

# Strategic Evaluation of the Museum Futures Programme

Year 1 Evaluation Report



*Social Research*

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*Service Design & Innovation*

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*Strategy & Collaboration*

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*Evaluation Support*

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*Social Impact Measurement*

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June 2026



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## Executive Summary

Museum Futures is a £4 million Scottish Government investment to strengthen the resilience and sustainability of Scotland's museums, delivered by Museums Galleries Scotland (MGS) in partnership with the National Lottery Heritage Fund ('Heritage Fund'). This interim report covers the first eight months of delivery, from the programme's launch in July 2025 to April 2026. It describes signals of early progress rather than offering summative findings.

In its first year, the programme reached 104 of around 297 potentially eligible organisations. 100 completed an Organisational Health Check (OHC), a structured diagnostic conversation with MGS. 58 received at least one of 94 grants totalling £3.5 million. Funding flowed across five strands plus a peer-learning bursary scheme, alongside wraparound support reaching 110 museums through 21 activities. Many of the organisations who engaged did so substantially across multiple parts of the offer, consistent with the programme's relational design.

The most distinctive feature of Year 1 is how Museum Futures has been delivered. Museums describe a relational style different in kind from prior funding: first-name contact, a named MGS lead across the OHC, grants and wraparound, plain language, and honesty made possible by trust. Four in five participating museums rate their relationship with MGS as excellent, and three in four rate the follow-up conversation with MGS as very useful. The same design choice that produces this strength also makes the model labour-intensive: protecting it as the programme matures will require continued attention to delivery-side capacity.

The clearest specific outcome finding from Year 1 sits in the Leadership Capacity Fund (LCF). Those who received an LCF award are significantly more likely than other programme participants to report leadership freed up for strategic work. The mechanism is described directly: the fund buys backfill capacity, museums use that capacity to step back from operations, and strategic thinking that had not been possible begins to happen.

The defining pattern of Year 1 is hope, not yet optimism. Museums describe clearer priorities, more confident leadership and better relationships than a year ago, but are careful not to overclaim. The strongest signals are cognitive and strategic: more than nine in ten Supported museums say the OHC helped them clarify priorities, and around four in five say it led to actions they would not otherwise have taken. When asked about operational capability across seven areas, the dominant response is 'stayed about the same'. Eight in ten survey respondents either condition their confidence on continued support or describe current progress as fragile. Thinking has moved. Capability has not yet followed at the same pace. This is the realistic shape of what eight months of foundational delivery can produce.

Reach has been somewhat deeper for staffed independent trusts than for the rest of the sector. Volunteer-run museums and local authority museum services are engaged at lower rates, and specific fit tensions have surfaced for both groups; both warrant targeted Year 2 attention. Among survey respondents not yet supported, none described themselves as uninterested in future engagement. There is latent demand for the programme.

The funding partnership that underpins the programme is informal in structure, substantive in content, and improving in trajectory. The relationship between partners has produced active and substantive co-ordination. Parallel Heritage Fund investment of around £1.7 million in resilience-focused grants to museums ran alongside the £4 million Museum Futures investment in 2025/26, with around £770,000 match-funded for museums also receiving Museum Futures support. Tools, infrastructure and expertise inherited from the Heritage Fund's three decades of investment in Scotland's museums now operate inside the programme. Partners describe Year 2 as the period in which co-ordination will be designed in more deeply as the programme matures.

A consistent message across the Year 1 evidence is that the programme's value is conditional on continuation. Museum Futures takes a long view by design: it diagnoses organisational health rather than project fit, funds leadership time rather than specific deliverables, and treats museums as ongoing organisations rather than as grant recipients. Year 1 has produced foundations from which longer-term outcomes could follow. Whether they do depends on continuation, on protected resourcing of the relational delivery model producing the value, and a policy environment conducive to continuing investment in the museum sector.

# Section 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Why Museum Futures exists

Scotland is home to a wide range of museums. They include national collections in the largest cities, local authority services in towns, independent charities looking after historic houses or specialist collections, and volunteer-run heritage centres in rural areas and on the islands. Together they hold much of the country's physical, social and industrial history. They welcome visitors, host school groups and community events, and give local areas a place where their own story is recognised and kept alive.

The past few years have been difficult. Paying visitor numbers have not returned to pre-pandemic levels and running costs have risen sharply. Most available funding is project-based, which does not pay for the people who keep a museum running day to day. Local authority budgets remain under sustained pressure. Many museums are small enough that the loss of one person is felt across the organisation.

A 2024 sector survey by Museums Galleries Scotland (MGS) sharpened the picture. 11 per cent of responding organisations believed they were at risk of closure within 12 months. The share holding more than 12 months of reserves had fallen from 43 per cent to 36 per cent since 2022, and the share holding less than four months had risen from 24 per cent to 28 per cent.

Museum Futures is a partnership programme designed in response to this situation. It is funded by the Scottish Government, which has committed £4 million to the programme as part of a wider commitment to invest at least £100 million more annually in arts and culture by 2028/29. The Heritage Fund provides parallel funding, and MGS leads delivery.

Three aligned strategies set the policy context. Scotland's Museums and Galleries Strategy 2023-2030 (MGS, February 2023) organises its vision around Resilience, Connection and Workforce. The Culture Strategy for Scotland action plan (December 2023) added a Resilience chapter to its three existing ambitions. The Heritage Fund's Heritage 2033 (March 2023) includes organisational sustainability as one of four investment principles. Museum Futures is a delivery instrument across all three.

Year 1 was an effective delivery period of around eight months rather than a full twelve. The £4 million was confirmed as a Culture and Heritage Capacity Fund in a Ministerial Statement on 30 January 2025. The programme was launched publicly as Museum Futures on 2 July 2025. The Year 1 evidence base for this report runs to April 2026. Where the report describes Year 1 reach or delivery, it does so against this shorter delivery window.

In that period, Museum Futures has engaged around a third of the eligible sector. Of the 297 museum organisations identified at this stage as potentially eligible, 104 engaged with the programme in some form. 100 completed an Organisational Health Checker. 58 received at least one grant, drawing on 94 awards worth £3,506,011 in total. Most engaged organisations have engaged in more than one strand of activity, and most funded organisations have drawn on more than one funding stream. What Year 1 has meant for participating museums is the subject of what follows.

## **1.2 What this report does**

This is an interim report at the end of the programme's first delivery period. It is the third in a short series of evaluation outputs. An inception report in October 2025 set out how the evaluation would be carried out. An early insights report in December 2025 brought together preliminary findings from the first months of delivery. The present report covers the full Year 1 evidence base assembled to April 2026.

The report presents signals of early progress. It is not a final judgement on whether Museum Futures is achieving its aims. It does not reach firm conclusions about how much specific change can be attributed to the programme. It does not include a full set of recommendations. Those will come in the final report.

## **1.3 How this report sits alongside earlier outputs**

This report supersedes the inception and early insights reports. Where a finding from one of those earlier outputs still holds, it has been re-tested against the fuller Year 1 evidence base and carried forward. Where the evidence has moved on, the report says so. The earlier reports remain useful as a record of how the evaluation was set up and what could be seen at each stage. From this point on, this report is the reference point for what Year 1 of Museum Futures has shown.

A final report will draw on a further wave of survey and interview evidence, and the programme's full delivery record. It will reach firmer conclusions where the evidence allows, and it will offer recommendations for the continuation and evolution of Museum Futures.

## Section 2. Evaluation approach and evidence

### 2.1 How the evaluation is designed

The evaluation has been designed to follow Museum Futures as it develops. It uses mixed methods, combining a survey and programme records with what museums have said in interviews and at the Museum Futures symposium, and the accounts of MGS, the Heritage Fund and the Scottish Government.

The evaluation is theory-based. It works from the programme's own assumptions about how change happens and tests them against the evidence. For each result, contribution is weighed alongside other plausible explanations rather than asserted from the survey alone.

The stance through Year 1 has been developmental. The evaluation is intended to support learning during delivery, not only to judge outcomes at the end. Emerging findings have been shared with MGS and with the wider programme as the year has progressed, so that delivery can be adjusted where useful.

The evaluation is organised around seven key Evaluation Questions (EQs). These are the same seven questions set out in the inception report in October 2025, with one small refinement to the sixth.

- How is the programme helping museums to be stronger, more effective and built to last?
- How is the programme helping museums connect with communities and places?
- How is the programme helping with leadership, skills and capacity across the sector?
- How is the programme stimulating new approaches, innovation and test-and-trial activity?
- How is the programme building collaboration, co-ordination and a more connected sector?
- What is working, for which museums, and in what circumstances?
- What does the first year mean for the future funding, policy and support of Scotland's museums?

The refinement to the sixth question, carried over from the inception report, is to broaden its scope. The other six questions are unchanged.

### 2.2 What evidence the report draws on

The report draws on five main sources of evidence. Each source adds something different, and the report is at its most confident where two or more of the sources point in the same direction.

The first is programme administrative data. This covers records of grant awards and applications, leadership fund monitoring, wraparound course attendance, what museums have identified as priorities through the OHC, the Pathfinder pipeline and the peer bursary scheme. These records show the scale and shape of what has been delivered: what has been applied for, what has been awarded, to whom, where, and through which routes.

The second is a survey of Scotland's museums carried out in April 2026. 80 organisations responded. Set against the 297 organisations on the museum population list that are potentially eligible for Museum Futures, this represents a 27 per cent response rate. The report uses a three-way grouping that reflects how involved each organisation is with the programme: 59 organisations that have completed an OHC and received further support ('Supported'); seven that have completed an OHC but have not yet drawn

on further support ('OHC only'); and 14 that have not yet engaged with the programme ('Not engaged'). This grouping is the main lens for reading the survey findings.

The third is a set of 19 interviews with museums, carried out in two waves across the first year. The interviews cover a range of museum types, sizes and locations, and include both museums that have taken part in the programme and a smaller number that have not. These interviews are the main source of direct museum voice in the report.

The fourth is contributions made at the Museum Futures symposium in March 2026. The symposium was a sector-wide event that brought museums together to share experience and discuss the programme; it has added texture to the evidence and surfaced voices the interviews do not reach.

The fifth is a partner-side evidence stream. This stream began with a group interview with the MGS delivery team in December 2025. It was extended through Year 1 by a stocktake discussion in April 2026, a validation meeting with the Museum Futures Partner steering group, and a follow-up discussion with the Heritage Fund. Together these sources give a delivery-side and partnership-side view of how the programme is being run, how the design decisions were made, and what the delivery team and the funder partners are seeing as delivery proceeds.

## 2.3 Stance and language

The report describes signals of early progress. Its language reflects that.

Where the evidence is strong and two or more sources point in the same direction, the report says so. Where the evidence is consistent with the programme making a difference, but attribution cannot yet be claimed, the language is careful. Phrases like 'plausibly contributing' and 'consistent with' are used deliberately. Where only one source supports a particular claim, the report names it as a single-source observation. Where a point is an interpretation rather than a direct evidence statement, this is named.

One framing runs through the report. Museums describe shifts that are beginning but not yet secured. The report returns to this 'hope, not yet optimism' pattern at several points.

Where the survey numbers allow, findings are split between the three engagement groups. Where a group is small, the report shows counts rather than percentages, so that a small group does not appear to carry more statistical weight than it does. Sub-samples of fewer than 15 are always reported as counts.

The museum side is the primary lens. The survey and interviews look at the programme as museums experience it. The partner-side evidence extends this with accounts from MGS, the Heritage Fund and the Scottish Government, and is largely the partners' own account of how the partnership is working.

## 2.4 What the evidence cannot yet tell us

A few things are worth naming as limits on what the first year can show. They are not reasons to discount the findings; they are pointers to where the evaluation will need to go next.

