireland, the NI Museums Council is the main channel of general

government support for museums. The Scottish Government revenue funds Museums and Galleries Scotland. In Wales, apart from the national museums, the museums and galleries sector comprises relatively small organisations. Small grants of up to £3k are available for accredited museums that are members of the Federation of Museums and Art Galleries Wales (FMAGW). The FMAGW administer the fund of circa £80k per annum on behalf of the Welsh Government's Culture Division, however there is no information available on the website about this at the time of writing. In 2023, the Welsh Government announced investment of £1.7million to 'transform service delivery' of museums and libraries (however, the majority of recipients of these grants are libraries). A [culture strategy](#) for Wales has been announced but the details on funding are not clear at this stage.

The majority of organisations supported through MGF are independent charities, some of which have close historical ties with local authorities, as some local authority museum services have become independent charities and receive grants from their local council to manage council owner collections and buildings. Other museums and galleries have been independent since inception. [University museums](#) have also been supported through the MGF, to a lesser extent. Their funding mix is slightly different in that some receive core funding from government through [UKRI HEMG Fund](#) (though this has seen a real-terms decrease of 44% over the last twenty years) and funding from their affiliate Higher Education institutions. However, like others the Higher Education sector faces significant financial challenges and is threatened by year-to-year budget setting. There is also a perception that university museums are larger and better resourced than they often are, in reality.

Table two provides a summary of the main funding sources available to the museums and galleries sector. High net worth individuals are not listed in table two, but we have heard anecdotally that this type of unrestricted funding from individuals via personal gifts or foundations, while not that common, can be extremely helpful due to the relative lack of formality involved and the flexibility to use the funds without restrictions or formal reporting requirements.

Table two: Summary of the main funding sources for the museums and galleries sector

Museums and Galleries funding source	Description and geographical remit	Funding details and updates
National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF)	<p>Largest source of project funding for heritage in the UK across all four nations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NLHF has launched their 10 year strategy which has four priority areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saving Heritage • Protecting the environment • Inclusion, access and participation • Organisational sustainability <p>On Museums, libraries and archives they state their priority to be: 'Making the collections that museums, libraries and archives hold more accessible through new displays, improving public buildings and galleries, or engaging people with interpreting new and existing collections.'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NLHF's time-limited Dynamic Collections (with a focus on the engagement, re-interpretation and management of collections) has now ended, finishing in early 2023. • Their old programmes under the Strategic Funding Framework (2019-2024), including the open programme and heritage resilience and recovery programme will come to an end by the end of 2023. • First applications between £10,000 and £10million under Heritage 2033 will be accepted from 2024. • There is mention of more localised decision-making and an emphasis on investing in places. There is also mention of delivering grants under £10,000 through partnerships with other organisations and initiatives.
Arts Council England (ACE)	<p>As of 2023, ACE revenue funds 77 museums which have been granted National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) in England. Selected museums will be provided with a total of £36.5m between 2023-26. This funding is only available to organisations in England.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACE's Unlocking Collections scheme which aims to 'enable museums to develop their collections-based work and increase public engagement with, and use of, their collections', is open until March 2024. • Twenty six museums and museum support organisations are new to the National Portfolio, including 9 in the North, 6 in South East, 4 in London, 4 in the Midlands and 3 in the South-West. • ACE also funds the Museums Development Network as well as the Museum Estate and Development Fund (MEND) which is also supported by DCMS, Historic England and NLHF.
Local Authorities		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thereport 'Local Authority Investment in Museums after a Decade of Austerity', commissioned by the Museums Association and funded by Esmée Fairbairn Foundation looks at local authority funding of museums over the last ten years in detail. • It found that: cuts in funding are having a material impact on the ability of museums to maintain basic levels of service with museum leaders concerned about the loss of revenue funding which enables museums to open their doors and pay staff; there is substantial variation in the level of funding cuts between different local authority areas; there are key factors underpinning decision making on cuts which include pressure on local authority budgets from statutory services, political preferences within the local authority, ability of the museum to generate income or match-funding, and profile of the museum within the local authority.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditionally one of the key sources of financial support for museums in the UK, but across the UK, local authority funding for museums and galleries has experienced a 27% drop between 2009/10 and 2019/20. • As non-statutory services, each local authority has the discretion to choose how much of their overall budget to allocate to museums and galleries. There is therefore significant variation in spending on museums. There are some local authorities spending nothing, though the vast majority do spend on museums. • When compared to funding for social care, homeless services and housing, museums representatives are finding it challenging to make a strong case for the importance of museums to the communities they serve.
UKRI HEMG Fund	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The UK Research and Innovation Higher Education Museum and Galleries Fund provides funding to support higher education museums, galleries and collections (HEMG) based in England. • To qualify, applicants must be a museum, gallery or collection based at an approved fee cap higher education provider in England eligible for Research England funding. • Museums which hold significant and unique collections and archives within universities that are outside of a traditional museum or gallery structure are also eligible to apply.
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	All fourteen national museums in England are owned and operated by the state and significant amounts of government funding is channelled to museums and galleries through ACE, MEND and collaborations with others such as Wolfson Foundation (listed separately below).
DCMS/Wolfson Museums and Galleries Improvement Fund	<p>Awarded over £50million in twenty years, largely focused on capital projects and supporting museums to improve displays, enhance collections care and make exhibitions more accessible to visitors. Limited to England.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Latest round provided funding to 33 organisations across England, from 2022-2024 • Particular focus on museums and galleries which are proposing the adoption of energy saving measures and improving sustainability. • 80% of the funding for this round has gone to museums outside of the capital.
Museums Association/Esmée Fairbairn Foundation	<p>Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund, run by the MA, operates on an annual basis closing for the latest round in spring 2024.</p> <p>A review conducted after 11 years of the Fund highlights how it has evolved, with an increased emphasis on innovative collections practice with social impact.</p> <p>Their new priorities focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work that furthers the established strategic aims of the applicants in relation to diversity, equity and inclusion, and/or is community-led. • Core funding to museums. Grants will be of a similar size and duration to previous years. • Enhancing learning from grantees and sharing this with the wider museum sector.
Museum and Galleries Scotland	<p>Receives pass-through funding from the Scottish Government, mainly for accredited museums across Scotland.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy launched in 2023 which outlines that at its core, 'Scotland's museum and gallery collections are cared for, accessible, and shared through stronger partnership working, both within and outside the sector, collaborating on vital and relevant work across the culture, arts and heritage sector as well as Scotland's wider social and economic economy.'

