Grantee Q&A: what arts venue Lowry learned from



Lowry recorded and presented the stories of those who have seen and been part of Salford's cultural regeneration. Photo: Lowry.

How being realistic about the organisation's capacity and building trust through consistency led to project success.

About the project

Salford's Lowry welcomes almost one million visitors a year to a diverse performing arts and exhibitions programme. It supports local talent and creative professionals and widens access to culture in Greater Manchester. The venue is named for the famous local artist LS Lowry and displays the largest public collection of his work.

To mark its 25th birthday, Lowry involved local communities to celebrate the stories and heritage of the organisation and its impact on the region. The project's three strands of work were a community grants scheme, oral history recordings which inspired a series of creative commissions, and exploring LS Lowry's legacy through community workshops and a public talk.

Emma Smallwood, Development Manager; Jenny Riding, Director of Learning and Engagement, and Aisling Serrant; Head of Learning and Engagement, share their reflections.

What did you find challenging about your application and how did you overcome it?

Emma: As an arts and cultural venue, it was a challenge for us to make sure that we kept heritage as the main focus of our application. We worked hard to get that messaging really clear, to make sure that heritage was always front and centre for everything that we were talking about.

What would you recommend organisations or groups spend more time on when they're developing their application?

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Lowry hosted an exhibition presenting the stories they gathered through oral history interviews. Photo: Lowry.

What advice would you give to someone who is a first-time applicant?

Emma: Make sure it's the right project at the right time. It’s easy to rush into something because it seems like a great opportunity. But you need to make sure the project is well thought out and it’s the sort of work that you want to do in your organisation right now. You must make sure the organisation is well resourced enough to deliver and manage the project successfully, but also to put the application together in the first place.

What do you know now that you wish you'd known before you began the project?

Jenny: How long the community grants process would take – taking time to promote the opportunity, to connect and engage with a diverse range of community groups and support them in the application process. But also, because we had community panellists making decisions on grants, it just needs longer than you might think.

When delivering your project, what surprised you?

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One of the community grants scheme projects was Culture Club, run by Community Pride CIC. They ran creative workshops in photography and collage, plus cultural trips documented through poetry and video. Photo: Lowry.

What's been the most rewarding moment of the project?

Aisling: There was a University of Salford placement student who was originally with us when we did a small pilot, before we'd even gone for funding. Once we got the grant, she started a placement on the project and then went on to be commissioned to create one of the podcasts. It was lovely to see that journey. And her podcast is absolutely brilliant!

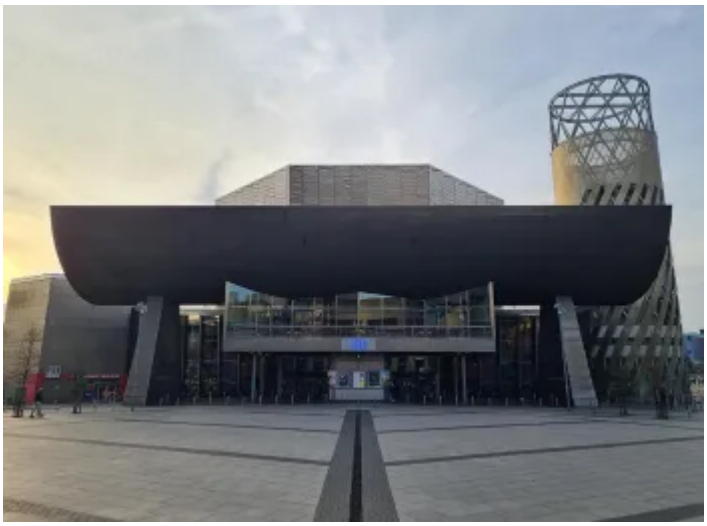
How do you build and maintain participation in your community activities and projects?

Aisling: We plan sessions and projects together with local communities to make sure they really are relevant and appealing to local people. Building trust is key and relationships don't happen overnight. So that consistency, of always being there and always welcoming people in, is helpful.

This is part of a series of Q&As with successful grantees – helping to demystify the project application and delivery process and share experience across the sector.



Blyth Tall Ship has created inspiring volunteer opportunities in the north east. Photo: Colin McLean Photography.



Lowry in Salford Quays. Photo: Rhianon Davies.

Lowry Turns 25 – a landmark year for culture and Salford communities



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