Three of the funding streams are still at early stages of delivery. Most of the Innovation Fund and Unlocking Potential Fund awards were in application, assessment or the first months of delivery at the

end of Year 1. Pathfinder is still mostly at the scoping stage, with considerable preparatory work underway but not yet translated into collective action. There is limited delivered activity in those three areas for the evaluation to judge. What can be said about them is said cautiously, and a firmer view will become possible in the next evaluation wave.

Many of the survey's findings rest on museums describing their own experience. That is the right source for questions about what the programme has felt like and what it has enabled. It is also vulnerable to a well-known pattern: people who have received support tend, on average, to report favourably on it. Where the numbers look particularly positive, the report takes this into account.

The evaluation has not yet spoken directly to the people museums serve. Communities, visitors and local partners have not been asked how they experience their local museum or whether Museum Futures is producing changes they can see. It is still too early in the life of the programme for this type of engagement to bring useful learning.

Two of the three survey engagement groups are small. The OHC-only group has seven respondents, and the not-engaged group has 14. Where the report draws comparisons between groups, small group sizes mean that findings should be treated as indicative rather than definitive. Where the comparison matters to the argument being made, the report says so.

## Section 3. Programme design and Year 1 delivery

This section describes how the programme is structured, what was funded through each stream, how reach has spread across the eligible sector, and what the diagnostic conversations with museums have revealed. It discusses programme output and reach. The question of what difference the programme has made so far to museums sits in Section 4.

### 3.1 How the programme is built

The programme is built around a single gateway and the support that follows from it. Most engaged organisations draw on more than one element of the offer.

The gateway is the Organisational Health Checker (OHC). The OHC is a structured, supported conversation between a museum and the programme's delivery team that produces a shared view of where the museum is and what it most needs. The conversation covers ten areas of organisational health including governance, workforce, funding, collections, buildings and communications. It produces a ranked picture of priorities rather than a score. Completing the OHC opens access to all subsequent forms of programme support, both funding and non-financial.

The funding behind the gateway is organised into five streams, each designed to respond to a different kind of need:

- The Leadership Capacity Fund (LCF) helps museums release leadership time, typically by paying for someone else to take on a defined piece of work so that a leader can focus on strategy, business planning or governance.
- The Unlocking Potential Fund supports single-museum organisational improvement projects, often around systems, processes, fundraising capacity or small infrastructure.
- The Innovation Fund is the largest stream by value, funding more ambitious changes to the way a museum operates or reaches visitors.
- Pathfinder funds collaborative projects that cross organisational boundaries and test new shared ways of working.
- Micro-grants cover small one-off costs from £50 up to £3,000.

The wraparound support offer runs in parallel to the funding rather than in sequence after it. It brings together accredited training courses, shorter lunchtime sessions, drop-in surgeries, webinars, and one-to-one arrangements with specialist consultants. Wraparound support is delivered through a mix of established sector bodies and individual consultants who have been selected by the Heritage Fund from their 'Register of Support Services', a procured consultant framework, to provide additional support and monitoring to projects in delivery. A separate small scheme, the Peer-to-Peer Knowledge Exchange Bursaries (PPKEB), gives individuals from one museum the means to visit another organisation and learn from its practice.

The sequence is designed to match each museum to the right mix of support rather than delivering a single product. A museum might complete the OHC, take up wraparound training, and then apply for a grant. Another might receive an LCF award to release time, then use the released time to prepare a larger Innovation Fund or Unlocking Potential Fund application. The combinations are flexible by design.

## 3.2 Funding in Year 1

The programme distributed £3,506,011 in its first year. The money went to 58 organisations through 94 awards across five funding streams.

**TABLE: BREAKDOWN OF AWARDS (2025/26)**

<b>Fund</b>	<b>Awards</b>	<b>Total distributed</b>	<b>Average award</b>
Innovation Fund	17	£1,685,652	£99,156
Unlocking Potential Fund	15	£756,332	£50,422
Leadership Capacity Fund	17	£599,724	£35,278
Pathfinder	3	£365,800	£121,933
Micro-grants	42	£98,503	£2,345
<b>Total</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>£3,506,011</b>	

The Innovation Fund was the largest stream by total value. Its 17 awards supported a range of projects, including capital developments, commercial infrastructure such as new retail or visitor services, and work to reposition museums for a changed visitor market. Awards were typically between £70,000 and £250,000.

The Unlocking Potential Fund made 15 awards at an average size around half that of the Innovation Fund. Awards are supporting organisational improvement projects, including digital systems upgrades, visitor-facing improvements, consultancy to prepare for a major opportunity, and posts that create new income-generating capacity.

The Leadership Capacity Fund matched the Innovation Fund in number of awards, at 17, but at a much smaller average size. Awards were typically used to buy leadership time by funding administrative, finance or development roles, so that leaders could focus on strategy, business planning, funding, governance or an organisational review.

Three Pathfinder awards were made in the first year. Two were partial awards funding scoping work at the early stages of collaborative projects. The third was a full award funding a shared staffing model across a cluster of museums.

Micro-grants were the highest-volume stream, with 42 small awards. Most were used for items of infrastructure such as contactless donation devices, upgrades to retail and admissions hardware, or attendance at trade events.

Not every application succeeded. Across the four competitive funds, 19 applications were unsuccessful in Year 1: seven for the LCF, seven for the Innovation Fund, four for the Unlocking Potential Fund, and one for a Micro-grant.

Heritage Fund investment alongside the programme has been significant. Six Museum Futures awards in Year 1 attracted confirmed parallel Heritage Fund funding totalling around £736,000: two LCF awards and four Innovation Fund awards. A small number of further partial awards were made with applicants encouraged to apply for Heritage Fund match funding. Outside the Museum Futures programme, the Heritage Fund made a further seven awards to museums in Scotland in FY 2025/26 totalling approximately £1.18 million, including support to MGS itself.

### 3.3 Reach into the eligible sector

Scotland's museum population, as defined by MGS for the purposes of the programme, comprises 303 organisations. This refers to the operating organisation, not the individual site: some of the 303 are responsible for a single museum, while others are trusts or local authority services that run several museums or sites between them. Eligibility and reach figures throughout the rest of this section are reported at this organisational level.

Six of the 303 are confirmed as outside the programme's eligibility criteria, mainly the national bodies that sit outside the programme by design, leaving 297 that are potentially eligible for Museum Futures. Across the first year, 104 of these 297 potentially eligible organisations engaged with the programme in some form – approximately one in three.

**TABLE: PROGRAMME ELIGIBILITY AND REACH AT 31 MARCH 2026**

	<b>Organisations</b>	<b>Share of potentially eligible</b>
Potentially eligible	297	100%
Engaged in some form	104	35%
Completed OHC	100	34%
Received at least one grant	58	20%

The OHC has been the single gateway to the programme and to almost all of its engagement. 100 of the 104 engaged organisations have completed an OHC. A small number of further OHCs were completed by organisations outside the core eligible population of museums, including sector networks, and have taken part in wraparound activities.

Of the 100 organisations that have completed an OHC, 58 have gone on to receive at least one grant by the end of Year 1. The remainder are in the programme through the OHC and wraparound support but had not yet drawn down funding at the close of the Year 1 evidence period. Most are at earlier stages of the funding-application cycle or have used wraparound support without yet applying for a grant.

Of the organisations that have engaged, many have done so substantially: completing the OHC, taking part in wraparound activities, applying for or receiving funding, often more than one of these. The remaining 193 of the 297 potentially eligible organisations did not engage in Year 1. They fall into two groups: eligible organisations not yet reached, and organisations whose eligibility has yet to be confirmed.

### 3.4 How grants have spread across organisations

In total, 94 awards have gone to 58 organisations. The way the awards are distributed across the 58 is worth pausing on.

- 31 organisations received one award in Year 1.
- 20 received two.
- Five received three.
- Two received four.

Just under half of funded organisations have therefore drawn on more than one stream. The combinations follow patterns the programme was designed around: a Leadership Capacity award releases time, that time is used to prepare a larger Innovation Fund or Unlocking Potential Fund application, a Micro-grant supports a small related piece of work. The administrative data does not tell us whether combined awards produce different results from single awards. That question is for later in the evaluation. What the figures show is that the design intent of matching museums to the right mix of support is visible.

By museum type, funded organisations are heavily independent. 48 of the 58 are independent museums. Seven are local authority and arm's-length organisation museums. One each is from the university, regimental and 'other' categories.

### 3.5 Wraparound support in the first year

Wraparound support has been the programme's broadest delivery channel in terms of reach. 21 different activities ran during the year, drawing 110 museums into some form of non-grant support. That is more museums than the combined grant streams have funded.

Not all 21 activities drew similar numbers. An accredited training programme on cultural enterprise drew 40 museums. A management programme for arts leaders drew 36. A visitor evaluation training programme drew 35. A surgery on new funds drew 21. Specialist support on human resources drew 20. Mid-range activities, including lunchtime sessions on trade and retail, the National Fundraising School, and VisitScotland's ticketing and webinar offerings, each drew between 14 and 19 museums. A long tail of more specialist activities, including lunchtime sessions on cafés, venue hire and social media, and sessions on marketing, volunteering and mental health, drew smaller but still meaningful numbers of between four and 11 museums each.

The average engaged museum took part in two to three activities. Some engaged with only one. A smaller number combined five or six activities across the year. Museums are not treating wraparound support as a single product. They are drawing from different parts of it depending on their priorities.

Three features of wraparound delivery are worth highlighting. First, the programme has worked with a mix of established sector bodies, specialist providers and individual consultants, ending Year 1 with 19 selected consultants and 42 further providers in active relationship development. Second, wraparound has served both LCF recipients, through a dedicated training strand, and the wider sector, through the general programme. Third, the MGS delivery team has held a continuing role beyond the grant award. LCF recipients have a named monitoring officer and a grants team contact, with first monitoring reports

received from several by year-end. Monitoring is the main mechanism through which the programme stays in touch with what awards are producing.

### 3.6 What the Organisational Health Checker has told us

One hundred OHCs from the eligible population were completed by the end of the first year, alongside a small number from organisations outside the established population. The completed OHCs are heavily skewed to independent museums, in line with the structure of the eligible pool, but the take-up rate within independents and within local authority museums is broadly similar, at around half of each group.

Museums completing the OHC rank their top three priorities across ten areas of organisational health. Aggregating these rankings gives a picture of what museums are telling the programme about their strongest pressures.

**TABLE: PRIORITIES SURFACED FROM THE ORGANISATIONAL HEALTH CHECKS**

Priority area	Share of all priority mentions
Funding	25.9%
Workforce and human resources	15.2%
Communications, marketing and advocacy	15.2%
Organisational planning and management	11.0%
Museum buildings, stores and other assets	10.6%
Governance	7.4%
Collections	5.7%
Financial management	5.0%
Risk management and mitigation	2.5%
Networks and partnerships	1.4%

Funding dominates. A quarter of all priority mentions fall in this area. The dominance is stronger still at top-priority level, where 45 of the 92 first-priority mentions are funding-related. Workforce and communications and marketing sit together in second place, each accounting for 15.2 per cent of priority mentions, but they behave differently in the data. They do not feature as strongly at top-priority level. They build as museums move through their second and third priorities, suggesting these are pressures that come into focus once the immediate question of funding has been named.

Below the top three sits a middle band of four areas, each between five and 11 per cent of priority mentions: organisational planning, buildings, governance and collections. Financial management, risk

management, and networks and partnerships each account for smaller shares. All ten areas have been selected by at least a handful of museums.

The OHC is a diagnostic instrument, not an outcome. The stronger claim, that completing the OHC has changed something for a museum, is discussed in Section 4. From the administrative records, the OHC has reached around a third of the potentially eligible sector, produced a clear and consistent picture of sector-level priorities, and mapped closely onto the shape of support the programme was built to provide.

