



**Association of
Independent Museums**

The National Body Connecting, Supporting
and Representing Independent Museums

Success Guides

Successfully Working Internationally





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Jane Weeks

Front cover picture: Mwanaima Salim, Curator of the Meru Museum, Kenya, inspects the Abbot Hall Walled Garden at the Museum of East Anglian Life.
(*Museum of East Anglian Life*)

Successfully Working Internationally

The emerging role of museums in other countries and cultures challenges us to consider the various forms museums take and the many different ways in which museums can serve communities.

For many museums across the world, working internationally is not a new phenomenon but, as a dimension of British museums, it has grown exponentially over the last decade. Following the success of the 2012 London Olympics, we are even more aware of the possibilities and potential for working globally. Though there is still an erroneous belief that international work is only for national museums, an increasing number of non-national museums in the UK are working internationally. Most countries have small and medium-sized museums looking to make links with similar sized museums in the UK, or those with specialised collections. This AIM Success Guide explores the diverse ways in which the UK's museums are working internationally, both in Europe and beyond, and the factors they have identified that need to be taken into account when venturing into this area.

Background

Britain's history – through trade, immigration, diplomacy, colonisation, war – binds us to the rest of the world. Some of the most comprehensive and internationally important collections are held by UK museums and UK museums have a rich history of working in partnership with their counterparts overseas to unlock stories and share expertise. But working internationally is always an exercise in mutual learning, cultural sharing and co-production.

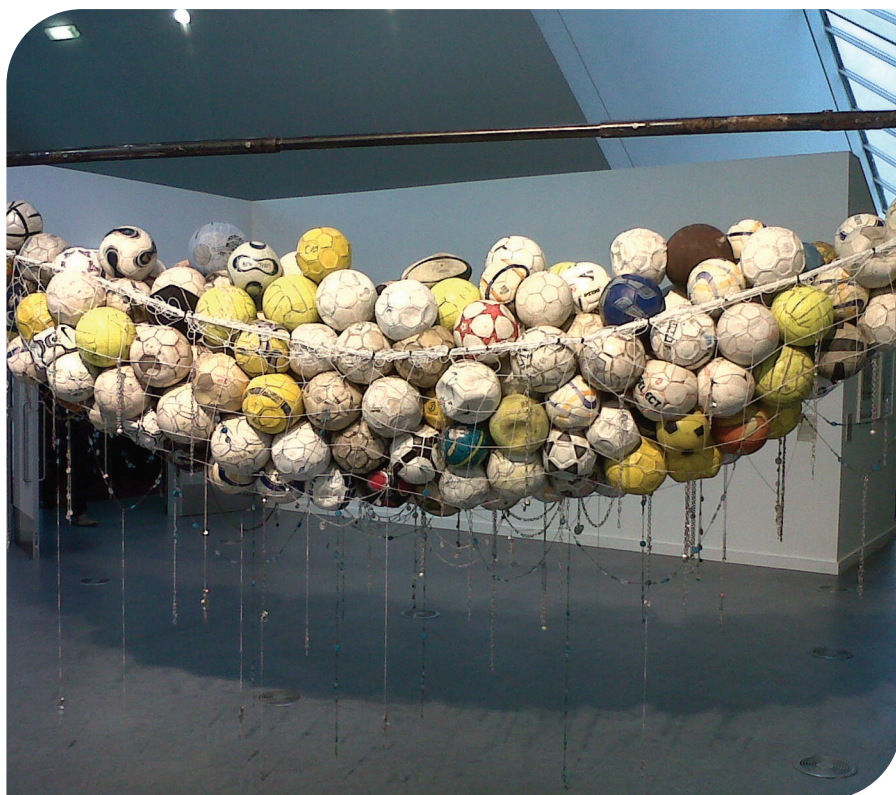
On the one hand, there is respect worldwide for the expertise held by the UK museum sector which has a global reputation for its expertise in advocacy, learning, audience development, curatorial standards, interpretation and exhibition design and commercial enterprises. Arts Council England's Accreditation Scheme has been used as a model and source of inspiration for similar schemes overseas, from Australia to Zanzibar. But this is not a one-way street. There is much for us to

learn, working with museums which face similar challenges but have found imaginative solutions to shared problems. The emerging role of museums in other countries and cultures challenges us to consider the various forms museums take and the many different ways in which museums can serve communities.

