Resource: Evidence Based Case for Funding

Definition

An evidence-based case for funding is one where statements about project need and demand are supported by objective information.

Benefits of an evidence-based approach.

Funders need to make decisions on how to invest their money, which can be very competitive. They will use an assessment process to help them objectively consider the merits of all the applications and decide which should receive funding. An evidence-based case for funding is a stronger case because funders will consider the project to be lower risk. Evidence will show the project need and demand, why the project is a priority, and the potential impact are all based on objective information, which will be considered more reliable than unsupported statements. Therefore, the risks of the project not being delivered are lower.

You can demonstrate:
- That your project has wider support from across your organisation, visitors, potential audiences, partners and experts
- That there is both need and demand for your planned activities
- Why your project is the right priority for you currently
- What the expected outcomes will be for your project

What evidence can you use to build a case for funding?

Your own data
- Visitor surveys and / or feedback
- Focus groups
- User panels, discussions with partners/stakeholders/local groups (letters of support)
- Reports or data sets e.g., collections data or income data
- Project evaluations

Data from the sector
Data collected by sector organisations e.g., Museums Development England, Museums Association, Association of Independent Museums.

Non-sector data related to your case for support
- Demographic data Office of National Statistics https://www.ons.gov.uk/
- Locality data via your local authority, rural community council etc

Top tips:

Referring to local policies plans or data will show the funder that other people agree that there is a need locally.

Building an evidence-based case for funding

Background information

This helps the funder to understand your museum. You could include:

☐   The type and number of objects in your collection

☐   The number of visitors per year and their demographics (age/class/location/diversity)

☐   Previous projects/ activity and your learning from them that has led your museum to this point

Evidencing Need

How do you demonstrate to the funder that there is a need for your project? You can use local policies, your own plans and surveys to show the need that your project will meet. Referring to local policies plans or data will show the funder that other people agree that there is a need locally. A collections care assessment or collections care policy shows that experts agree with or support the collections needs you are looking to address.

Examples:

1) The 2022 conservation survey of the entomology collections showed that 25% needed urgent treatment to stabilise them, so that they can be displayed and used by researchers.

2) Local data shows that the population of our town has a higher-than-average number of people in the 75+ age group. Our data shows that visitors in the 75+ age group are lower than those for the 65-75 age group. A focus group of visitors in this age group, has identified several barriers to access including seating, ramps, platform lift, disabled toilets, large print labels, admission charges for carers and quiet times to visit the museum.

3) A survey of our collections and displays showed that we have very little material relating to people with learning disabilities in our town. Local data shows that there are approximately 100 people with learning disabilities living in our town, many of whom are unemployed. A charity run support group has existed in the town for 15 years with about 30 members.

Evidencing demand

Funders will want to know if there is demand for your proposed project, who will use it, benefit from it and get involved? You may identify a local need for people with learning disabilities, but how do you know that the project you have planned for them is one that they will want to do and benefit from? You may have heard the phrase co-produced or co-developed. This simply means that you develop the proposal with the target group to ensure that they want to participate. You can use records of your discussions/consultation/pilot activities in your application.

For example:

1) An initial survey of our entomology collections shows that they contain specimens of insects that are now highly endangered or extinct. We have been contacted by several researchers wanting to access the collections for research into biodiversity loss when they are stable enough for viewing.

2) We have consulted with local care homes for elderly people mostly in the over 75 age group to gauge interest in visiting the museum. 6 out of 7 would like to bring residents here if we make changes to improve access for them.

3) The local charity run group for people with learning disabilities has confirmed that they would be very interested to work with us on a project to increase our collections via an oral history project. They are particularly keen for the participants to learn skills that could help with employability i.e., to learn interview, editing and IT skills to help with the interviewing process as well as sharing their stories.

Why this project is the right priority for you?

Funders, stakeholders, trustees and supporters will want to understand why you have made this project your current priority.

What process did you go through to consider your potential projects and what criteria did you use to prioritise this one?

What evidence did you use in making that decision?

Are you responding to feedback from visitors, or those who don't visit?

Has a survey or expert advice been a factor?

How does this project align with your museum's purpose, policies and plans?

If you don't have sufficient evidence or information to support your decision to prioritise this project, consider gathering more data through evaluation.

Showing Impact

Funders will want to know what impact their investment will have. They want to know what difference it will make for the museum, your team and your participants. What will be learned? How will people feel? How will their life change? How will your organisation / collections / team change?

Finding ways to evidence this impact will help with future grant applications. The best sources for this will be from previous evaluation reports, impact statements, case studies, qualitative data gathered for previous projects.