## Section 4. Findings by evaluation question

Section 4 sets out what Year 1 has shown against each of the seven Evaluation Questions (EQs). The questions are taken in numerical order. Each section describes what the evidence says, how confident the report is about the reading, and the questions that will be important to come back to in Year 2.

### 4.1 Evaluation Question 1 (EQ1). How the programme is helping museums become stronger, more effective and built to last

This is the central question. Is Museum Futures helping museums become more stable, more capable and better able to keep going in the future?

Year 1 has been an approximately eight-month delivery period for a sector losing ground. The form of resilience an interim report can speak to is therefore foundational: whether museums know where they are, whether leaders have space to think and plan, whether priorities and direction have come back into view. On that basis, the evidence is consistent with Museum Futures plausibly contributing to clearer priorities, renewed planning activity and more confident leadership among participating museums. The harder shifts, to operational capability and financial durability, have not yet arrived. They were not expected to. Museums say so themselves, and describe hope rather than settled optimism.

#### The starting point: museums are working hard to hold ground

The sector the programme walked into is under real and compounding strain. When museums were asked about their current challenges, the dominant answer was funding. 65 of 74 survey respondents (88 per cent) named funding and financial sustainability as one of their top three challenges. No other challenge came close. The pattern held across every engagement group and matched what the OHC has surfaced at programme level. Below funding sits a cluster of related pressures: around four in ten respondents named buildings, estate and maintenance; a third each named the paid workforce and collections care and management; a fifth each named the volunteer workforce and communications and audiences. The sector is facing a cluster of related pressures, not a single issue.

Financial position is flat more than falling, but the picture is harder than that summary suggests. 30 of 74 respondents (41 per cent) said their financial position was about the same as 12 months ago. 24 (32 per cent) said it had improved. 20 (27 per cent) said it had worsened. The pattern is similar for reserves and paid staff numbers. About half of respondents say things are holding steady. Volunteer numbers look healthier, with 22 of 73 respondents (30 per cent) seeing growth.

The qualitative evidence gave this picture in human terms. A chief executive at an independent trust set out the basic arithmetic:

*'Since we came out of COVID from 2023, our paying visitor numbers have never recovered to pre COVID levels. And in the same period, as we all know, we've had significant annual increases in costs. So the graph has got costs and income going in the wrong directions towards each other.'*

*Interview, December 2025*

A leader at a small museum described staff capacity so stretched that there was no time for anything beyond dealing with the day's crises. Some museums are holding steady. A few are doing well. The common experience is of a sector running hard to stand still. Any judgement about whether the programme is making museums stronger has to start there.

### **Stabilisation work: a clearer view, priorities returning, planning starting again**

Within that starting point, the most consistent thing Year 1 has produced is a clearer view. The programme has given participating museums space to step back from day-to-day pressures, name their priorities and form a shared picture of where they are.

The OHC has been the first part of this. Museums repeatedly described the conversation as more than a form. It produced a shared picture of the organisation that staff, managers and trustees could look at together. Several used the word 'aligned'.

The chief executive of an independent trust described how the OHC was used:

*'We completed it as a management team and we asked certain managers to complete parts of it. We took the results of that to one of our committees with trustees, used it to spark some of our discussion there. I'm not sure that anything surprising emerged through it, but it helped us all to just make sure that we really were all on the same page internally.'*

*Interview, December 2025*

A board conversation grounded in evidence rather than individual memory. Not always a revelation, sometimes a confirmation of what was already known, but useful because it brought things into the open.

The survey confirms this at scale. 36 of 53 Supported respondents (68 per cent) said Museum Futures had helped them develop clearer priorities for development or change. 32 of 53 (60 per cent) said it had helped them develop a clearer understanding of their organisation's strengths and weaknesses. These are the two strongest outcome signals in the evidence base for this evaluation question. Only one of 53 said they had not experienced any notable changes. 14 (26 per cent) said it was too early to tell, which is consistent with the programme's Year 1 delivery stage. Of those who did report changes, 51 went on to answer a question about the programme's contribution: 30 (59 per cent) said the programme had made a significant contribution alongside other factors, 12 (24 per cent) said it was the main driver, and nine (18 per cent) said it had made some contribution. No respondent said it had made little or no difference.

Alongside the diagnostic shift, interviews and the symposium surfaced a clear pattern of planning and priority-setting coming back. Several museums described getting a three to five year plan drafted for the first time in years. Others described ambitions that had been put on hold returning as possibilities. A museum leader at an independent trust described ideas returning, including an outdoor amphitheatre, lighting projects and partnerships with tour operators, the kind of thinking she called 'brave'.

Museums used careful language. Not 'we are stronger now', but 'we have clearer priorities', 'we are starting to plan again', 'we have more confidence that we know what to do next'. This is the shape of Year 1 for participating museums: confidence that the direction is right, a lift in morale museums attach to the

programme, planning that had stopped starting again. It is not yet an organisation measurably more resilient. It is an organisation on which more resilient operations can be built.

## Operational capability: limited shift in the first eight months

The change in how museums see themselves has not yet translated into a measurable lift in operational capability. The survey asked museums to rate how their capability had changed across seven areas. The dominant answer across every area was 'stayed the same'. Around a third reported improved capability in financial management (33 per cent) and in communications, marketing and audiences (33 per cent). Around three in ten reported improvement in workforce planning, strategic planning and fundraising. Governance improvement was reported by around a quarter. Digital was the weakest area, with only 16 per cent reporting improvement.

This is to be expected at this stage. The OHC and LCF were the most fully delivered elements of Year 1. The larger grants, which are the streams designed to produce capability change at scale, were mostly still in application, assessment or the first months of delivery at the end of the year. A leader at a small independent museum that had received an LCF award described the position carefully:

*'I think it's too early to say. I hope that it will result in some good change, but we were so early on that I don't think I could comment on it yet. When we got the grant we felt quite optimistic about the possibilities of it. We'd have been in a different place if we hadn't have got it.'*

*Interview, December 2025*

When the survey data is split by engagement group, the gap between Supported and Not-engaged respondents on capability change is small and inconsistent. 19 of 53 Supported respondents reported improved financial management, compared with three of ten Not-engaged respondents. 16 of 53 Supported reported improved strategic planning, compared with two of ten. Given the small Not-engaged base of ten respondents, these comparisons are tentative. The direction of the patterns is weaker than the cognitive outcome signals above.

Two readings sit alongside each other. The capability shifts the programme is designed to produce will take longer than eight months to become visible to survey respondents. The foundational work of Year 1, on diagnostic, planning and priority-setting, is the right work to have done first. The Year 2 question is whether the cognitive and planning shifts begin to translate into operational capability change at the scale the survey can detect.

## Hope, not yet optimism

When asked about the future, museums are more positive than they were a year ago. 52 of 70 respondents (74 per cent) described themselves as either very or fairly optimistic about their museum's outlook over the next two to three years. Only two respondents were pessimistic. This is a clear positive signal.

When asked how likely the positive changes they had seen were to last, the picture shifted. Only 10 of 70 respondents (14 per cent) said changes were well embedded and likely to continue. 49 (70 per cent) said they were fairly confident, but qualified that confidence by adding that continued support would be

needed. Nine (13 per cent) described their progress as fragile. Two said they had not had significant positive changes to sustain. Combining those who qualify their confidence by naming continued support with those who describe their progress as fragile gives 58 of 70 respondents (83 per cent) whose confidence in durability is conditional.

This is the 'hope, not yet optimism' pattern. Museums describe a different direction of travel but not yet secured change.

The pattern is not distributed evenly. Supported museums are modestly more likely to describe changes as well embedded (eight of 53, or 15 per cent) than Not-engaged museums (none of ten). Even within the Supported group, however, three-quarters qualify their confidence by naming continued support as the condition for change to last. The programme is associated with renewed confidence. It is not yet associated with confidence that is self-sustaining.

### **The programme and the problem that underlies it**

Museums were clear that Museum Futures is not designed to solve the sector's core funding gap, and that this remains the dominant constraint on what they can do.

Project grants come restricted to specific activities; museums need unrestricted money to sit alongside them. One museum, close to closure the previous year, described Museum Futures as helping it step back from that position without resolving the underlying pressures. Museums do not hold this against the programme; they are clear about what it is and what it is not.

Interviews also described timing mismatches: LCF money arriving after redundancies had been made, application windows compressed against already-stretched capacity. Museums described value alongside frustration about pace. Both responses are real and both belong in the picture.

### **How much of this can we credit to the programme?**

Three qualifications apply.

First, the strongest outcome signals come from Supported museums describing their own experience of a programme they have benefited from. The 83 per cent attributing at least some contribution to Museum Futures is a real signal, but it sits on the same survey instrument as the changes themselves.

Second, the Not engaged and OHC only bases are small (14 and seven respectively); the direction of difference points towards the programme making a difference on durability, but cleaner comparisons are not yet available.

Third, museums themselves attribute change partly to the programme and partly to other factors. Of 51 respondents to the contribution question, 30 said the programme made a significant contribution alongside other factors, 12 said it was the main driver, nine said it made some contribution, and none said it made no difference.

With those qualifications, the evidence is consistent with Museum Futures plausibly contributing to clearer priorities, renewed planning activity and more confident leadership among participating

museums. It is not yet consistent with a claim that participating museums are more resilient in any measurable operational sense.

## What the first year cannot yet show

Three questions stay open for Year 2.

The programme's effect on museums that completed the OHC but have not drawn on further support is thin in the evidence. The OHC only group has seven survey respondents, and the interview material includes few voices from this segment. Whether the OHC alone produces durable change, and what determines whether a museum moves beyond it, are questions for the next wave.

The plans and priorities that have returned need to become funded, delivered work if they are to produce the resilience the programme is aiming for. Year 2 will test whether the plans hold, whether the larger grants now in early delivery produce the intended shifts, and whether the cognitive and planning shifts translate into operational capability.

The 'hope, not yet optimism' pattern has a clear testable condition. 83 per cent of Supported museums qualified their confidence by naming continued programme support. Whether confidence becomes self-sustaining if support continues, or what happens to the shifts if it does not, is central to the final report.

## 4.2 Evaluation Question 2 (EQ2). How the programme is helping museums connect with communities and places

Is the programme helping museums strengthen what they do for their communities and local areas?

The Year 1 evidence on this question is thinner than on any other. The programme's first-year focus has been on organisational stability, leadership capacity and the diagnostic conversation. Community-facing changes sit further down the line. The evidence is consistent with a Year 1 programme laying foundations before they are built on, and museums have been clear about this when asked directly.

### Community work is already central to how many museums see themselves

Museums in the interviews and at the symposium described their community role as part of who they are, not an add-on to their main work. This came through most clearly in the smaller museums, where the line between museum and community is thin.

A leader at a small museum that runs multiple community services put the position plainly:

*'We've got 14 people working for us. Apart from the museum side, we do a lot of community work, so we provide an accessible transport service. We run a day club for elderly and housebound people. We do a meals on wheels service throughout the winter. You know there are lots of community activities, after school club, young historians group.'*

*Interview, December 2025*

Other museums described intergenerational work with local primary schools, the importance of keeping a site open and active in the life of the area, and civic roles extending well beyond the visitor attraction function.

This is context, not programme effect. It tells us what museums mean when they talk about resilience. For many museums in the evidence, resilience is about more than keeping the doors open. It is about sustaining the community functions the museum has come to carry.

### **A tension museums named: commercial pressure and community mission**

A smaller number of voices named a tension that runs through this question. The programme supports museums to grow income, diversify revenue and think commercially. Some museums worry that the pull towards commercial activity could come at the expense of the community and public-facing work that defines why they exist.

The tension was not presented as criticism of the programme but as a real pressure museums are holding. Free entry, community access, school visits and outreach do not generate income; they cost money to deliver. A funding environment that rewards commercial thinking can squeeze them. One museum trust operating free-entry sites described that decision as made under pressure. Another voice described the risk that commercial work, however necessary, could pull attention away from learning and outreach if the balance tips too far.