Why do it?

Working internationally can bring many benefits, both institutional and personal:

- Developing skills and knowledge
- Bringing a different perspective on your collections and your institution
- Creating a different perspective on shared heritage
- Bringing an important new dimension by linking to living communities and museums overseas
- Attracting new audiences, especially young people who have a more global perspective
- Sharing knowledge



Golden Nuggets, an artwork by Cameroonian artist Pascale Marthine Tayou, in the National Football Museum's exhibition *Moving into Space: Football and Art in West Africa*, part of the *We Face Forward: Art from West Africa Today* project in Manchester in 2012.

- Raising your museum's profile, both nationally and internationally
- Raising the awareness of a UK audience keen to know more about the world around them
- Developing a broader understanding of the meaning of identity and the role of the museum
- Developing a potential new income stream.

Working internationally is also challenging. As Sally MacDonald, Director of Museums and Public Engagement at University College London, says: "Working internationally can confound attributions, overturn assumptions and refocus ambitions".

Where to do it?

Virtually every museum in the UK has some form of cross-cultural contacts, whether through the collections they hold, the heritage they protect, their local community, or contacts with overseas tourists. Museums with

international collections have a natural starting point for dialogue with source nations, whether it is about loans, sharing expertise or repatriation, but all museums can find international stories to tell, through notable individuals, our engineering heritage, agriculture, historic events, the Roman Empire – the list is endless. Many museums in the UK are working in multi ethnic communities, so audiences offer potential links as well as collections.

How to do it?

International work can take many forms:

- Participating in conferences and workshops
- Joint research project
- Loans
- Touring exhibitions
- Placements and internships
- Web links with other museums, places and communities
- Festivals and events.

First steps

The engagement might be a one-off event or exhibition, or a casual approach from a museum overseas. Even so, it's important to think through the implications. The Success Guide will help you here.

It's helpful to develop an international strategy for your museum, which will keep you focused on what you want to achieve. This doesn't have to be a long document, but it's worth beginning by checking on existing international contacts both within your organisation and in your area. What international partnerships or contacts already exist in your museum, your local university or your local authority? Is your local town or city twinned with another city in another country? Are there local diaspora communities you could build links with?

It's important to be clear in your objectives, to be selective and not to be too ambitious. It is all too easy for

international work to expand and absorb time and resources. If your museum has little experience of working internationally, you might want to start by talking to or working with a museum which has experience of working internationally (see Further Support at the end of this Guide), attending some international seminars and conferences, to build up a network of contacts and get an idea of the sort of projects being undertaken. There are many existing international networks which you can join, of which the most important is ICOM (see Further Support). Or you could consider applying to be a minor partner in an EU Culture Fund project, where the lead is taken by another organisation. The UK Cultural Contact Point has a database/index of past projects and European cultural organisations looking for partners (see Further Support).

Your international strategy should focus on specific areas, such as research, projects, and external

Luton Culture's *Truck Art* project, part of the UK Cultural Olympiad, the work of a group of young Lutonians, working with artists from the UK and Pakistan.
(Luton Culture)