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The strategy has three strands – Connection, Resilience and Workforce. • They run a small grants fund for grants up to £15,000; a capital resilience fund for funding up to £60,000; and the Museum Development Fund which is for museums who wish to become more resilient, these grants are up to £60,000. All of these funds are open to accredited museums only.
Northern Ireland Museums Council	Provides the main channel of general government support for museums. Also partners with others such as Art Fund and NLHF.	Recent grants programmes were for accredited museums to apply for support with acquisitions (up to £1k) and connecting with young audiences (up to £500).
Federation of Museum and Art Galleries Wales	The Welsh Government's Museums Libraries and Archives Division.	No information available on grants at time of access to the website, with a message that information would be coming soon.
Art Fund	England/UK Award millions of pounds in grants every year to support UK museums and galleries. Art Fund is an independent charity supported by members who buy the national art pass, as well as being supported by trusts, foundations and individuals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art Fund Museum of the Year 2024 (One winner receives £120,000 and four finalists receive £15,000) • Commission grants – support the acquisition and commission of important new work. • Weston Loan Programme (short term loans of important works of art/artefacts to museums and galleries across the UK) • Jonathan Ruffer Curatorial Grants – supporting curators to undertake research projects by supporting travel and other practical costs. Two sizes, up to £2,000 and over £2,000. • Going Places – a new UK-wide programme that will engage underrepresented audiences with museum collections through collaborative touring exhibitions. • Student opportunities – grants for museums to offer paid opportunities for students. • Now completed, The Wild Escape project was the largest ever collaboration between museums, galleries, historic places and young people and encouraged thousands of young people to create art inspired by nature, which has been turned into a collective online artwork.
Pilgrim Trust, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, The Wolfson Foundation, The Headley Trust, Freeland Foundation, Rothschild Foundation, The Clore Duffield Foundation, The Linbury Trust, The Foyle Foundation.	Independent trusts and foundations, with most funding museums and galleries across the UK.	Provide a range of core and project funding opportunities ranging from small grants to large (£1,000 to £150k+) and over multiple years.

The funding need experienced by organisations applying to the MGF is clear, and has become more complex since the start of the pandemic and subsequent recovery. Although independent charities - which make up the majority of the organisations funded by John Ellerman Foundation through the MGF – may be less reliant on local authority funding, the cuts have a knock on effect on them by way of increased competition for an already limited pool of consistently squeezed funding sources. Arguably, larger museums are facing greater uncertainty than smaller museums in some ways, as smaller museums tend to have much smaller staff teams and more volunteers, more diverse (albeit often piecemeal) income sources and are less reliant than larger museums on large chunks of revenue funding which pay for staffing and core costs. Local authority funding cuts continue to cause significant concern, and although many organisations are in a better place than they were during the pandemic, there is less optimism as to whether this can be maintained in the longer term. As noted in the table above, Local Authority funding has [dropped](#) between 2009/10 and 2019/20 by 27% (from £426m to £311m) and is expected to drop by £60m this year, 6.3% down on last year.



The Holburne Museum ©

3. Methodology

Quantitative and qualitative research methods have been applied to determine the impact of John Ellerman Foundation's MGF since its inception in 2013, with a particular focus on the last five years. This comprised three main activities: desk-based research; an online survey; and group discussions with current and former grant-holders as well as other funders and experts in the sector. Detail on each activity is given below.

Desk-based research

This consisted of a review of existing quantitative grants data and qualitative internal documentation comprising: grant application scoresheets and notes; notes from annual MGF review meetings between lead Trustees and staff; Virginia and Caroline's notes and evaluations; MGF application guidelines documents; and grant-holder reporting where available (note that there are some gaps in reporting particularly related to the pandemic, shifting projects/timelines, as well as grants made recently not being due to report yet – though we have elicited feedback from the survey and convenings). This research informed the development of the survey questions and focus group discussions.

Online survey of current and former MGF grant-holders

Survey invitations were sent to fifty current and former MGF grant-holders, dating back to the programme's inception. There were 27 complete responses, which is a response rate of 54%. There was an even spread of recent and longer-standing former grant-holders, though staff changes were more evident (through bounce back email notifications) in former grant-holders receiving grants prior to 2019. The survey was open from Thursday 24th August to Tuesday 12th September 2023, with three reminders sent during that time. The questions ranged from: practical details such as type of funding received (salary or programme costs); length and number of grants received; feedback on funding and grants management; to questions on the placement and retention of curatorial staff; the impact the grant had on the organisation, its staff and volunteers; how funded programmes have progressed; and wider questions on the main challenges and opportunities facing organisations within the museums and galleries sector at the moment.