A programme that strengthens a museum's commercial capability does not automatically strengthen its community role. Depending on how museums use the time and money they receive, the two could move together or pull apart. Year 2 will need to look at this directly.

### **What the evidence can and cannot yet tell us**

The survey explores this issue only lightly at this stage. It does not ask about community partnerships, programming, exhibitions, events, accessibility, civic role, or how communities experience the museum. The closest survey items bundle communications, marketing and audiences into single lines, which means the survey cannot isolate a change in audience understanding from a change in marketing activity.

What the survey does show is that 23 of 69 respondents (33 per cent) reported improvement in communications, marketing and audiences capability over the past 12 months, and 23 of 69 named this area as a top-three future support need. Both figures are similar across engagement groups. Audience work is a live area for museums, but the survey does not tell us whether the programme is making a difference to how they reach, understand or serve communities.

When asked directly in interviews, museums were candid about the limits of what they could yet point to. Some described early discussions. One or two described small practical changes, including shop surveys of local preferences and audience thinking returning after years of survival-mode operation. None described changes clearly attributable to the programme in Year 1.

The community voice itself is missing. No community members, audience members or local partners have been interviewed for this evaluation; the evidence is museums describing their own sense of their

community role. Civic museums, with their distinctive community and place-based mandates, are also only lightly represented in the interview material.

## What Year 2 needs to take up

The absence of direct evidence in Year 1 reflects two things: where delivery has reached, and where the evaluation has not yet gone.

Year 2 will need to test whether the organisational stability the programme is helping to rebuild translates into stronger or more ambitious community work. It will need a route to hear from the people museums serve, not only from museums themselves. And the tension between commercial capability and community mission deserves direct attention, to see whether the two move together or pull apart as the programme matures.

### **4.3 Evaluation Question 3 (EQ3). How the programme is helping with leadership, skills and capacity across the sector**

Is the programme giving museum leaders and staff the time, skills and support they need to lead their organisations well?

The clearest single outcome finding in the Year 1 survey is covered in this section. Museums that received a Leadership Capacity Fund award are far more likely than other Supported museums to report leadership freed up for strategic work - the outcome the fund was designed to produce. Beyond this headline, the section describes modest early movement on other leadership outcomes, a sector still under real pressure on leadership capacity, and wraparound elements working well where taken up.

#### **The starting point: leadership absorbed by day-to-day work**

Two patterns stood out when museums were asked about current leadership and governance.

44 of 70 respondents (63 per cent) disagreed that their senior leadership has enough time and capacity for strategic work beyond day-to-day operations. Only one respondent strongly agreed. This is the most concentrated negative signal across the survey's leadership and governance items. Senior leaders being absorbed by operational work is a majority condition across participating museums.

Workforce confidence is similarly mixed. Asked how confident they were that their museum has the workforce, paid and volunteer, it needs over the next year, respondents split almost exactly down the middle. 37 of 70 (53 per cent) leaned confident. 33 of 70 (47 per cent) leaned not confident. Only six respondents were very confident. Workforce is a shared concern across the engagement groups, not confined to one part of the sector.

Boards themselves are seen more positively. 55 of 70 respondents (79 per cent) agreed their governing body has the skills and knowledge it needs to be effective. The issue is not that leaders and boards lack skill. They lack the time and space to use the skills they have.

Interviews and the symposium confirmed this in human terms. Leaders described roles thick with administrative, finance and operational work only they could sign off, with no time in the week to think beyond it.

A staff member at a non-participating museum put it sharply:

*'If you've got two people and they're both running around with buckets, you haven't got time to do things like business planning and all of that kind of stuff.'*

*Contribution at the Museum Futures symposium, March 2026*

This is the condition the Leadership Capacity Fund was designed to address.

### **The Leadership Capacity Fund differential: the clearest outcome finding**

Among the 53 Supported survey respondents, 15 had engaged with the Leadership Capacity Fund. The remaining 38 had not, though most had taken up other parts of the programme. On one specific outcome, the contrast between these two groups was sharp.

Asked whether their museum had seen 'senior leadership freed up for strategic work' since engaging with Museum Futures, 11 of 15 LCF recipients reported this outcome. Among non-LCF Supported respondents, only 1 of 38 reported it. The 73 per cent rate among LCF recipients is around 25 times higher than the 3 per cent rate among non-LCF Supported respondents.

The specificity of the pattern matters. On the four other leadership-related outcomes in the survey (more confident or strategic planning, new skills applied, improved governance, improved staff morale), LCF recipients do not consistently report higher rates than other Supported museums; on some items the rate is higher among non-LCF Supported respondents. This is not LCF recipients reporting more of everything; it is LCF recipients reporting more of what the fund was designed to produce.

Interviews and symposium voices described the mechanism. LCF money was most often used as backfill: administrative, finance or development support so the person carrying those jobs alongside their leadership role could step back. What museums bought was time. How they used it varied: strategic planning, commercial thinking, income diversification, board development, revisiting ideas shelved during harder years. The common factor was that a strategic conversation began where one had not been possible before.

A fundraiser at an independent trust described the shift:

*'It's allowed me to step back and think about what more we could do if we had, you know, a helicopter vision of what we were doing on the fundraising, rather than the scramble every day to try and get some money in so we could pay people.'*

*Contribution at the Museum Futures symposium, March 2026*

Helicopter vision rather than daily scramble. That is the mechanism the fund was designed to create.

The evidence is consistent with the Leadership Capacity Fund plausibly contributing to released leadership time among recipients. The outcome gap is specific to the fund's designed mechanism, which strengthens the reading.

## A wider pattern of modest leadership and governance change

Beyond the LCF headline, a cluster of leadership-related outcomes appeared in the responses of Supported museums. 53 Supported respondents answered the outcome checklist:

- 16 of 53 (30 per cent) reported a more confident or strategic approach to planning.
- 14 of 53 (26 per cent) reported new skills or knowledge applied in practice.
- 13 of 53 (25 per cent) reported improved staff or volunteer morale or confidence.
- 12 of 53 (23 per cent) reported senior leadership freed up for strategic work.
- 12 of 53 (23 per cent) reported improved governance arrangements or board discussions.

These five outcomes form a cluster in the 23 to 30 per cent range. Roughly one in four to one in three Supported museums reports each. None is dominant on its own. Together they sketch an early pattern: the programme is associated with movement on how leaders think and apply knowledge, on staff morale, and on the quality of governance conversations.

Several museums described this as a kind of permission to be ambitious. The programme gave leaders space to consider ideas that a survival-shaped funding environment had pushed aside. One museum leader used the word 'brave' repeatedly. This is a change in posture more than action, but museums described it as real and new.

## Coaching, mentoring and training: working where taken up

The leadership-facing wraparound offer is a second channel through which the programme is trying to strengthen leadership capacity.

Mentoring and expert advice drew strong ratings. 15 of 22 Supported respondents rating this element described it as useful (10 very useful, five fairly useful). Two rated it not very useful, none not at all useful, five said it was too early to say. Coaching in particular was described as one of the most valuable parts of the wraparound offer where museums had accessed it. The common thread was that one-to-one, tailored, confidential conversation is what leaders often lack most. Take-up was not universal: some had not reached that point in the programme; others had not known the support was available.

Formal leadership training attracted more mixed responses, partly because many courses had not yet been taken up in full. The LCF usefulness ratings show the same pattern: 13 of 23 Supported respondents rating the LCF described it as useful, eight said it was too early to say, and two rated it not at all useful. The two negative ratings are a minority voice for Year 2 follow-up.

A leader at an independent trust observed that leadership training pitched at emerging leaders is not always a good fit for someone late in career:

*'I'm at the end of my career, not the start. So I almost wish I could send someone else on that.'*

*Interview, December 2025*

Leadership training pitched at emerging leaders is not a good use of the time of a leader a decade into the role. It would be a good use of the time of a successor being developed alongside them. The programme supports the leader who completes the OHC; it does not always reach the next person down, even where the development need sits there. This is single-source in Year 1, but structurally specific; Year 2 should test whether it surfaces more widely.

## **A limit the money alone cannot solve**

One further pattern in the interview evidence qualifies how the LCF works at different scales. The fund gives leaders money to buy time. For the largest organisations this worked cleanly; for the smallest, only partially. Leaders in small and medium organisations described a specific delegation problem.

A chief executive at an independent trust gave the clearest account:

*'Some of my time, some of my finance manager's time and some of my development manager's time. The bits and pieces I do that you could take away and give to somebody else is often so integrated into the day that the time taken to brief them and get them to do that work would be just as long as doing it yourself.'*

*Interview, December 2025*

Leaders in smaller organisations do many jobs in small increments across the day, each resting on knowledge built up over years. Handing any one task over requires a briefing process almost as expensive, in leadership time, as doing the task itself. Money to buy someone else's time does not automatically create leadership time; the briefing itself costs leadership time. This does not mean the LCF is not working for smaller museums; it means the benefit is narrower than the headline figures suggest. The benefit is real, but limited to tasks that can be carved off.

## **How confident can we be about the programme's role?**

The LCF differential is the strongest specific outcome finding in Year 1. Three qualifications apply. The LCF recipient base is small at 15; one or two different responses would change the percentage noticeably (the strength of the finding sits in the specificity of the outcome rather than the size of the sample). Selection into the LCF may not be random: museums that applied may be better placed to use released leadership time. And this is self-report at an early stage; eight of 23 LCF recipients rating the fund said it was too early to say.

With those qualifications, the evidence is consistent with the LCF plausibly contributing to released leadership time among recipients, and with the wider programme plausibly contributing to modest early shifts in leadership confidence, skills application, staff morale and governance conversation quality among participating museums.

## What Year 2 needs to look at

The LCF finding invites a longitudinal question. What has the released leadership time actually produced in the first group of recipients? Strategic plans, new income streams, different governance conversations, board decisions: each can be tested when delivery is further along. Year 2 should return to LCF recipients and ask.

The seniority mismatch observation needs systematic testing. If the right audience for the leadership training the programme offers is often 'the next leader, not the current one', the design of the offer may need to flex.

The delegation problem in the smallest organisations is structurally specific. What the programme can offer museums whose leaders have no one to delegate to is a question for Year 2.

### **4.4 Evaluation Question 4 (EQ4). How the programme is stimulating new approaches, innovation and test-and-trial activity**

Is the programme helping museums try new ways of working, take risks and test new ideas?

Museums are coming to the programme with ideas, and the programme is giving them space to develop them. Three of the funding streams designed to support new models (the Innovation Fund, the Unlocking Potential Fund and Pathfinder) were still largely at application, assessment or scoping stage at year-end. Demand is present. Outcomes are not yet available to assess.

#### **A strong appetite for trying new things**

New-approach activity is widespread across the sector and not concentrated in museums taking part in the programme. 41 of 70 survey respondents (59 per cent) had tried a new approach in the past 12 months; 23 of 70 (33 per cent) were planning to; only six had neither tried nor planned to. Over 90 per cent of respondents are at or beyond the intent stage. Innovation is a sector-wide condition right now, driven by many things at once: post-pandemic recovery, local authority changes, funder requirements, new team members, and the programme.

What museums are trying leans heavily towards income: music festivals and outdoor events, venue hire for weddings, escape rooms, endowment fund approaches, shop redevelopments backed by local surveys, feasibility work on reopening parts of sites. These are not radical reinventions. They are practical ideas for getting more revenue from existing assets and building new assets that earn their keep.

Many of these ideas are not new. They had been shelved during harder years and are now being picked up again. Innovation in the programme is often a museum returning to something it had already thought of, with the time and permission to develop it properly. The programme is functioning as a permission structure for ambition that was already there.

