

# Update on the Museums and Galleries Fund 2021-22

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As the trees around us in parks, gardens and woodland transform into a blaze of yellow and scarlet, and pumpkins adorn the supermarket shelves, funders know it is that time of year... conference season!

My colleagues and I have already been treated to a series of stimulating sessions organised by the Association of Charitable Foundations and New Philanthropy Capital as part of their virtual programming this autumn, and we can look forward to more food for thought at #ACEVOFest21 in early November. However, there is one event in my diary that I am particularly looking forward to this year, and that is the Museums Association Conference from 8-10 November, with the enticing theme of 'Brave New World'.

This annual event brings together museum practitioners, policy makers and funders to exchange ideas and learn, provoke, strategise and be inspired. In 2020 the conference pivoted to a virtual format swiftly and successfully. This time the conference will take place in a hybrid way for the first time, enabling participants to come together physically in Liverpool or join in remotely. This flexibility is a sign of the times, and many would argue, a silver lining to the challenges caused by the pandemic, in that it makes for a more inclusive and accessible event.

One of the reasons why I am especially excited to be part of this year's conference is that museums and galleries have long occupied a central place in my personal and professional life. My initial foray into grantmaking at the Rothschild Foundation (Hanadiv) Europe nearly twenty years ago, followed a stint as a junior researcher at the Jewish Museum of Amsterdam. There I had been cataloguing a rare collection of Hebrew and Jewish manuscripts, spanning five centuries and several continents. I will never forget the thrill of handling these precious items and discovering their ability to tell a story of the people who created these beautiful objects and relied on them for their spiritual and intellectual sustenance despite the sometimes frightful trials and tribulations of historical circumstances.

In Liverpool, alongside colleagues from Art Fund and Museums Galleries Scotland, I will be speaking on the theme of Covid-19 as a catalyst for change. Our panel discussion will be chaired by Dr Virginia Tandy, longstanding advisor and evaluator of John Ellerman Foundation's Museums and Galleries Fund. Together, we will be reflecting on the ways in which different funders have adapted their respective programmes and ways of working over the past 18 months. Ellerman's response to Covid is perhaps best epitomised by the "We stand with the sector" pledge, which was coordinated by London Funders and signed by hundreds. This allowed us to reimagine the art of the possible. Funders were called on to prioritise and offer flexibility, adaptability and support to applicants and those they fund. As a group, we did so in many ways, including launching emergency funds, providing grant uplifts, changing reporting requirements, and removing breaks between a grant ending and an organisation reapplying. In our panel discussion at the MA Conference, we will explore how we can best meet the needs of the sector going forward – an urgent concern for those tasked with raising funds.

Our Museums and Galleries Fund is entering its ninth year and to date has awarded 51 multi-year grants, mostly core funding, worth a total of just under £4.4M. We aim to help strengthen museums and galleries in the UK by supporting organisations wishing to enhance and sustain

curatorial development in order to attract a broader and more diverse public. This core aim has remained consistent since the Fund's inception back in 2013. With most, if not all, museums and galleries forced to close during the numerous lockdowns of 2020-21, we recognise the need to support these institutions more than ever.

This is particularly relevant as we know that many museums and galleries are having to think hard about their operating models in the wake of the pandemic. Linked to this, they will be grappling with difficult questions relating to the role of cultural institutions when it comes to addressing the urgent themes of the day – many of them directly related to the collections they look after and present, digitally and in person, to audiences in the UK, and increasingly further afield. These include timely and often long-overdue questions around legitimacy, representation and inclusivity. With COP26 about to kick off, museums and galleries are only too aware of the climate crisis and the important role they have to play in terms of advocacy and modelling good institutional behaviour.

The current round of the Fund opened earlier this month and the deadline for submitting first-stage applications is Friday 7 January 2022. We are particularly interested in proposals which enable new ways of working both for established curators or those just starting out, or which ensure organisations are able to safeguard and advance curatorial skills and make the most of opportunities at a time of development or change. Based on the learning from previous rounds and our existing portfolio, we expect digital and tech innovation to play a significant part in this year's round of applications.

The Fund remains open to a wide variety of collection types. We have supported visual and decorative arts, archaeology, and social and natural history collections, to name but a few. You can find out about the grants we have made on [our website](#) and through [360 Giving](#). Accreditation is not required, but applicants are expected to demonstrate excellence in their field at a UK-wide level; national significance, usually through a unique or high-quality collection; commitment to collaborative approaches, either as the focus of the request, or at a minimum with a strong track record of partnership working.

If you have any queries in the meantime about eligibility criteria or the application process, please contact us via [museums@ellerman.org.uk](mailto:museums@ellerman.org.uk) in the first instance. A follow-up phone call with a member of the Grants Team can be arranged for more in-depth queries.