Case Study – Museum of East Anglian Life and Meru Museum, Kenya

Between 2009-2012, the Museum of East Anglian Life (MEAL) in Suffolk developed a relationship with Meru Museum, in Kenya. Brokered and funded by the British Museum's Africa Programme, the partnership explored how museums could use local cultural

heritage as a means of developing social and

community assets. Both Meru and Stowmarket are agricultural centres, and their museums have collections of local cultural heritage and social history as well as live specimens (cattle, sheep and horses at MEAL, crocodiles, monkeys and snakes in Meru). MEAL is known for its work in supporting volunteering, training and skills development for vulnerable people whilst Meru Museum's gardens are used by local herbalists and act as a medical centre. The partnership shared knowledge to help establish social enterprises based around traditional horticulture. At MEAL, a small horticultural business was set up to develop skills in vulnerable adults, whilst Meru Museum developed programmes teaching traditional farming methods to orphans and vulnerable children and people living with HIV and AIDS to reduce dependency on food imports and the use of hybrid seeds. The two museums exchanged staff members during the period and shared expertise online. The MEAL/Meru programme illustrates the potential for partnerships based on resilience, sustainability and community development.



Meru Museum, Kenya. (Museum of East Anglian Life)

When developing your strategy, bear in mind significant global events and anniversaries that might provide an impetus for working internationally.

relationships, and you should be clear about what resources, both in terms of staff and funding, you have available. What projects do you plan to develop? Which institutions in which countries do you see as being potential partners? How will you develop and support these partnerships?

Communications are obviously crucial. If you're thinking of working in a country where English is not the first language, what language skills are

there in your organisation or what translation support might be available? Does your website provide information in more than one language?

When developing your strategy, bear in mind significant global events and anniversaries that might provide an impetus for working internationally. The 2012 Olympics and the Cultural Olympiad offered a great opportunity. The centenary of the First World War offers another. The Imperial War

A Chinese delegation on a tour of the Scottish National Mining Museum, as part of the British Council's *Connections through Culture* programme.



Museum is creating an international partnership to bring together all the plans and activities around this significant anniversary. To date, there is a network of over 850 organisations from over 25 countries, including not just the Allied countries, but also Germany, Russia and China. The First World War centenary website www.1914.org provides a timeline, a range of digital assets and a series of 'How To' guides for partners.

Other major events in the next few years are the 2014 World Cup in Rio de Janeiro, the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, and the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro.

Building Partnerships

Developing sustainable partnerships with overseas organisations takes time, commitment and patience. When developing a project, you'll need to build in more development time than you would for a UK-based project.

Never underestimate the impact that cultural and other differences – working practices, food, religion, climate, time zones – will have on progress. For example, during Ramadan, the annual month of fasting for Muslims, offices and institutions in the Arab world are only open for limited hours. Working with China or Brazil can mean early mornings or late nights, and many countries' working week is not the UK norm of Monday to Friday.

Partnerships work best when partners share values, are committed to common aims and when there is a mutual spirit of respect and co-operation. So, it's worth taking time at an early stage to research the country you want to work with – its culture, its politics, its history, even its food and its pop music!

When developing a project, you need to be transparent about funding. This is particularly important if you are thinking of working with museums in

less wealthy countries that will assume you, as a representative of the West, are able to fund the project.

Partnerships are developed based on personal trust, and it's important to be a generous host, when your partner organisation visits the UK, and a sympathetic and sensitive guest, when visiting their country.

How to fund it?

International working does not have to cost a lot of money. Much can be done online, through Skype and social media, though it does help for initial meetings to take place face to face to build trust. Low-cost airlines offer cheap flights to Europe and North Africa and for long-haul destinations, there are various sources of grants.

Travel grants

- **The Art Fund Jonathan Ruffer Curatorial Grants** invite applications from UK curators, scholars and researchers to undertake travel or other activities to extend and develop their curatorial expertise, collections-based knowledge and art historical interests www.artfund.org/what-we-do/apply-for-funding/curatorial-grants-aims-and-eligibility
- For ICOM members, ICOM UK offers a **Travel Bursary Fund** for ICOM members wishing to attend ICOM events, and the **Camilla Boodle Bursary Fund** offers additional funding to extend a visit <http://uk.icom.museum/bursaries/>
- The **British Council** offers a number of short-term grant schemes for specific countries. Currently, the China UK Connections through Culture project <http://ctc.britishcouncil.org.cn/> offers grants for trips to and from China to work with Chinese cultural organisations. In 2013, thanks to a grant from Arts Council England, the British Council offered non-national museums in England one-off grants

to travel to India. The British Council's Transform project in Brazil <http://transform.britishcouncil.org.br/>, which runs up until 2016, will also offer opportunities for building links with museums in Brazil.