#### **A sharper signal among innovation-engaged museums**

Within Supported museums, a sharper pattern appears. 18 of 53 Supported respondents (34 per cent) said Museum Futures had helped them test or plan a new approach:

- 14 of 31 Supported respondents engaged with the Innovation Fund, Unlocking Potential Fund or Pathfinder (45 per cent) reported testing or planning a new approach.
- 4 of 22 Supported respondents not engaged with any of these three strands (18 per cent) reported it.

Museums engaging with the strands designed to test new approaches are more than twice as likely to report doing so. The pattern is less clean than the LCF differential in EQ3: innovation-strand 'engagement' often means an expression of interest rather than a delivered project, and museums with existing innovation intent are more likely to put themselves forward. But the direction is consistent with the three innovation-oriented strands plausibly contributing to new-approach activity among the museums engaged with them.

### The innovation funds: early in delivery, positive where rated

Engagement with the Innovation Fund and the Unlocking Potential Fund was substantial but mostly at an early stage. Among Supported respondents, 18 of 53 (34 per cent) had engaged with the Innovation Fund and 21 of 53 (40 per cent) with the Unlocking Potential Fund.

Where the funds could be rated, the picture was cautiously positive. Of 26 Supported respondents rating the Innovation Fund, 11 were positive, two negative, and 13 (50 per cent) said it was too early to say. Of 27 rating the Unlocking Potential Fund, 12 were positive, one negative, and 14 (52 per cent) said too early. Half of raters saying 'too early to say' is consistent with the qualitative evidence and administrative data. Interviews confirmed this: museums described themselves as in the application or early-delivery phase, with several waiting to hear back on expressions of interest. The Year 1 evidence can speak to demand and to the ideas museums are bringing forward. It cannot yet speak to whether those ideas will progress from pilot to tested model.

Although the MGS team has done considerable preparatory work, Pathfinder is even earlier in delivery. Only 2 of 53 Supported respondents had engaged with the strand. 10 Supported respondents rated it; all 10 said it was too early to say. Museums named collaborative ideas they felt would fit (regional collections storage, shared work between related museums, sector-wide sustainability models). Pathfinder was not expected to deliver in Year 1; it was designed to build momentum in Year 1 and deliver in Year 2.

### A specific concern worth watching: innovation as fireworks

One interviewee raised a concern worth carrying forward even though no other source echoed it directly. A leader at an independent museum described the risk in their own words:

*'One of the temptations for this fund will be to fund something really innovative, innovative, in whatever that is, whatever that means. For me, I think there's a huge number of museums in Scotland that for years have been held back by barriers to kind of move on and innovate and do new things. I think that's where the money should be thought about, because it could be just like a firework thing that looks great for a couple of weeks or even 6 months.'*

*Interview, December 2025*

The concern is structurally specific. Innovation is open to two interpretations: novelty, meaning something that has not been done before, preferably striking; or structural, meaning removing the things that have held museums back from doing what they already know they need to do. The risk is that the Innovation Fund tilts towards the first when the second is what is needed.

This is single-source. It is also specific enough to warrant attention. As the Innovation Fund moves towards full delivery in Year 2, how it interprets innovation in practice will shape whether it produces durable change or short-lived spectacle.

### How confident can we be about the programme's role?

The Year 1 evidence on this question is constrained by where delivery has reached. Three qualifications apply. New-approach activity is widespread, including among museums not engaged with the programme; the survey cannot cleanly isolate what the programme is contributing. The differential within Supported museums (14 of 31 versus 4 of 22) is indicative rather than definitive, on small bases where engagement often means application. And the positive usefulness ratings sit on respondents who felt able to give a substantive rating; half or more said it was too early.

With those qualifications, the evidence is consistent with the Innovation Fund and the Unlocking Potential Fund plausibly contributing to a higher rate of testing or planning new approaches among museums engaged with them. Pathfinder's contribution is not yet testable. The demand signal is strong; the outcome signal will emerge as delivery catches up.

### What Year 2 needs to look at

As projects move from application into delivery, Year 2 will need to test whether the early positive ratings of the Innovation Fund and the Unlocking Potential Fund hold up in practice, and what the two funds have enabled at museum level.

Pathfinder's Year 2 delivery is also the stage at which the cross-museum collaboration the fund is built around will first be tested. Whether it can deliver the models it is designed to pilot is a question for the end of Year 2.

The 'fireworks' concern is specific enough to check for. Year 2 should look directly at what the Innovation Fund is being used for, and whether the work embeds beyond the immediate project.

## **4.5 Evaluation Question 5 (EQ5). How the programme is building collaboration, co-ordination and a more connected sector**

Is the programme helping museums work better together and feel part of a stronger, more joined-up sector?

The answer has two parts.

The relationship between MGS and participating museums is the most distinctive and most highly-rated feature of the programme in Year 1, corroborated in interviews and at the symposium. Wider

collaboration is moving in the right direction for about half of respondents, but most of the shared learning travels through existing sector networks rather than programme-driven routes.

The funder-side partnership between MGS, the Scottish Government and the Heritage Fund operates informally and substantively, with significant inherited infrastructure and parallel investment; early friction is addressable as the partnership matures.

## The MGS relationship is the most distinctive feature of the programme

When Supported respondents were asked to rate the quality of the support and relationship they had received from MGS through Museum Futures, the distribution was unusually concentrated:

- Excellent: 43 of 53 (81 per cent)
- Good: 9 of 53 (17 per cent)
- Fair: none of 53
- Poor: 1 of 53

52 of 53 rated the relationship as excellent or good; 43 rated it as excellent. The one 'poor' rating is a minority voice the survey cannot illuminate further.

A closely related question asked Supported respondents to rate the follow-up conversation with MGS staff after the OHC. 38 of 51 (75 per cent) rated it very useful and nine of 51 (18 per cent) fairly useful, with two not very useful, none not at all useful, and two too early to say. These are the two most positive distributions in the survey, and they corroborate each other.

Interviews and the symposium added texture to this. Museums described being on first-name terms with a named MGS contact who returned phone calls the same day, answered emails in plain language, and gave honest answers about fit, including when a particular strand was not the right one. Each museum has a lead contact who stays with them from the OHC through any grant applications and into the wraparound offer: one person, one relationship, continuity.

A leader at an independent trust described the approach:

*'I like that really approachable sort of way of dealing with things, even in those initial meetings and conversations... I actually believed him when he said we want to help you.'*

*Interview, December 2025*

Museums most often described the relationship as 'different' from prior funders, and named the MGS approach as one of the best they had encountered.

This is a delivery-style finding rather than an outcome claim. It describes how the programme works, not yet what it achieves. Its importance is that it is the connective tissue across the whole offer. Findings elsewhere in the report rest on it.

## Honesty made possible by trust

The relational style has a specific consequence. Museums were willing to tell MGS what was really going wrong, including the things harder to say in public.

The OHC is a self-assessment tool. It works only if people answer it honestly, and honest answers require trust that the information will not be used against the organisation later. Several interviewees described the moment of deciding how honest to be. In each case, the trust built through the relationship with MGS tipped them towards honesty. One museum described a deliberate decision to be transparent about a difficult financial position, because without transparency the support on offer would not fit what the museum actually needed. The programme's diagnostic and financial instruments can only work if museums are honest with the people delivering them.

## Wider sector connection: moving for about half

Beyond the MGS relationship itself, the survey asked whether museums felt more or less connected to other museums and the wider sector than they did a year ago. 33 of 70 (47 per cent) felt more connected, 34 of 70 (49 per cent) about the same, two less connected, one didn't know. The two less-connected respondents were both in the Not engaged group. Supported museums are modestly more likely to report feeling more connected (28 of 53) than other groups, but the effect is not dramatic. Sector connection is moving, but slowly.

Collaborative activity is more widespread than the sector-connection figure suggests. 46 of 70 respondents (66 per cent) said their museum had shared new learning or strengthened partnerships in the past 12 months, and 15 of 70 (21 per cent) were currently exploring new partnerships. 87 per cent of respondents are either doing this work or actively exploring it.

When those respondents were asked through what routes the shared learning had happened, a clearer picture emerges. 51 respondents answered. They could choose more than one route.

- Through an existing network or forum: 32 of 51 (63 per cent)
- Through informal contact with colleagues: 23 of 51 (45 per cent)
- Through an MGS-facilitated introduction or connection: 11 of 51 (22 per cent)
- Through a Museum Futures event, programme or activity: 5 of 51 (10 per cent)
- Through another MGS event, programme or activity: 5 of 51 (10 per cent)

Existing sector infrastructure is carrying most of the collaboration activity. Programme-driven routes (events and MGS-facilitated introductions) together account for a minority. If the programme wants to strengthen sector-level collaboration further, working with and through existing networks is likely to reach more museums than building new programme-specific channels.

## Programme-attributed partnership outcomes are modest at this stage

When Supported respondents were asked which changes they attributed to Museum Futures, two items on the outcome checklist speak to collaboration:

- New or strengthened partnerships with other organisations: 8 of 53 (15 per cent)

- Greater connection to the wider museum sector: 11 of 53 (21 per cent)

Compared with cognitive outcomes in EQ1 (clearer priorities 68 per cent, clearer understanding 60 per cent), partnership and sector-connection outcomes are much less widely attributed to the programme. The relational model works exceptionally well at MGS-to-museum level; the programme has not yet produced a strong outcome signal at the level of museum-to-museum collaboration. The first is strong, the second emerging.

Peer learning with other museums was named by only 7 of 69 respondents (10 per cent) as a top forward support need. Existing networks already carry most of the collaboration the sector needs.

Qualitative evidence told a similar story. Museums described appetite for collaboration: related museums discussing possible joint work, trusts talking to each other about shared approaches to storage or sustainability models, museums with similar remits looking for common cause. What was thinner was collaborative delivery: museums working together on the same project with shared governance. This is partly because Pathfinder was still pre-delivery, and partly because collaboration is hard, takes time, and is not the first instinct when museums finally have capacity to think again. Stabilisation comes first.

## The partnership between funders

The partnership is informal in structure, substantive in content, and improving in trajectory. The Heritage Fund operates under the National Lottery Act, which constrains formal partnerships with other funders. What has been built instead is an active informal arrangement in which Scottish Government provides the core £4 million investment, MGS designs and delivers the programme, and the Heritage Fund operates alongside through parallel funding and sector support. The architecture inevitably creates 'two front doors' to funding; co-ordination across the two has been a Year 1 work-in-progress.

The Heritage Fund brings a 30-year backdrop: around £330 million to Scotland's museums, £7 million to sector-led initiatives, £35 million since 2016, and £6.5 million in pandemic emergency support. In Year 1, the Heritage Fund awarded approximately £1.7 million in resilience-focused grants to Scottish museums: around £770,000 match-funded with MGS for museums also receiving Museum Futures support, and £1 million as non-aligned resilience funding the Heritage Fund would have integrated more closely had timing allowed.

Two pieces of Heritage Fund infrastructure now operate inside Museum Futures. The Register of Support Services, a Heritage Fund-selected register of consultants, provides one-to-one support to around 24 Museum Futures-engaged organisations at approximately £15,000 each. The Organisational Health Checker was developed by MGS building on an antecedent Heritage Fund tool.

The two strands address different needs. Museum Futures focuses on strategic, capacity-building and innovation-oriented work; Heritage Fund resilience funding focuses on safeguarding at organisational scale, including crisis-stage interventions and longer-arc capital pipelines the Heritage Fund has run since the 1990s. The division is not absolute but is visible in Year 1.

Friction was discussed openly by both partners and was largely a matter of timing: the Heritage Fund's 2025/26 budget was profiled before MGS had finalised the Museum Futures shape, and February–March

2026 signposting to the Heritage Fund for matching funding came late in the cycle. Both partners describe Year 2 as the period in which alignment can be achieved more fully.