Convenings and discussions with key stakeholders

Following on from what was learned from the activities above, discussions with experts in the sector (grant-holders, funders and sector associations) were arranged to add to the findings from the desk-based research and survey, and to inform our conclusions and recommendations. Invites were sent to all fifty current and former grant-holders asking them for participation in one of four online discussions. Twenty-nine current and former grant-holders attended these, which is a response rate of 58%, reflecting the wide variety of MGF grant-holders from large, small, local authority, university and independent museums. In addition, a fifth online meeting was held with representatives from nine fellow funders and experts with an interest in and experience of funding in this area. The discussions were used to explore the challenges and opportunities facing the museums and galleries sector in terms of the funding landscape, the nature and climate crises, cost of living, staffing and volunteer retention, contested histories and more. Attendees were also asked to reflect on what excited or concerned them most in their work right now, as well as considering what it would take for the museums and galleries sector to be thriving in 10 years.



The Hepworth Wakefield ©

4. Key findings to date

The following section details the key findings from the research conducted for this review. This is broken into four parts – a snapshot SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis which combines and summarises points from all of the key findings; the benefits of MGF funding; challenges and opportunities; and reflection on the role funders like John Ellerman Foundation can play in supporting the museums and galleries sector.

4.1 SWOT analysis of MGF

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grant-holders have felt listened to • Supports the ‘under the hood’ work on collections • Flexible funding approach • Supports all types of organisations and a wide variety of collections • Funds emerging work such as new or additional roles, building and strengthening curatorial teams • Funding for core costs is appreciated as it is still rare • Able to advocate for Living Wage in a low-paying sector • Willingness to fund ‘experimental’ or ‘risky’ projects • Helps organisations build test cases which have unlocked further funding, meaning projects have continued, positions have been kept and collections have been reorganised and reimaged • Champions partnership-working and co-curation • No punitive action taken when things do not go to plan 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11% overall application success rate, competitive rounds with between 50-70 applicants each year, therefore a large number put time into applying but do not get funded • Not enough funding to make more than six to seven grants a year • Funding is restricted to the niche area of curatorial work (this is a strength and a weakness) • Curatorial roles are often low-paid, and it is hard to recruit and retain early-stage career personnel • Projects sometimes veer off course due to staff turnover, overambition or delays to capital projects • Staff turnover is high, especially for junior positions • Institutional knowledge is at risk, if/when people move on
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain our position in the ecology of funders, focusing on curatorial skills and embedding new ways of working whether through approaches to collections management or engaging with communities • Connect MGF more to our wellbeing themes of Community, Access, Sustainability and Equity • Connect up the pioneers in our existing grant-holders to create communities of practice where there are gaps (possibly on issues which chime with our Environmental or Social Action funding categories) • Enhanced focus on collaboration and communities links well with an increasing willingness (from Government and others) to consider de-centralisation, devolved power, place-based funding 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diminishing revenue funding (particularly from Local Authorities) to support building maintenance, staff, running costs and large capital projects • Competing issues such as rising poverty mean that museums are having to justify their existence and make a case for their wider contribution to society, with less focus on ‘art (or heritage) for art’s sake’ • Public perception - museums seen as elite, a ‘nice to have’ • Staff continue leaving the sector due to low wages and feeling devalued • Niche collections specialists posts disappear and skills are lost • Culture wars and the resulting reluctance for museums and galleries to engage in

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The connection to our aim of improving the wellbeing of people, society and the natural world could be strengthened in a more holistic way (i.e. connecting to all funding categories not just Arts) • Support curators to have the time and space to learn from each other • Share learning from Protea (the one-off international curatorial exchange between UK and South Africa-based curators, funded and conceived by John Ellerman Foundation as part of our 50th Anniversary celebrations in 2021) with a focus on the benefits of international curatorial exchanges • Build on the unintended consequences of an enhanced digital offer which resulted from Covid-19, including for example international connections being built and maintained in the vein of <i>Protea</i> – could extend the Foundation’s reach beyond the UK • Coordinate and collaborate with other funders and bodies such as NLHF, Art Fund, MA to share learning and advocate on behalf of museums as well as build better understanding of decision-makers and the public of their value to communities and society 	<p>curatorial development that may attract public criticism</p>
--	---

4.2 Benefits and impact of MGF funding

Core curatorial benefits

Over the ten years of the MGF, funding has largely been directed towards early stage career curatorial posts, boosting existing capacity of curatorial teams or supporting the creation of a curatorial function and new curatorial approaches. There have been very positive benefits to this in terms of: breathing new life into collections; being able to test and embed new ways of curating and collections management including through more participatory, community-focused and inclusive approaches; and providing invaluable early career experience and training for the individuals in these posts. The explicit and targeted support for staff costs and focus on bolstering curatorial skills have consistently been welcomed and received positively, being cited as invaluable by multiple grant-holders.

In the early days of the MGF, support was slightly more focused on enabling museums to understand better the status of their holdings and support a case for the designation of particular collections. This has become even more important it seems in recent years and there is more emphasis on asking ‘and so what’ – there is a deeper requirement for localised knowledge to be useful to a wider range of audiences, which speaks more pointedly to the criteria of MGF on the national significance and relevance of collections, as well as attracting a broader public.

Wider institutional benefits

Some of the most impactful outcomes from MGF funding have come from programmes of work which were pioneering for the institution, including experimenting with completely new approaches in some cases. They have been transformational in places, creating change which has been embedded and carried forward, often supported by a capital development

linked to the MGF funded project. In some cases, these changes have prompted a re-evaluation of mission, vision and beliefs. Not all projects such as these have gone to plan, especially where ambitious plans have been made the responsibility of very junior staff. However the flexibility and understanding with which the funding was awarded, meant that organisations could adapt, extend or pivot when necessary, and learn from what worked and what did not, as a result.

Although, as noted elsewhere in the review, staff turnover in the sector is high and issues with recruitment and retention have been challenging, with MGF grant-holders no exception, the ability to offer funding which is at least two or up to three years long is crucial in ensuring organisations are in the best possible position to be able to offer continuity and security, reducing the chances staff will move on. This has meant that although in some cases post-holders have left, the position in the organisation remains a key fixture of the staff structure. There is an overwhelming sense of gratitude in the feedback received from MGF grant-holders particularly where strategically catalytic grants have enabled new ways of working or curating that would not even have got off the ground, had trust (in the form of an MGF grant) not been placed in them to try something new.