Project funds

Various grant-giving bodies and foundations offer funding towards international projects. Many of these are for specific areas of the world:

- EU – for the Cultural Fund, but also for other sources of funding such as regional Structural Funds, Research and Social funds www.ec.europa.eu/unitedkingdom
- Headley Trust www.sfct.org.uk/the-headley-trust/
- Ford Foundation www.fordfoundation.org
- Getty Foundation www.getty.edu/foundation/funding/
- Aga Khan Foundation www.akdn.org/akf_grantees.asp
- Though Heritage Lottery Fund www.hlf.org.uk grants cannot be used to cover work outside of the UK, they can be used for covering the UK-based aspect of an international project.

Can you make money from working internationally?

At ICOM UK's 2013 Working Internationally seminar, Beth McKillop, Deputy Director of the Victoria & Albert Museum, made the point that working internationally offered two options: 'business' or 'showcase', ie generating income or raising the international profile of the museum. Don't undertake international work on the assumption it will make money. It is rare for international working to create a sustainable income stream, and it often takes time and resources to develop. However, a current success is the touring exhibition *Towards Modernity: Three Centuries of British Art* featuring paintings, drawings and watercolours from collections in

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Case Study – The Lightbox and Ceramics Museum, Zibo, China

In October 2011, The Lightbox hosted *From the Realm of the Dragon*, an exhibition of historic and contemporary ceramics from the Zibo Ceramics Museum in China. The impetus came from a Memorandum of Understanding signed between Surrey County Council (SCC) and the city of Zibo,

and the costs of the exhibition were shared between SCC and Zibo. Zibo is one of the earliest ceramic manufacturing centres in the world; its history of ceramic production stretches back to 8000 BC. The key challenges were scale and timescale. By UK standards, the Ceramics Museum is very large and its collections are extensive. Selecting pieces for display from a collection 5,000 miles away was a challenge, as was conveying to the curators in Zibo the limitations of the exhibition space in The Lightbox. The Lightbox curators also had to be flexible, as the list of pieces available for display was not agreed until the last moment, so text panels could not be finalised until the pieces had arrived in the UK. The Lightbox staff also had to be aware of the different approach taken to replica items in China, where replicas are revered as a craft tradition, as replicas would not normally be included in a UK exhibition. The project was demanding but

rewarding, both for The Lightbox staff, who broadened their understanding of the different approaches to historic items and curatorship in China, and the two Ceramics Museum curators who spent time in Woking setting up the exhibition, and being introduced to UK museum practice.



Entrance to the *From the Realm of the Dragon* exhibition at the Lightbox. (The Lightbox)



Celadon vase in the *From the Realm of the Dragon* exhibition at the Lightbox. (The Lightbox)

Manchester and the north west, which is touring six venues in China, including the Beijing World Art Museum. The exhibition was put together by Bury Art Museum as an income-generating project in response to anticipated cuts.

Where to go for advice?

British Council www.britishcouncil.org
The British Council is the UK's cultural relations agency, and creates international opportunities for the UK and other countries, in the Arts, English and Education and Society. It has offices in over 100 countries around the world. The British Council offers advice and support to UK museums looking to work overseas, through their Museums and Heritage Adviser, a post part-funded by Arts Council England. Contact Jane Weeks, the Museums & Heritage Adviser jane.weeks@britishcouncil.org.