A further benefit is forward-looking. The Heritage Fund expects capital project applications from Museum Futures-engaged museums to become more viable in the medium term as the programme builds the resilience foundations longer-arc Heritage Fund capital investment can land on. On the Heritage Fund's 10-year horizon, this is a substantive partnership benefit beyond the immediate cash.

## **The programme's wider organisational benefit to MGS**

A further finding emerged in the partner-side evidence. Museum Futures is producing a wider organisational benefit to MGS itself, beyond its effects on participating museums.

The OHC and the follow-up conversation are generating intelligence about Scotland's museums that previously sat scattered across MGS or was held only by individual museums. The diagnostic at the front door of Museum Futures is doing institutional work as well as programme work.

Alongside the intelligence dividend sits a relationship dividend. Museums that have completed the OHC are visible in a different way to MGS staff, enabling cross-team co-ordination in ways that were harder before. MGS staff also described a specific delivery-design insight: while the case worker model is strong, the relationship between MGS and any given museum is not single-threaded. It is held across multiple strands, which protects continuity if one MGS contact moves and lets other strands contribute to and benefit from the relationship the programme has built.

The programme's relationship-led design is beginning to produce value for MGS as an organisation, not only for the museums it supports.

## **How confident can we be about the programme's role?**

Two qualifications apply. The relational findings come from people who have received programme resources and have reason to rate the relationship favourably. The strength of the qualitative evidence, and the specificity of what museums describe (first-name relationships, same-day responses, continuity of contact), both suggest the rating reflects something real about delivery, but the survey alone cannot separate delivery quality from goodwill. And the museum-to-museum collaboration outcomes are modest: where Supported museums report stronger sector connection (28 of 53), the figure is not dramatically different from the broader sample, and programme-driven routes account for a minority of the shared learning happening across the sector.

With those qualifications, the evidence is consistent with Museum Futures plausibly contributing to a very high-quality relational delivery model at MGS-to-museum level, and to a modest beginning on sector-level collaboration in a year where existing networks have done most of the collaborative work.

## **What Year 2 needs to look at**

Three questions stay open for Year 2.

Collaboration outcomes need testing as Pathfinder moves into full delivery. The Year 1 evidence captures the demand side (museums describing collaborative ideas they would like to develop) but cannot speak to delivery. Year 2 should look directly at what Pathfinder funds and how this collaborative model of innovation and delivery works in practice.

The MGS relational model needs scalability testing. The qualitative material includes one explicit concern about delivery-team stretch; the MGS team's own account is of caseloads at or beyond what current resourcing comfortably holds. Year 2 is when the resourcing question becomes pressing.

The partnership architecture needs further partner-side and museum-side evidence. What the partnership is producing at museum level, including the experience of museums applying to both MGS and the Heritage Fund in parallel, is the next evidence gap.

## **4.6 Evaluation Question 6 (EQ6). What is working, for which museums, and in what circumstances**

Who is the programme working well for, and who is it working less well for? What parts of the offer are landing, and what is less visible so far?

Year 1 reach is best described as deeper than wider: of the organisations that engaged, many did so substantially across multiple touchpoints. The programme's front door (the OHC and the follow-up conversation with an MGS contact) is strongly validated by the museums using it, and specific fit tensions identify where the current design works less cleanly for particular kinds of museum.

### **The OHC and the follow-up conversation: a strong front door**

Museums repeatedly described Museum Futures as designed in response to what they had been saying for years: the combination of funding and support; the focus on organisational sustainability rather than project activity; the willingness to trust museums' own accounts of their needs. Most participating museums in the evidence recognise the programme in these terms.

Within the offer, one specific element stood out: the combination of the OHC and the follow-up conversation with a named MGS contact. Museums described it as the most useful part of the programme, and the survey figures confirm it. 53 Supported respondents rated agreement statements about the OHC process. 51 of 53 (96 per cent) agreed the OHC helped them identify or clarify their priorities. 50 of 53 (94 per cent) agreed the follow-up conversation with MGS was valuable; 35 of those agreed strongly. These are among the highest agreement rates anywhere in the survey.

The OHC itself was rated very useful by 25 of 53 raters (47 per cent) and fairly useful by 27 of 53 (51 per cent); 52 of 53 found it useful overall. The follow-up conversation was rated very useful by 38 of 51 (75 per cent). Together, the OHC and the conversation that follows are working as the programme's diagnostic entry point: the OHC gives the conversation something concrete to work from, the conversation gives the OHC somewhere to go.

## From diagnostic to action

The third OHC agreement statement asked whether the OHC process had led to actions the museum would not otherwise have taken. 41 of 53 Supported respondents (77 per cent) agreed. Four in five Supported museums describe the OHC as not just diagnostic but action-driving. This is the strongest signal in the survey that the front door of the programme is doing more than producing recognition: it is producing change.

A specific minority sits within this picture. 11 of 53 Supported respondents (21 per cent) disagreed that the OHC led to actions they would not otherwise have taken. Among OHC-only respondents, the figures point in the same direction but more sharply: on a small base of seven, all seven agreed the OHC helped identify priorities and six of seven agreed the follow-up conversation was valuable, but four of seven disagreed that it led to actions.

A delivery-stage timing caveat affects part of this picture. OHCs completed after January 2026 sat in a delivery window where grant decisions were held pending the Year 2 funding settlement, narrowing the action pathway through the programme's own channels for those respondents. Some of the minority who disagreed may sit inside this window: action through the programme had not yet been possible at the time of the survey, rather than being absent in principle.

Beyond the timing caveat, three hypotheses are worth testing in Year 2. MGS staff capacity to follow through on each OHC may be stretched, with the first conversation landing well but sustained follow-through taking longer. Museums that have done the OHC but not received further support may find it harder to convert diagnostic insight into action because they lack the means to act. For some museums, the OHC may be validation of what was already known rather than revelation, less likely to produce new actions. The minority is small but specific, and the delivery-model refinement question it raises is worth following up.

## Components rated highly

Supported respondents rated the usefulness of 18 programme elements they had engaged with. Three findings stand out.

Micro-grants are the strongest-rated specific strand. 25 of 31 raters (81 per cent) rated them very useful, with no raters giving a negative rating. Micro-grants deliver quickly, in amounts between £50 and £3,000, against clearly-defined need. The survey strongly supports the reading that this design is working.

The follow-up conversation with MGS is the next strongest at 75 per cent very useful. The OHC itself, the Leadership Capacity Fund (covered in EQ3) and mentoring and expert advice also rate well where they have been taken up. For several elements, particularly the Innovation Fund, the Unlocking Potential Fund and much of the wraparound offer, half or more of raters said it was too early to say. A future survey wave will test whether early positive ratings hold up when more users can give a view.

Asked how much Museum Futures had contributed to the changes they had identified, 42 of 51 Supported respondents (82 per cent) described the programme as either the main driver or a significant contributor; no respondent said it had made little or no difference. Supported museums describe

Museum Futures as a significant part of the picture, with the programme sitting alongside other factors for most.

## Who the programme is reaching, and how deeply

The programme's reach in Year 1 is best described as deeper than wider. Of around 297 potentially eligible organisations, 104 (35 per cent) had engaged with the programme by year-end. Of those, 100 completed an OHC and 58 received at least one grant. Where museums have engaged, many have done so substantially: across multiple touchpoints, often with more than one element of the offer.

This is consistent with a programme designed around relational delivery and a diagnostic conversation rather than breadth of touch. The 193 organisations that have not engaged include both potentially eligible organisations not yet reached and organisations whose eligibility is still being clarified. Whether and how Year 2 reaches further into this group, and which museums within it sit at greatest need, is taken up at the end of this section.

One survey pattern stands out. Volunteer-run museums (those with no paid staff) are reached less than staffed museums. Among 14 volunteer-run respondents, six were Supported, against rates of 75 to 91 per cent across every band of museums with paid staff. Volunteer-run museums were also the largest single group of Not engaged respondents, six of 14. A programme designed around freeing leadership time from operational work has to contend with museums where leadership and operations cannot be separated.

The qualitative evidence made sense of this pattern. A leader at a small museum running multiple community services alongside its museum activity described the reality of overlapping roles:

*'At the moment we've got the person who runs the shop does community engagement as well. It's just, well, we all do in a way.'*

*Interview, December 2025*

In volunteer-run and very small-staff museums, the treasurer also opens on Saturdays and the person who runs the shop also does community engagement. Leadership and front-line work are held by the same small group of people across overlapping roles. The Leadership Capacity Fund mechanism, which works by buying capacity to free leadership time, does not translate cleanly to organisations of this shape. The programme's benefit exists for volunteer-run museums, but is narrower than for staffed organisations.

## Specific fit patterns: where the programme works less cleanly

Beyond the volunteer-run pattern, the qualitative evidence surfaced three further fit patterns. Each is structurally specific and refines what 'works for whom' means at sector level.

The first is local authority museum services. The OHC is designed around an organisation. A local authority museum service is an organisation inside another organisation. The council has its own strategic plans, resources, governance and constraints that museum staff cannot change. Some of the

weaknesses an OHC would surface for a local authority museum are weaknesses of the council structure itself.

A leader at a local authority museum service described the moment of organisational self-definition the OHC required:

*'We had to really think through, well, what is our organisation? Do we want to kind of refer to the council and refer to our own museums and galleries? And actually we decided no, because we're really looking from the position of the museums and galleries, what their challenges are.'*

*Interview, December 2025*

Within the survey, of six Supported local authority respondents, three agreed the OHC had led to actions and three did not. Among independent museums the agreement rate was 35 of 44 (80 per cent). The local authority base is small and the comparison indicative rather than definitive, but it is consistent with the qualitative picture and with the Early Insights Report's earlier observation.

The second pattern is collaborative networks. The OHC, designed as it is for individual organisations, and being the primary entry point to the programme and engagement with its funding streams, creates the impression that the programme is built exclusively for individual organisations. It is not clear that networks can apply for funding or how they could go about doing that. This is something that needs to be clarified in Year 2.

A third observation sits on the positive side of the design question. Non-accredited museums have begun to engage with Museum Futures in ways the standard MGS funding route has not historically supported. Accreditation in Scotland has historically functioned as a gatekeeper for museum funding; Museum Futures has deliberately opened its door wider, and the opening is reaching non-accredited museums.

## **What holds museums back, and what draws them forward**

When Supported museums were asked what had made it harder to make the most of Museum Futures, the dominant barrier was staff time. 33 of 53 (62 per cent) named lack of staff time or capacity; 18 of 53 (34 per cent) named compressed application timescales; 11 of 53 (21 per cent) named uncertainty about whether the programme would continue. Design-level barriers (navigation, admin burden, support mismatch) were named by fewer than one in six. The constraint on the programme is sector capacity, not programme design.

Respondents not yet fully engaged with the programme have not pointed to programme design as a barrier. Among the ten Not engaged respondents, six name lack of time or capacity, five name lack of awareness of the programme, and two name more urgent priorities. Outright rejection of the programme is rare: only 2 of the 17 non-Supported respondents said it was not relevant to their museum.

One specific awareness gap stands out. No OHC-only respondent reported being aware of the Leadership Capacity Fund, the programme's flagship capacity strand. Among Not engaged respondents, three of nine who answered the awareness question had heard of none of the programme elements listed; the remaining six had heard of at least one. Awareness of the programme among currently non-engaged museums is partial.

What is striking about both non-Supported groups is the forward intent. 5 of 7 OHC-only respondents said they were very or fairly likely to engage with further programme support. 6 of 10 Not engaged respondents said they were very or fairly interested in future engagement, with a further 4 of 10 saying they would need to know more before deciding. None were uninterested. A meaningful share of currently non-engaged museums would engage if the communications gap were closed and the capacity constraint eased.