MGF funding has also helped to boost curatorial staff morale and renewed belief in their profession. This point speaks to both the core curatorial skills development as well as the wider institutional benefits and 85% of survey respondents rated a boost in staff morale as the most significant benefit of receiving a grant. This point was echoed anecdotally in discussions, with grant-holders commenting that they felt that the Foundation understood, appreciated and valued their work. There were further comments around the impact funding can have on a team and individual's wellbeing, a benefit that is rarely highlighted.

The impact of curatorial work beyond the museum through new networks and partnerships
Emphasis on working in partnership with others has been a feature of the MGF since the beginning, but the learning from some of those that have had this as a central tenet of their grant has pointed to deep and effective partnership being hard to achieve in practice. As a result, evidence of experience in partnership working is now required and included in the application guidance so that expectations are better managed and this type of work has the best possible chance of success.

Where partnership has worked well, it has resulted in expanded networks and connections which previously had not been accessible. One survey respondent gave their impression that national museums seem more willing and interested in collaborating with regional museums compared to previously. These approaches became more relevant during the pandemic when organisations worked together more closely through peer to peer support networks.

Advances in digitisation in recent years and particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic, planned or otherwise, have had interesting and varied consequences. For those engaging new audiences, extending their reach locally, regionally, nationally and internationally has increased a team's confidence, particularly in terms of highlighting the wide reach of their collections.

Digitisation of collections has been another win in several cases, with examples of organisations which have no physical space and are largely online demonstrating new models of working which have inclusion and access at their heart. In places there has also been helpful learning and reflection about the significant time and unique expertise digitising collections can take. This has been underestimated in places and that learning is important

and helpful to bear in mind for future applicants to the MGF. It is noteworthy that some of this experimentation and subsequent learning would not have happened if organisations had not been awarded the funding to trial these approaches.

Type of funding and application process

As noted previously, the Foundation consistently receives largely positive feedback on both the type of funding offered through the MGF as well as the experience of the application process. The key highlights relate to clearly communicated and straightforward application processes, proportionate and supportive grants management both in terms of processes and staff relationships – all of which speaks to the Foundation’s values of being responsive, discerning, connected, flexible and applying a personal touch. Getting to know Trustees through the second-stage visits was also highlighted positively (likewise, Trustees enjoy meeting applicants, getting to know their proposed projects and building their understanding of the sector through visits) along with the Foundation’s flexibility when things do not go to plan, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic.

4.3 Challenges and opportunities facing the museums and galleries sector

The funding landscape

The scarcity and slow erosion of funding for museums and galleries in the UK has been highlighted throughout this review. There is a consistent call and desire for core, longer term, unrestricted and capital funding to support work which creates the building blocks and basis to build a sustainable museum or gallery, both in terms of physical infrastructure and programming that is relevant and engaging. The funding landscape feels precarious and ‘piecemeal’ - a word which came up more than once in reference to the type of funding available, which is often project-based, small and relatively short-term.

Burdensome application forms where the length and complexity could be the same whether bidding for a £1,000 or a £100,000 grant were oft-referenced, with pleas for funder transparency about what information was requested and why. Funders and sector colleagues reflected that it seemed some organisations were opting to go for smaller, easier to secure pots of funding (often project-based) due to capacity and time constraints, which is unsustainable. The discussions highlighted the importance of clear and proportionate application processes.

Funding the “*sexy*” work (i.e. work that is perceived by some to follow trends) is seen as being given priority over “*getting ones’ house in order*”. This tension was expressed on several occasions, as well as being referenced at the MGF conference held in 2019 and in the MGF reporting. This review found there was a clear ask for maintaining funding sources for collections management including disposals and the “*under the bonnet*” work of curatorial teams, which is being “*eroded*”. There was a perception that these roles are the first to go in challenging funding periods, and so understandably several survey respondents felt that this work is undervalued. On a positive note, there were comments around more funders being open to funding core costs and there has been more of a concerted focus on collections in the sector in recent years. On the latter, the well-documented issues at the British Museum including the scale and number of items stolen from their collections has reinforced messages around the importance of robust collections management. Finally, there is an opportunity for funders to share their learning with each other, which does seem to be happening in places but better coordination of funding and approaches would be helpful.

Nature and climate crises

There was a mixture of hope and concern around the action required to combat the nature and climate crises. There was recognition that museums and galleries have a very important role to play, but that the ambitions many have and the scale of the problems are currently not matched by the resources required (and perhaps available) to achieve significant resolutions.

There are two main ways museums are thinking about this – taking action on their operations and taking action in their programming (especially considering what role they can play in raising awareness of the issues). Both in the survey and across the meetings there were examples given of museums taking practical steps on the former, for example by installing solar panels, insulating buildings and reducing energy consumption (also important because of dramatically increased energy costs), and on the latter through educating and engaging the public in discussion around the nature and climate crises. One way of doing this that was mentioned was through open ‘climate cafés’ based in museum settings. The MGF has also supported nature and climate related work, including through building networks, and developing specific climate-focused curatorial posts. Such funding was supported generally, but frustration was expressed at the lack of funding to support capital projects, as well as collections rationalisation and disposals, which would support buildings and organisations’ long-term sustainability and viability.

Some survey and roundtable respondents reflected on whether the nature and climate crises had become “buzzwords” for funders, and they had “tunnel vision” about this. Some reflected on the risk of organisations speaking to these crises in order to receive funding, but without actually embedding the necessary thinking or approaches across their organisations. Given the crisis that we are in, that funders are focusing on nature and climate as a priority is necessary and welcome – but it is also important to heed calls for support with building knowledge on the topics as well as how to implement changes effectively so that museums and galleries can play a key role as well as securing sustainability for their places and the people they serve, now and into the future.

