CAPOD Funding Report

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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Event /Course Title</th>
<th>Visitor Studies Group Conference 2017</th>
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<td>Date of event</td>
<td>22nd-23rd March 2017</td>
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1. Brief description of Event (50-100 words):

The two day conference examined the theme of Measuring Up. A range of speakers from national organisations, major museums, universities and research companies shared their experiences, ideas, frameworks, failures, successes and tips for measuring the intangible outcomes of projects. Particular focus was on measuring social value and wellbeing. A regular theme throughout the conference was the difficulty of capturing these intangible outcomes and there was much discussion of ways of overcoming some of the problems. The conference also provided a range of approaches to measuring impact and speakers were open about what had and had not worked.

2. What were the benefits of attending and what did you gain from the experience in terms of transferable skills and knowledge.

Impact measurement is an increasingly important aspect of our work as a Unit and of my work in particular. This is especially the case as we participate increasingly in projects that will contribute to the REF, which requires robust evidence of genuine impact. Despite this, impact measurement has been a large skills gap for myself and within the Unit which required filling. The conference provided a range of approaches that I can now trial and gave me a much better idea of how to carry out this kind of evaluation. This will undoubtedly allow us to work more effectively with academics and to assess and consequently improve our existing internal projects.

3. What actions will you be taking as a result of attending or by making new networking contacts.

Initially I will be assessing our major MUSA Young Artist Award schools programme, both to trial one of the approaches and to see how we can ensure that this project, probably our most significant outreach activity, has the impact we think. I will also have an increased involvement in our collaborative research projects with academics and be making use of these new skills.

4. Can you share any additional resources produced in connection with the event (e.g. feedback from participants, training resources, website links, and additional materials.

I have complete notes from the conference. Presentations are available on the Visitor Studies Group website: http://visitors.org.uk/measuring-ways-capturing-social-value-intangible-outcomes/

5. Tips/experience learned from the event
The most important learning points related to the general approaches we can take in this area. The need to begin with a “theory of change”, a hypothesis about what we think our work achieves, before moving on to plot how we think that change happens – noting the causal influences. These causal influences are the things that we need to test.

Another major learning point was that we do not need to test all these causal links – only the ones that have not already been proven, only the ones we can influence and only the ones that have a major influence on our theory of change. The danger of getting bogged down in trying to prove every cause and effect relationship was a recurring theme throughout the conference. Our research needs to be good, but it only needs to be good enough for our purposes. Otherwise the overwhelming amount of work that we might perceive to be necessary can dissuade us from doing the work or take more time and resources than necessary.

I also discovered a range of approaches to use, including creative and anthropological approaches, and the necessity in many cases for control samples.

6. Any additional comments or information regarding the event

An excellent conference, well worth attending. The chance to visit some of London’s national museums also gave me ideas in other areas of my work, especially exhibition interpretation and display techniques.