

Museum Information Management: Adapting to Change

Quick Guide 1: Understanding Change

Introduction

Many museums are experiencing a reduction in resources and/or changes to their status or governance. Whatever the size, type, location or funding of your museum, it is likely that it will need to withstand the impact of significant change in the economic environment.

Information and its management can often be overlooked during times of organisational change or upheaval. Effective information policies and information management can be vital tools in helping museums make important decisions and maintain confidence in all aspects of their work. The need for a robust information management framework is not a luxury in changing times. Your information policies and coherent information management can also be significant tools in creating opportunities for your organisation to survive and thrive in difficult times.

This is the first in a series of six *Quick Guides*, aimed at helping museums identify and address the kinds of information management issues likely to arise from the kind of change now being experienced across the sector. They will help you tackle the impact of the external economic environment from the perspective of change management, identifying the risks, priorities and opportunities presented to your museum.

Scope

Quick Guide 1: Understanding Change provides you with:

- A reminder of the first principles of information management and policy development
- An understanding of the ways in which external change might affect the way you manage information in your museum
- A constructive framework for responding to changes in your museum's operating environment from an information management perspective
- References for further reading

Principles

These are the eight principles of information management and policy which may be affected by changes to your museum's operating environment.

Enabling effective information management and access	Developing effective records management
Knowing what information is where, who is responsible for it, managing, accessing and preserving it.	Ensuring that the public record of museums' business is properly documented and managed.
Informing strategic thinking	Developing and sharing skills
Ensuring that information is managed strategically; informed by & underpinning priorities and contributing to innovation.	Ensuring that museums have access to appropriate skills to enable effective information management.
Gathering and using management information	Recognising the cost and value of information
Managing the provision of performance and management information effectively and rationally.	Establishing processes to capture and share information, and to develop a museum-wide ethos which reflects the intrinsic value of information.

Developing cohesive services and products	Fulfilling legal and ethical responsibilities
Taking a broad view of information services & products and planning these in response to user needs in the context of the wider information marketplace.	Ensuring that museums fulfill their legal and ethical obligations.

Issues

There are many different **types of change** which may affect your museum. Among those you are most likely to encounter are changes to:

- the governance of your museum;
- the role or goals of your museum;
- the way in which your museum works to achieve its goals;
- the way in which your museum is organised;
- the staff and budgets available;
- the tools and systems available.

It is unlikely that you will encounter just one type of change - often change in one area will trigger changes in others.

Each type of change is likely to have some sort of **impact** on different areas of your museum, including:

- the core goals and strategic aims of your museum;
- the service levels you are able to sustain;
- the logistics of how your museum works on a day-to-day basis;
- the legal, ethical and professional expectations and responsibilities placed on your museum;
- the finances and resources available to your museum.

You'll need to understand the type of change your museum is facing and the impact it's likely to have across your organisation.

Solutions

Once you understand change and how it might affect your museum it's important to take a constructive approach in your response. This will help your museum to withstand change much more effectively than simply being passive.

This does not mean that you have to accept change without questioning it or pretend that everything will turn out well. Taking a constructive approach is all about:

- being realistic
- assessing the situation
- making choices
- being pro-active.

This will help empower you and your colleagues and will support rather than undermine your museum.

Opportunities

Whatever the reason for change, it is unlikely that the impact will be wholly negative. Opportunities will almost certainly exist and it is important to recognise and take advantage of these; they will help your museum in the future. Examples of broad opportunities to look out for are:

- identifying positive choices available to your museum even if change is imposed
- the ability to focus decision-making based on a renewed remit for your museum
- your museum's dependency on effective information management to enable organisational change.

By identifying opportunities arising from change you will be taking a positive stance which will help to ensure that your concerns are listened to and understood.

What you can do

To understand how change might affect the way you manage information in your museum, follow these steps:

1. Decide which **type(s) of change** are relevant to your museum
2. Consider the **impact** of each type of change on different areas of your museum.
3. How might each type of change affect the information management **principles** listed above?
 - Consider issues, solutions and opportunities for each area of information management - make a list of these.
 - Consider whether you have all the information you need in order to understand what might happen - make a list of what you need to find out.

It might be helpful to follow these steps with someone else, so that you can discuss what might happen. You can then make practical use of your analysis of your museum's situation by following the steps in the other *Quick Guides* in this series.

Once you have a better understanding of the change being faced by your museum and its likely impact on information management you will be in a better position to prepare for that change. It's important not to keep this to yourself however - work within your organisation to ensure that you can communicate the issues, opportunities and questions that you have identified to your senior managers. This will help inform their decision-making and will help them understand the impact of planned change on a core museum function.

Further reading

The other five *Quick Guides* in this series provide more detailed advice on the steps to follow to help ensure that your information management is in the best possible shape to support your museum in times of change. The other titles in the series are:

- Quick Guide 2: Surviving Separation*
- Quick Guide 3: Museum Mergers*
- Quick Guide 4: Assessing Risk*
- Quick Guide 5: Maximising Opportunities*
- Quick Guide 6: Real-life Implementation*

Find out more about successful and constructive change management by going to:

Local Government Improvement and Development: Change Management
<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=5829768>

Kotter, J & Rathgeber, H.
Our Iceberg is Melting: Changing and Succeeding Under Any Conditions, Macmillan, 2006

Renaissance London Museums Information Policy Toolkit
<http://www.museuminfo-records.org.uk/toolkits/InformationPolicy.pdf>