## How confident can we be about the programme's role?

Three qualifications apply:

- The front-door findings come from Supported respondents who have received programme resources and have reason to rate the diagnostic favourably; the strength and specificity of the qualitative evidence suggest the rating reflects something real about delivery.
- Several of the 'for whom' findings sit on small bases (OHC-only seven, Not engaged 14, local authority Supported six, volunteer-run 14), which warrant counts rather than percentages.
- The OHC-to-action gap is survey-visible but the survey cannot say why it exists; the timing caveat accounts for part of the picture and the three hypotheses need qualitative testing in Year 2.

With those qualifications, the evidence is consistent with Museum Futures plausibly contributing to a strong diagnostic experience and a strong working relationship for participating museums; plausibly contributing to a range of early changes for the museums who have drawn on its support; and not yet reaching some specific parts of the sector (volunteer-run, non-accredited, and local authority museum services) as fully as it reaches the staffed independent trusts.

## What Year 2 needs to look at

Four questions stay open.

Why does the minority disagreement on OHC-to-action persist beyond the timing caveat, and what would close it? This is the clearest delivery-model refinement question Year 1 surfaces. Qualitative work with OHC-only museums, and with the 21 per cent of Supported museums who disagree the OHC led to action, would let the programme test the three hypotheses and adjust accordingly.

How can the programme reach volunteer-run museums more fully? The engagement gap is clear and the reasons are likely capacity-related. What a version of the programme that works for a volunteer-run museum looks like is a design question for Year 2.

How does the programme work for local authority museum services? The fit tension is specific and structural. Targeted qualitative work with local authority museums on OHC fit should be a priority.

How deeply is the opening to non-accredited museums reaching them? The non-accredited museums in the Supported group are a positive signal. Whether the opening reaches them in comparable depth to accredited museums, or only at the shallower edges, is the next question.

## 4.7 Evaluation Question 7 (EQ7). What this means for future funding, policy and support for Scotland's museums

What does the evidence from Year 1 say about what should come next?

The Year 1 evidence points consistently in one direction. Museums describe the programme as worth continuing, and its value as depending on continuation. The most widely-shared concern is the one-year funding horizon: museums in the middle of work that only makes sense if support continues. The core unrestricted funding gap remains the sector's dominant need and sits outside what the programme can solve on its own. The current relational delivery model is strongly rated by museums using it; whether it is sustainable at current scale, let alone larger, depends on delivery-side conditions.

### Core funding is the sector's dominant forward need

When museums were asked what kinds of support they will need over the next 12 months, one answer dominated. 50 of 69 respondents (72 per cent) named core funding or financial stabilisation as a top forward priority; no other need came close. The second-ranked need, help with income diversification or fundraising, was named by 28 of 69 (41 per cent). A tier below sit marketing and audience development (33 per cent), buildings and capital (33 per cent), and collections care (26 per cent): a second cluster around physical and public-facing capacity. Governance, digital, workforce, leadership and strategic planning support sit in a third tier, each named by a meaningful minority but fewer than one in four respondents.

The engagement-group split on core funding is striking. Among Supported museums, 35 of 52 (67 per cent) named it; among Not engaged respondents, 10 of 10 did. Every Not engaged museum who answered the question named core funding as a top priority. This is a sector-wide position, slightly more acute among museums not currently in the programme.

Museum Futures is not designed to fill this gap, and several museums in interviews and at the symposium made this explicit. The programme helps them think, plan and invest in specific changes; it is not designed to meet the organisation's running costs. Museums reporting core funding as the dominant need are not saying the programme is failing. They are referring to the funding environment the programme is working inside.

A leader at an independent trust framed this directly:

*'The big issue still with the project funding is where is the core, the unrestricted. And that's a real challenge for us, because a lot of our money comes in restricted form, and we have to find unrestricted matches to fit alongside it.'*

*Interview, December 2025*

As the sources of unrestricted money get thinner, the museum's ability to take on new restricted grants gets thinner with them. A programme designed to build resilience sits inside a funding environment that continues to erode the base from which resilience has to be built. This is a finding about the limits of the programme's design, not a criticism of it.

## The durability of current change depends on continued support

The question of durability, introduced in EQ1, belongs here too. It speaks directly to whether the programme's effects will hold without continued investment.

70 respondents were asked how confident they were that any positive changes of the past year would be sustained. 10 of 70 (14 per cent) said 'very confident' and described changes as well embedded. 49 of 70 (70 per cent) said 'fairly confident' but qualified that confidence by naming the need for continued support. 9 of 70 (13 per cent) said they were not confident and described progress as fragile. Two said they had not had significant positive changes to sustain.

58 of 70 respondents (83 per cent) either condition their confidence on continued support or describe their current progress as fragile. Only 14 per cent describe change as well embedded. Within Supported museums, the pattern is sharper still: 40 of 53 (75 per cent) condition their confidence on continued investment.

This pattern is the clearest survey-visible expression of 'hope, not yet optimism'. Museums describe a different direction of travel from a year ago, but do not describe it as locked in; they consistently name continued investment as the condition under which it will hold. Supported museums describe the programme not as mission-accomplished but as a beginning.

The 21 per cent of Supported respondents who named 'uncertainty about whether the programme will continue' as an active barrier (covered in EQ6) expresses the same concern. For one in five participating museums, the possibility that the programme might not continue is not a background worry: it is already affecting how they engage with the programme now.

Interviews and the symposium said the same thing in more human terms. Museums described themselves as in the middle of work that only makes sense if it continues.

A leader at a small independent museum, only recently engaged with the programme, named this directly:

*'The worry is if it was just a one year programme, because I don't think there's been time for actual impact to happen for the programme and to be meaningful. Whereas if you had it over a couple more years, then you could start making meaningful differences and seeing that impact kick in.'*

*Interview, December 2025*

Other museums described planning a three-year strategy with money that might not exist in 18 months, hiring development capacity on a contract that runs out before the development plan is delivered, and applying for larger grants to build income streams that will only start paying off after the programme's current cycle ends. The programme works partly because it takes a long view: it diagnoses organisational health rather than project fit, funds leadership time rather than specific deliverables, treats museums as ongoing organisations rather than grant recipients. All of this takes time to produce visible outcomes. A programme that ended at the point where beginnings turn into outcomes would be one that collected the costs and missed the benefits. This was the most consistent future-facing message across the evidence base.

## The current relational delivery model is working at museum level

Any conversation about what comes next needs to sit alongside what is already working. The current MGS relational delivery model is rated very highly by museums using it (figures in EQ5): 43 of 53 Supported respondents (81 per cent) rated the relationship excellent, and 38 of 51 (75 per cent) rated the follow-up conversation very useful.

This matters for what comes next because the decision is not only whether to continue the programme but whether to continue it in the form it has taken. Museums describe the form as different from prior funding: whole-organisation, relational, responsive, and honest. The elements most consistently valued are not financial alone but the combination of a diagnostic that gives museums a shared picture of where they are, a follow-up conversation that works out what fits, grant streams that sit inside an ongoing relationship rather than outside it, and a delivery team whose accessibility is named repeatedly as part of what the programme does.

Whether the model can hold at scale is a different question. The qualitative evidence included one specific concern, raised carefully, that the MGS team is visibly stretched: delays and a pressure of volume that the quality of the relationships otherwise hides from view. The model's distinctive feature is also the one most vulnerable if volume rises without matching delivery capacity. The Year 1 evidence should inform delivery-side decisions about future resourcing.

## A timing finding, and what it suggests for continuation

A specific pattern in the qualitative evidence is worth carrying into the discussion of what comes next. Some participating museums described the Leadership Capacity Fund arriving after redundancies had already been made; the fund would have been more valuable earlier, and by the time it arrived some of the capacity it was designed to protect was already gone.

This is not a simple design problem: the fund was new and took time to set up, while the museums that needed it most could not wait. The pattern tells us something about how the programme fits into museum timelines. A sustainability-focused programme that arrives after the worst damage has been done is still useful, but less useful than one that could have reached organisations earlier.

The programme is now in a better position: the infrastructure exists, the processes work, the delivery team is in place. If the programme continues, it could reach the next wave of museums at an earlier point in their difficulties, before the redundancy decisions have been made. This is a specific argument for continuation, grounded in the Year 1 evidence.

## The partner-level continuation question

The continuation question has a partner-level dimension that museums experience but cannot speak to directly.

The funder-side picture has been set out in EQ5, including the parallel Heritage Fund investment, the inherited Register of Support Services and OHC approach, the architectural distinction between Scottish Government strategic and innovation funding and the Heritage Fund resilience and safeguarding focus, and the maturity-issue friction the partners themselves named.

The Year 1 evidence is consistent with a partnership that has been substantively active and is improving in trajectory. Whether the partnership architecture can support a multi-year continuation is a question that will need partner-side testing in Year 2.

## **The wider policy context the continuation argument sits in**

The continuation argument museums describe sits inside a wider policy environment. Three elements of that environment bear directly on the issue of continuation.

The £4 million Year 1 investment in Museum Futures is one delivery instrument of a wider Scottish Government commitment to invest at least £100 million more annually in culture and the arts by 2028/2029. The continuation question is partly a question about whether the museum sector's share of the wider commitment is sustained over the full trajectory of that commitment.

Scotland's museum sector has not had a multi-year funding architecture equivalent to Creative Scotland's Multi-Year Funding portfolio. The one-year horizon museums name so consistently is a feature of that funding environment, not of how Museum Futures has been designed. The Year 1 evidence is not a case for any particular policy solution. What it does establish is that the museums engaging with Museum Futures describe their continued engagement as dependent on continuation, and locate the continuation decision as one about budgets rather than about programme design.

The policy context for Scotland's local authority museum services is also evolving. The Scottish Government and COSLA published a Culture Partnership Agreement statement of intent, with the Agreement itself intended to be co-developed during 2026. This is directly relevant to the local authority fit tension surfaced in EQ6 and to Pathfinder's place-based focus. Year 1's findings on local authority museum services sit inside an active and unresolved policy conversation.

## **How confident can we be about the programme's role?**

This section deliberately does not make contribution claims about Museum Futures. The core finding is structural: the conditions under which the programme's design logic can deliver include continued investment and time. The evidence for that finding is consistent across three sources.

Two qualifications apply. The durability findings rest on museum self-report at a single snapshot; whether the 'conditional on continued support' pattern holds a year from now, and whether the 14 per cent 'well embedded' share grows or stays flat, is a longitudinal question Year 2 will help to answer. The high satisfaction ratings for the current delivery model come from respondents who have received programme resources; the qualitative evidence supports the reading that the rating reflects something real about the approach rather than goodwill alone, but the survey alone cannot confirm this.

With those qualifications, the evidence is consistent with a clear Year 1 position. Museums describe a programme that is working, with positive change beginning but not yet locked in. Continuation is described consistently across sources as the condition under which the programme's design logic can hold. The programme has not yet completed what it set out to do; it cannot, within a single year. What it has done is establish the conditions and the relationships from which longer-term outcomes could follow.

## What Year 2 needs to look at

Four questions belong here.

The durability question is testable longitudinally. If the programme continues in Year 2, does confidence become self-sustaining for any meaningful share of museums? If it does, which conditions make the difference? If it does not, that is itself important evidence about how long the programme's effects take to embed.

The partner-level dimension needs continued attention. Year 2 will be the period in which the partnership architecture set out in EQ5 can be tested under designed-in co-ordination.

The scalability question sits alongside continuation. If the programme continues, and if demand at the level seen in Year 1 persists, delivery capacity is likely to become the binding constraint on what the programme can achieve. What a sustainable version of the current relational model looks like at a larger scale is a Year 2 question for the delivery side.

The interaction between Museum Futures and the wider funding and policy environment is material. The programme's effects will hold or not partly depending on what happens to funding for Scotland's museums outside the programme, and on how the wider policy conversation develops. The final report will need to place Museum Futures inside that wider picture.