ICOM UK <http://uk.icom.museum>
ICOM UK is the only UK museum membership organisation for museum

professionals with a dedicated international focus. It provides a gateway to the ICOM network of 30,000 museum colleagues throughout the world. ICOM UK also acts as an advocacy body, a leader in industry standards, and a forum for professional development. It holds an annual 'Working Internationally' meeting which brings together museum professionals from all over the UK to share their experience and expertise.

The **UK Culture Contact Point** for the European Union in the UK www.culturefund.eu offers workshops and online seminars on bid-writing and maintains a database of EU cultural organisations looking for partners for EU funded applications.

The **Cultural Attaché Network**, which includes all the cultural attaches for foreign embassies in the UK, is managed by *Embassy* magazine, www.embassymagazine, which runs briefing events for UK based embassy representatives.

Summary and Top Tips

Working internationally can provide museums with a fascinating and valuable experience, and most museums can develop the capacity to work internationally, providing they approach it in a systematic way. It will help to bear in mind the following Top Tips:

- Stick a toe in the water by attending an international seminar or workshop
- Build a network of contacts and learn from other people's experience
- Be patient and allow sufficient time to develop partnerships
- Take time to understand cultural differences
- Keep up to date with changing political situations
- Don't overstretch your resources and allow for a contingency budget
- Beware of 'mission creep'
- Evaluate your project
- Celebrate your success

Jane Weeks is a museum consultant specialising in strategic planning and project management. She has worked in Poland, Germany, Bahrain and Bulgaria, and, since 2000, has been the Museums and Heritage Adviser at the British Council. During that time, she has developed museum management projects in Iran, Oman, Bahrain, Kenya, Russia, China, India and Brazil and has supported UK museums to work around the world. She is a member of the Board of Visitors of the Pitt Rivers Museum and is a co-opted member of the ICOM UK national committee.

Further Support

ICOM UK <http://uk.icom.museum>

National Museum Directors Council

www.nationalmuseums.org.uk

Includes details of the international work of national and major non-national museums, including the publication *World Collections*

www.nationalmuseums.org.uk/media/documents/images/world_collections_final_report.pdf. For more information about national museums' international work, see their websites:

British Museum

www.britishmuseum.org/about_us/skillsharing/international_training.aspx

National Museum of Scotland

www.nms.ac.uk/making_connections/international_connections.aspx

Tate

www.tate.org.uk/about/our-work/international-partnerships

Victoria & Albert Museum

www.vam.ac.uk/content/links/our-international-work/

Arts Council England

www.artscouncil.org.uk

ACE now has the national development role for museums in England and recognises the importance of international working. ACE has significant experience of working abroad with artists and is a potential source of advice and support.

Culture360.org

www.culture360.org is an online platform connecting Asia and Europe through Arts and Culture.

Heritage Without Borders, a University

College London social enterprise working in developing countries to build capacity in heritage skills, and provide work experience for students and heritage professionals.

<http://heritagewithoutborders.org/>

Foreign & Commonwealth Office

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>. The FCO website hosts regularly updated travel advice for every country.

Europe

UK Cultural Contact Point

www.culturefund.eu

Network of European Museum Organisations (NEMO)

<http://www.ne-mo.org>. NEMO is made up of museum organisations within the EU, and supports networking and co-operation amongst museums in Europe.

European Museum Forum

<http://www.europeanmuseumforum.info/> is an agency committed to raising the standard of museums throughout Europe and showcasing excellence. It runs the European Museum of the Year Award.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Carol Scott, Chairman, ICOM UK, Katie Childs, Policy and Project Manager, National Museum Directors Council, and Timothy Mason, Timothy Mason Arts and Heritage Consultancy, for reviewing a draft of this Guide and Tony Butler, Director, Museum of East Anglian Life, and Marilyn Scott, Director, The Lightbox, for contributing case studies.

AIM would like to thank the British Council and ICOM UK for contributing towards the costs of producing this Guide.

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3 Chestnut Grove, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 1TJ
Registered in England No. 1350939 | Charity No. 1082215

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AIM Editor – Diana Zeuner



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