Decolonisation, contested histories and accessibility

We noted a mixture of excitement and apprehension in survey responses and discussions around the progress (or lack of) being made on topics such as decolonisation, repatriation and inclusive histories. Some cited there being real momentum, energy and opportunity to change curatorial practice as well as collections, and the ways in which people enjoy, understand and steward them. Others discussed competing priorities, and ambitions in these areas not being realised, again due to resource constraints.

There were also reflections on how even the smallest, least well-resourced museums are managing to make very positive strides, and so it cannot all be about resource, with organisational buy-in and leadership both seen as very important in taking this work forward. This is an area which has parallels with the findings from our review of the Foundation’s *Protea* programme, whereby those working within museum settings on issues of decolonisation and repatriation were keen to drive things forward at pace, but decision making power to enact this drive is hampered due to the power structures in place and a hesitancy or lack of urgency to act which points to issues of sector and political leadership. Bringing issues such as these to life through international exchange, shared learning and enhanced connections may help to move the sector to act.

Another difficulty felt by some, but particularly relevant to local authority museums was that approaches to discussion around contested histories varies from institution to institution or

from council to council. Some local authorities have become more risk averse and are seen to be avoiding addressing these important issues. This chimes with [research](#) mentioned earlier in the report, 'Local authority investment in museums after a decade of austerity', conducted by Museums Association, which looked at the last ten years of Local Authority funding and cuts, including reviewing the ways in which decisions are made on funding to museums and galleries, and the variety of approaches and prioritisation within different councils. It speaks to the need to speak with a stronger collective voice on the power and potential of museums as '[civic anchor](#)' institutions that enhance the wellbeing of people, society and the natural world.

Living with, and recovery from Covid-19

One of the most notable differences since the start of the pandemic mentioned by grant-holders was the switch to online working, mentioned as difficult for some, whereas for those who were able or already in the process of moving online it meant they reached audiences they may not have thought to engage with had this not happened. However, for new staff recruited into curatorial positions, learning from others – especially in touching and getting to know objects and collections – was made more difficult due to not being able to quickly ask questions of colleagues. This kind of shift in working environment is not unique to museums and galleries, but are perhaps exacerbated in a sector where so much is centred on the physical building and the touch, feel and interrogation of objects. This also impacts traditional ways of engaging with collections and with methods of curating, especially when attempting to involve volunteers in co-curation. Several projects were impeded by this, and whilst visitor numbers have almost recovered, volunteers have not come back in the same numbers as previously.

4.4 The role of independent funders in supporting the museums and galleries sector

Continue to provide core, flexible, multi-year funding

Philanthropic funding makes up just one part of the complex mix of museums and galleries funding, and independent funders have an important role to play in this ecology. One of the most consistently cited key strengths of funding from trusts and foundations is the ability (not always the reality) that they possess to keep this flexible, without restrictions and in support of core costs including salaries. This type of funding can reinforce messages of trust in the expertise and governance of the organisations being supported. As seen through the pandemic, the flexibility which organisations need and received (from John Ellerman Foundation and others) was vital in allowing organisations and teams to adapt and pivot where necessary. One funder described philanthropic funders with smaller pots as being 'catalytic', but only if there are bigger sources of funding to support organisations to take new ways of working further and fully embed them.

Trusts and foundations may wish to see more emphasis on important issues which affect all of us, such as the nature and climate crises and approaches to diversity, equity and inclusion, but there are clear arguments for seeking progress in these areas that ensure the work is being embedded within a grant-holder's governance and strategy. It is important that independent funders like John Ellerman Foundation try to maintain flexibility with their own strategies if possible, so that they are able to continue to respond to need.

A lack of sustained funding and low pay are also resulting in staff retention issues within museums and galleries. Core, flexible and multi-year funding should continue to be offered as the default where possible to allow organisations to plan effectively and become sustainable so they exist long into the future.

Beyond funding – create time and space for learning with peers

There is more that could be done to support peer learning in the sector. The [subject specialist network](#) already plays this role to some extent, by connecting subject specialists, and providing advice and guidance about collections, acquisitions, preservation, access and research on specific subject areas, as well as connecting a mixture of museums and galleries as well as other funded organisations together. A feature of the museums and galleries sector is that many organisations have small curatorial teams, sometimes with only a handful of staff, and this is conducive to seeking out others in similar spaces to compare and contrast approaches (similar in some ways to independent foundations).

A much bigger mapping of the sector could prove useful in gauging not only what funding exists but what 'funder plus' offers and networks also exist and where, if any, there is overlap. This would support the ecosystem of funders to really be intentional about the support they offer, beyond the most important part which is the funding itself, as well as the organisations seeking funding and broader support. Through discussions, there were also calls for funders to speak more to each other, and even consider innovations such as common application forms or reporting.

Advocate for and champion curatorial skills and the museums and galleries sector's contribution to wellbeing and communities

On an organisational and sectoral level, respondents felt that funders should use their independence and connections to work with the Museum Association and others to influence Local Authority and government of the unique role that the sector plays in bringing people together, increasing wellbeing and building knowledge both of local places but of history, art and people. There is existing literature on this so rather than building new evidence it could be beneficial to create a collaborative statement or position regarding the threat to museums and galleries and their value to society. There have been iterations of this in the recent past and so it may be about amplifying existing messages such as the Museum Association's [manifesto](#). To effect change it is essential to maintain pressure, raise awareness and continue advocating for the sector.

An opportunity exists to spotlight the important role these vital organisations have in communities, and there are examples of projects supported through the MGF which have had a profound and lasting impact on the identity and meaning of people, place and community, drawing together individuals under one physical or metaphorical roof. Since the pandemic as well as a tumultuous political environment, there appears to be a trend to focus more on ideas relating to community organising, citizens assemblies, participatory approaches and decentralisation – this also applies to approaches such as those of regenerative and wellbeing economies which are being applied on a much more regional than national basis. Although we have supported examples of museums with non-physical spaces and digital initiatives which serve to democratise knowledge and research, the UK has a plethora of physical museums which could be used as civic anchors, really leaning into the role and the physical spaces they inhabit in the community.



Cornwall Museums Partnership ©

5. Conclusion

This review has sought to report on how the MGF has evolved, how far it is meeting its intended purpose, the impact of the work funded, and the successes and challenges it has supported.

The review found that:

- Since 2014, the museums and galleries sector has faced ongoing funding challenges and these continue to worsen. The MGF originally came into being because of the widening gap left by consistent cuts and an incremental decrease in available funding through government and local authority sources. This funding need has not decreased over ten years; indeed, the sector's need for financial support is very much still apparent. However, **the level of funding that the MGF is able to provide is a tiny drop in the ocean compared to the level of financial need that has been cited in this report.**
- The MGF is one small fund in a complex patchwork of funding for the museums and galleries sector, which organisations can understandably find difficult to navigate. Analysis of other funding available has shown that **MGF is a comparatively minor source of funding for the sector overall** compared to other, much bigger independent and government funders.
- Despite this, MGF has attracted **largely positive feedback from grant-holders**, notably the fact that it offers core, multi-year and flexible funding for curatorial work, and is not overly prescriptive; and that the application and grants management process are clear and supportive. In other words, **the MGF is well designed and well delivered** in line with the Foundation's values and ethos as a responsive grantmaker.
- However, **it is concerning that the MGF has an overall success rate of only 11%.** This compares poorly to the Foundation's success rate for its main grants programme (28%). This suggests two conclusions:
 - There is **clearly a demand for this type of funding** and there is no question that the MGF is responding to a need in the sector.
 - On the other hand, nearly 90% of applicants are left disappointed: **we simply cannot meet anywhere near the current level of demand** and this does a disservice to all those organisations who put time into an application in good faith, with the odds of success stacked heavily against them.
- **Successful grant-holders have experienced many benefits** from this funding, including positives for the individuals whose posts are funded (including early career curatorial professionals); their teams; the wider organisation; and a wider network of partner organisations, where relevant. In many cases, the funding has also contributed to positive environmental benefits and opportunities for public and community engagement, although this has been harder to evidence consistently.
- **Similarly, in some cases organisations reported that the funding has been 'catalytic'** and has provided a foundation for further organisational or curatorial development beyond their MGF grant – especially when providing vital resourcing capacity in the form of bolstered curatorial teams or new ways of working. However, we have not been able to follow up consistently with every organisation to understand better the long-term effects of the funding, particularly in a context where staff turnover is high and organisations face ongoing funding challenges.
- **We have also not been able to analyse the role that MGF funding plays within grant-holder organisations' overall funding mix** in any detail, for example how substantial a source of funding it is for organisations of different types and sizes.

Overall, the MGF has undoubtedly supported brilliant projects, passionate people, and clever and resourceful adaptations during the most difficult times. In many cases, grant-holders have been enabled to try out new ideas, whether in the form of new curatorial posts or new approaches to collections management. MGF funding continues to be appreciated and have a positive impact on the organisations that do receive funding, especially on staff morale.

We were aware from previous analysis that recruitment and retention of teams, and partnership working have been tricky. These issues have in places been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, but we have also seen where the benefits of partnership have been keenly felt, in creating peer networks which support rather than compete with each other. This speaks to the value of MGF's focus on the role of the curator, the wider knowledge of the organisation, and benefits to the sector as a whole.

This review found that organisations have made positive use of the MGF's flexible core funding, and that fellow independent funders working in the museums and galleries are supportive of the role we play in the sector. There are many examples of grants which have furthered collective understanding on social history, as well as our understanding of the environment and of the arts. Collections and the curatorial skills which are built through the study of them have a very important role to play in building society's collective understanding of our past, present and future. However, there does need to be a clearer alignment between the purpose of the Museums and Galleries Fund and the Foundation's overall strategy and mission to advance the wellbeing of people, society and the natural world, and the size of resources that we are able to offer.

John Ellerman Foundation will enter a new strategic period when our current strategy comes to an end in 2025. This review will be used to inform our new strategic direction, including the future of this Fund. In the meantime, the next round of the Museums and Galleries Fund will be open for applications in October 2024 and potential applicants will be able to find out more information about the process on our website.

Appendix: Museums and Galleries Fund grants from 2014-2023

Organisations highlighted in colour denote those which have received more than one MGF grant.

	Name of Organisation	Use of grant	Year awarded	Amount	Years	Geographical area	Collection type
Round 1 - 2014	Tyne and Wear Archives Development Trust	Towards the costs of a 'Basic Design' research and exhibition project at the Hatton Gallery.	2014	£82,264	2	North East	Visual arts
	York Museums Trust	Towards the costs of a Collections Facilitator to work with the British Studio Ceramic collection.	2014	£80,400	3	Yorkshire	Visual arts
	University of Glasgow	Towards the costs of The National Inventory Project, which will research and publish online the pre-1900 European old master paintings in the collections of four participating museums.	2014	£45,000	2	Scotland	Visual arts
	Metropolitan Arts Centre	Towards the costs of the Visual Art Programme, specifically to develop and share facilities and the experience and skills of their curatorial team.	2014	£82,825	1	Northern Ireland	Visual arts
	Leeds Museums Galleries	Towards the salary of an Assistant Geology Post to manage a project which connects the Museum's geology collection with specialist experts and local geology collections.	2014	£112,000	3	Yorkshire	Geology, local history
	Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery	Towards the costs of a project reuniting HMS Challenger material from across the UK, in the form of a searchable on-line database for researchers and wider audiences.	2014	£91,930	2	South West	Oceanography
	Grundy Art Gallery/Blackpool	Towards the salary of the Collections Officer to research and manage Blackpool's historic illuminations collection.	2014	£135,000	3	North West	Local history
Round 2	Royal Pavilion & Museums	Towards the 'Film Pioneers' project, to better understand and display this important film and media collection which illustrates the seminal role Brighton and Hove played in film-making in the 1890s and early 1900s.	2015	£92,505	1.5	South East	Film and media

	Manchester Museums Partnership	Towards a programme of curatorial development, to enhance knowledge, skills and confidence in the use of the four partner museums' collections of Islamic art, fabric and other objects.	2015	£97,882	2	North West	World Cultures & Ethnography
	Lakeland Arts/Cumbria Museums	Towards the Cumbria Museums Consortium Curatorial Skills Development Programme, which will provide training, share knowledge to strengthen collection care and improve the management of loans by museums across the region.	2015	£90,000	3	North West	Visual arts
	Gainsborough's House Society	Towards core costs, specifically the salary of the 'Keeper of Art & Place' to develop the 'Art in Suffolk' initiative with museums across the county, by sharing professional art curatorial skills and training to help the county's museums make the best use of their art collections.	2015	£84,000	3	East	Social History & Anthropology
	Bristol Museums Development Trust	Towards the costs of South West Museums Natural Sciences Project, a dedicated programme of training and professional development to enhance curatorial skills across the region.	2015	£85,425	2	South West	Natural sciences
	Bowes Museum	Towards the salary of an early career curator of Fine Art, to work closely with the Auckland Castle curatorial team and Durham University to research the collections, disseminate the learning and raise the profile of Spanish Art in Durham.	2015	£89,250	3	North East	Visual arts
Round 3 - 2016	Turner Contemporary	Towards the costs of developing an innovative, audience-led curatorial approach to enable community members to shape the programme.	2016	£90,000	3	South East	Visual arts
	Potteries Museum & Art Gallery	Towards the salary of a full-time assistant curator to develop the Local History collections, increase access to those collections and ensure the transfer of curatorial knowledge.	2016	£81,110	3	West Midlands	Social History & Anthropology
	Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales	In partnership with the Natural History Museum, towards the costs of training and assisting curatorial staff at six museums across the UK to research, categorise and interpret the molluscs in their natural history collections.	2016	£92,950	2	Wales	Natural History
	National Maritime Museum Cornwall	Towards the costs of curating the nation's small boats collection and address under-provision in the care, conservation and interpretation of historic small boats and crafts.	2016	£95,172	2	South West	Maritime, boats
	National Army Museum	Towards the costs of supporting a national network of regional army museums to broaden audiences, share good practice and support curatorial development.	2016	£66,085	2	South East	Military

	Beamish Museum	Towards the costs of curatorial activity in the "Remaking Beamish" project, which aims to create authentic and immersive settings that are representative of the North East.	2016	£78,000	3	South East	Local history
Round 4 - 2017	Watts Gallery	Towards the salary of a new Curator of Landscape to develop and implement a coherent vision for the different sites comprising the Artists' Village	2017	£46,000	2	South East	Visual arts
	Tate Foundation	Towards the costs of a touring and registrarial skills training programme with four regional partner organisations, centred around Le Passeur 1881 by William Stott of Oldham	2017	£90,903	3	South East	Visual arts
	Silk Heritage Trust	Towards the salary of the Director and costs associated with improving the care, access and documentation of the collections held by Paradise Mill and the Silk Museum	2017	£99,000	3	North West	Textiles, local history
	Orkney Natural History Society Museum	Towards the salaries of a new Collections Development Team to strengthen the curatorial capacity of Stromness Museum	2017	£75,078	3	Scotland	Maritime History
	Tyne and Wear Archives Development Trust	Towards the costs of a development and exhibitions project at the Laing Art Gallery, which will provide a new model of researching, curating and touring exhibitions for local authority museums	2017	£86,148	2.5	North East	Visual arts
	Museums Sheffield	Towards the costs of the next phase of the Going Public project which aims to research and develop relationships between private and civic collections and philanthropists, especially in fine art	2017	£99,000	3	Yorkshire	Fine art
Round 5 - 2018	Woodhorn Charitable Trust/Museums Northumberland	Towards the salary of a Project Curator, to provide a programme of collection care training to staff and volunteers across the Trust's four Northumberland sites	2018	£92,961	2	North East	Other
	National Museums Scotland	Towards the costs of the Natural Science across Scotland project, providing a curatorial training and support programme to over 40 local partner museums	2018	£107,000	2	Scotland	Natural History

	Holburne Museum of Art - Bath	Towards the salary of a Contemporary Curator, a new post shared between the Holburne and The Edge at the University of Bath, to develop innovative approaches to curating contemporary art	2018	£89,431	3	South West	Visual arts
	Gainsborough's House Society	Towards the salary of the Keeper of Art and Place to maintain curatorial skills and collections-based work and continue the 'Art in Suffolk' initiative with museums across the county	2018	£30,000	3	East	Social History & Anthropology
	Dorset County Museum	Towards the salary of a new Curatorial Director, to lead on the curation of four new permanent galleries, boosting organisational curatorial capacity	2018	£90,172	3	South West	Natural history
	Colchester and Ipswich Museums	Towards the costs of the Evolving our Natural Science project, to transform organisational understanding of four natural science collections and develop their in-house curatorial expertise. Hired an Assistant Collections and Learning Curator.	2018	£87,255	3	East	Natural sciences
Round 6 - 2019	The History of Science Museum	Towards the salary of a new Islamic Collections Curator to develop and strengthen the skills and expertise in the curation of Islamic objects within the museum, whilst working with local volunteers and communities to integrate the curatorial role with community engagement	2019	£100,000	2	South East	Science and Technology
	The Hepworth Wakefield	Towards the salaries and professional development of the curatorial team who will contribute to the installation and curation of outdoor sculpture in the new THW Garden	2019	£84,667	2	Yorkshire	Visual arts
	National Museum Wales	Towards the costs of expanding the online Mollusca types database to 12 additional partners in the UK and Eire	2019	£49,790	3	Wales	Natural history
	Museums Worcestershire	Towards the salary of a new Curatorial Officer to research and contextualise the Worcestershire County Museum's unique Vardo (Romany caravan) collection	2019	£82,000	3	West Midlands	Craft
	Metropolitan Arts Centre (The MAC)	Towards the costs of four connected, curatorially-focused initiatives to further develop their role as an incubator for curatorial thinking and practice in Northern Ireland	2019	£104,000	2	Northern Ireland	Visual arts
	Lakeland Arts	Towards the salary costs of a Collection Management Assistant and Curatorial and Programming Assistant to safeguard and develop curatorial skills during the capital development of Abbot Hall	2019	£95,000	3	North West	Visual arts

	Hereford Cider Museum	Towards the salary of the Director and partner costs, to increase capacity for curation and interpretation and deliver an ambitious exhibition programme in partnership with the National Trust and Brightspace Foundation	2019	£126,000	3	West Midlands	Other
	Cornwall Museums Partnership	Towards the costs of a 3-year Trainee Curator programme in 5 partner museums with collections of social history, visual arts and natural sciences	2019	£90,000	3	South West	Other
Round 7 - 2020	The British Glass Foundation	Towards the salary of Projects Curator and associated costs	2020	£60,000	2	West Midlands	Craft
	Outside In	Towards their "Curating Collections Course"	2020	£60,000	3	South East	Visual arts
	Manchester Museums Partnership	Towards the "Indigenising Manchester Museum" Project	2020	£101,850	2	North West	World Cultures & Ethnography
	Glasgow Women's Library	Towards the "Curating in Partnership Project"	2020	£81,423	2	Scotland	Social History & Anthropology
	Dovecot Studios	Towards new curatorial posts	2020	£81,960	2	Scotland	Craft
	Bluecoat	Towards costs of a Project Curator to explore the links between contemporary art practice and the history and politics of postcolonial legacies, diversity, cultural identity and race	2020	£99,579	2	North West	Visual arts
	Art UK	Towards increased curatorial capacity of "Art Detective", an online forum for specialists and others interested in resolving questions about the artworks held by UK public collections	2020	£81,425	2	West Midlands	Visual arts
	2021 Round 8 -	Tate Gallery Liverpool	Towards the costs of a new curatorial post to embed new models of practice and become more relevant to their local audience, particularly Liverpool's Black communities and people of colour	2021	£115,556	2	North West

	Sheffield Museums Trust	Towards the costs of a Curator of Industry and Metalwork who will work across the Graves Gallery, Millennium Gallery and Weston Park Museum	2021	£94,500	3	Yorkshire	Metalwork
	Nottingham Castle Trust	Towards the salary of a new Assistant Curator role and guest curator fees, to work on their fine art collection	2021	£89,990	2	East Midlands	Visual arts
	Jurassic Coast Trust	Towards the new Jurassic Coast Collection project, specifically the salary of the Conservation Officer - Palaeontology, as well as software for cataloguing specimens, and curatorial training for museum staff and volunteers	2021	£80,000	2	South West	Natural history
	House of Illustration	Towards the creation of the UK's first dedicated online platform for collections-led content on the history of illustration	2021	£56,250	2	South East	Visual arts
Round 9 - 2022	Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery	To use the Tullie House and Lakeland Arts social history collections as a case study for how a comprehensive programme of disposals can be conducted strategically and inclusively	2022	£90,000	2	North West	Social History & Anthropology
	Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts	To facilitate a new curatorial post, Curator of Art and Climate Sciences, at the Centre	2022	£124,677	3	East	Visual arts
	People's History Museum	Towards core costs, specifically an early career curatorial post	2022	£132,806	3	North West	Other
	History of Science Museum, University of Oxford	To consolidate learnings from the Multaka programme and enable the delivery of curatorial activities leading to longer-term benefits for both audience development and the wider sector	2022	£50,362	1	South East	Science and Technology
	FACT (Foundation for Art & Creative Technology)	The grant will support the delivery of the first three years of its Curatorial Development Programme, an annual three-strand series of curatorial residencies	2022	£117,000	3	North West	Other
Round 10 - 2023	The Holburne Museum of Art - Bath	Towards the salary of a Contemporary Curator post and associated project costs	2023	£35,000	1	South West	Visual arts

	The Bowes Museum	Towards a Co-Production Curator salary to embed a new community-centred approach within the Museum	2023	£89,646	2.2	North East	Decorative Arts
	Natural History Museum	Towards the salary costs for the Museum Network Coordinator of Our Broken Planet project and travel costs for partner organisations	2023	£89,978	2	South East	Other
	Jurassic Coast Trust	Towards the salary of the Jurassic Coast Collection Lead Officer and contributions to fossil preparation	2023	£95,500	2	South West	Natural history
	Bristol Museums (M-Shed)	Towards the salary of a Working Exhibits Manager on their Working Exhibits collection	2023	£78,126	3	South West	Industrial
	Amgueddfa Ceredigion Museum	Towards curatorial staff salaries on their Perthryn project	2023	£91,572	2	Wales	Social History & Anthropology