## Section 5. Implications for Year 2

This is an interim report, and recommendations sit outside its scope. What this section does is surface, from the Year 1 evidence, the questions Year 2 will need to take forward. The implications group into two sets: how the programme continues to develop as it moves into its second year, and how the evaluation itself needs to evolve to answer the questions Year 1 has raised but cannot yet resolve. Each implication is grounded in findings already in Sections 3 and 4.

### 5.1 Implications for programme design

#### Year 1 evidence makes the case for continuation.

The defining analytical pattern of Year 1 is hope, not yet optimism. Thinking has moved across most participating museums; capability has not yet followed at the same pace. Museums describe clearer priorities, more confident leadership and better relationships than they had a year ago, but condition their confidence on continued support. 58 of 70 survey respondents (83 per cent) either condition their confidence on continued support or describe current progress as fragile; only 10 of 70 (14 per cent) describe positive changes as well embedded. 21 per cent of Supported museums name programme continuity uncertainty as a barrier already affecting how they engage with the programme today.

The continuation argument has three layers. The first is what museums say. The second is the programme's design and cost profile: Year 1 has incurred the set-up costs, and the larger funding instruments (the Innovation Fund, the Unlocking Potential Fund, Pathfinder) are now moving from application into delivery. Stopping before that delivery runs its course would collect the costs and miss the benefits. The third is the wider policy context: the £4 million Year 1 investment is one instrument of a Scottish Government commitment to invest substantially more in culture and the arts. The one-year horizon is a feature of the funding environment Scottish museums operate in, not of how Museum Futures has been designed.

The decisions about future funding sit outside the programme's control. What the Year 1 evidence does is set out the position clearly: work has begun whose value depends on continuation, and the one-year funding horizon is structural to the sector, not something the programme can fix.

#### The OHC works well but must lead to action.

The Organisational Health Checker is doing the job it was designed to do for four in five participating museums. 51 of 53 Supported respondents (96 per cent) agreed it helped identify priorities, 50 of 53 (94 per cent) agreed the follow-up conversation with MGS was valuable, and 41 of 53 (77 per cent) agreed it led to actions they would not otherwise have taken.

A specific minority sits within this picture. 11 of 53 Supported respondents (21 per cent), and four of seven OHC-only respondents, disagreed that the OHC led to action. A timing caveat applies to part of this: OHCs completed after January 2026 sat in a delivery window where grant decisions were held pending the Year 2 funding settlement, narrowing the action pathway temporarily. Some of the disagreeing

minority sit inside this window. EQ6 sets out three further hypotheses about why the gap occurs beyond the timing caveat; none can be resolved from the Year 1 evidence.

The implication is that Year 2 delivery attention can usefully concentrate on the step from diagnostic to action, particularly for museums that complete the OHC but do not currently move on. The four-in-five positive signal is strong. The minority is small but specific, and worth following up.

### **The successful relational delivery model should be scaled with caution.**

Relational delivery is the clearest positive signal in the survey (figures and qualitative detail in EQ5). 43 of 53 Supported respondents (81 per cent) rate the relationship with MGS as excellent, and 38 of 51 (75 per cent) rate the follow-up conversation very useful. The relational model is the thing participants most consistently value, and the thing that makes the programme's other instruments work as well as they do.

The same feature is also the most labour-intensive to deliver. It rests on continuity of a named MGS contact, responsive engagement across the OHC and grant journey, and a relationship museums describe as different in kind from prior funding. 21 per cent of Supported respondents name programme continuity uncertainty as a barrier already affecting how they engage. The qualitative evidence included one account of the delivery team as visibly stretched, and the MGS team's own account is of caseloads already exceeding what current resourcing can comfortably hold.

The design choice that makes the programme work is the same one that constrains its scalability. Any continuation decision needs to match delivery resourcing to the model producing the value; decoupling the two would risk compromising the feature that participants most value, and scaling the programme up without attention to what made it work at its current size carries the same risk. This is a question about resourcing the delivery model, not about its design.

### **Year 2 should consolidate the depth of reach and address specific gaps.**

The programme reached 104 of around 297 potentially eligible organisations in Year 1: 100 completed an OHC and 58 received at least one grant. Many of those who engaged did so substantially across multiple parts of the offer. The pattern is best described as deeper than wider, consistent with the relational design. Year 1 reach was never intended to extend to every museum in Scotland.

Year 2 can consolidate this depth while addressing specific gaps. Volunteer-run museums are engaged at lower rates than staffed museums: 6 of 14 volunteer-run survey respondents were Supported, against rates of 75 to 91 per cent across every band of museums with paid staff. Local authority museum services experience a specific fit tension with a programme designed around individual organisations. Both groups warrant targeted Year 2 attention.

The latent demand signal is meaningful. Of the survey respondents not yet Supported, 5 of 7 OHC only and 6 of 10 Not engaged said they were interested in future engagement, with a further 4 of 10 Not engaged saying they would need to know more before deciding. None were uninterested.

## **Year 2 is when partnership co-ordination needs to be fully designed in.**

The funder-side picture set out in EQ5 describes a partnership informally configured but substantively active in Year 1: around £1.7 million in parallel Heritage Fund resilience-focused grants alongside the £4 million Museum Futures investment, the Register of Support Services and an antecedent Heritage Fund OHC tool now operating inside the programme, and the Heritage Fund's 30-year backdrop of resilience-focused investment in Scotland's museums giving the partnership a longer time horizon than Museum Futures itself.

Friction in Year 1 was a timing issue rather than a structural one. The distinction between Museum Futures (strategic and innovation funding) and the Heritage Fund (resilience and safeguarding) has been visible across the year. Partners have described the co-ordination structures they have begun to put in place for Year 2: earlier information sharing, aligned application timing, co-ordinated decision-making where appropriate, and a clearer working architecture across the two front doors to the respective funds.

Year 2 is when this co-ordination can be fully realised. The supportive function Museum Futures plays for the Heritage Fund's longer-arc capital pipeline is one partnership benefit worth tracking. Inherited infrastructure and the cross-sectoral knowledge the Heritage Fund brings, sit alongside the parallel funding as part of what the partnership delivers and its value should be acknowledged. .

## **The Year 1 grant portfolio carries design lessons for Year 2.**

The Year 1 grant portfolio took a different shape from what the programme originally envisaged. The Innovation Fund drew more applications than anticipated. The Unlocking Potential Fund did too, with much of the demand reflecting remedial work rather than the next-stage activity the fund was framed around. Pathfinder was funded as staged scoping (two partial scoping awards and one full award) rather than three full awards. Micro-grants were the most-rated specific strand at 81 per cent very useful (25 of 31 raters), with widespread uptake across 42 awards.

This adaptation produced a portfolio that fits where the sector actually is, rather than where the original design assumed it would be. Year 1 grant-making carries forward lessons about how each strand is being received, what museums can absorb, and where the funding architecture needs to flex. The Pathfinder pattern is a particular Year 1 learning: a fund that supports first-phase scoping before committing larger sums can extract more value across more pilots than one that goes straight to full delivery.

## **The wider funding environment is a key consideration.**

Core funding is the sector's near-universal forward priority. 50 of 69 survey respondents (72 per cent) named core funding or financial stabilisation as the dominant forward support need, including 35 of 52 Supported respondents (67 per cent), five of seven OHC only, and 10 of 10 Not engaged.

Museum Futures is not designed to fill this gap, and was not represented as doing so. A programme designed to build resilience sits inside a funding environment that has the potential to either erode or strengthen the base from which resilience has to be built. The programme's effects will hold or not partly depending on what happens to funding for Scotland's museums outside it. The Year 1 evidence can describe this dynamic; resolution sits in the wider policy environment around culture funding.

## 5.2 Implications for the evaluation

The Year 1 evidence base has reached the limits of what it can speak to on several questions Year 2 will need to address. The implications below describe what those gaps are and how to close them.

### Year 2 needs to reach the community and audience voice.

The evaluation has not yet spoken directly to the people museums serve. The survey, interviews and symposium are limited to museum staff and representatives; the partner-side evidence explores the programme from the inside. None of these reach the communities, visitors and local partners who are, for many museums in this evidence, the reason the museum exists. Year 2 will need to find a route to hear from them, particularly for EQ2 on community and place-based contribution. Doing so would also strengthen the wider evidence base on what organisational resilience is for.

### Early outcome signals need longitudinal testing.

The difference between LCF recipients and other Supported museums on whether senior leadership has been freed up for strategic work (11 of 15 against 1 of 38) is the clearest outcome finding in the Year 1 dataset. It is also a snapshot. What has the released leadership time actually produced: strategic plans written and funded, new income streams brought on line, different governance conversations leading to different decisions, or time used in ways that did not embed into durable change? Year 2 is the earliest point at which this can be tested by returning to LCF recipients and asking directly.

The same logic applies to other early outcome signals across Section 4. The cognitive outcomes in EQ1 (clearer priorities, clearer understanding, more confident planning) need testing for whether they translate into an operational capability shift over time. The testing or planning of new approaches in EQ4 (14 of 31 against 4 of 22) needs testing for whether tested approaches become embedded change. The wider organisational benefit to MGS surfaced in EQ6 needs testing for whether the dividend consolidates or fades as delivery scales or staff change.

### Museum innovations to be more fully considered in Year 2.

The Innovation Fund, Unlocking Potential Fund, Pathfinder strands were largely at application, assessment or scoping stage at the end of Year 1; their outcomes have not yet happened. Half or more of survey raters said it was too early to say: 13 of 26 for the Innovation Fund (50 per cent), 14 of 27 for the Unlocking Potential Fund (52 per cent), and all 10 raters of Pathfinder. Year 2 is when the evaluation can look at what these three strands of innovation fundings have actually produced at museum level, rather than at what was applied for. The same logic applies to many wraparound elements with similar 'too early to say' patterns in their Year 1 ratings.

### Future reporting will distinguish between levels of collaboration

The Year 1 evidence treats collaboration largely as a single category, but the sector's collaborative activity sits at different levels of maturity – informal networking between colleagues, programme-supported connections between museums, and more structured joint working. These are different things,

developing at different speeds. Future reports will consider them separately, so that the evaluation can track how collaboration matures as the programme develops.

### **Further qualitative work with those not yet engaged fully.**

OHC only and Not engaged museums are the thinnest parts of the Year 1 qualitative evidence base. The survey suggests meaningful latent demand in both groups, but the qualitative data underpinning it is limited. Understanding what would convert interest into action, why some museums pause after the OHC, and what keeps others from engaging at all, would help the programme reach further. Targeted interviews with both groups in Year 2 are the route.

### **Some open concerns need further attention in Year 2.**

Three concerns surfaced in Year 1 at different evidential weights. None is settled.

The 'innovation as fireworks' concern (single-source). One leader raised the risk that the Innovation Fund could reward eye-catching, short-lived projects when the deeper need is structural. As the fund moves into full delivery, Year 2 can test the concern against what has actually been funded.

The local authority fit tension (triangulated across interview, survey and delivery-side discussion). Three of six Supported local authority respondents agreed the OHC had led to actions, against 35 of 44 among independent museums on a small base. Year 2 qualitative research sits inside the Culture Partnership Agreement policy conversation noted in EQ7.

The tension between commercial capability and community mission (multi-source but tentative). Several voices raised the risk that the pull towards commercial activity could come at the expense of free entry, outreach and community work. Year 2 should look at this directly, alongside the EQ2 community and audience gap.

Each of these should be treated as an explicit Year 2 question rather than left to surface incidentally.

### **Further exploration of the funding partnership is required.**

The Year 1 evaluation has now drawn on substantive partner-side evidence. What is missing is the museum-side experience of the partnership in operation: applying to both MGS and the Heritage Fund in parallel, or being signposted between the two doors. Year 2 should explore this dimension alongside continued partner-side evidence, as co-ordination becomes more fully embedded.

Year 2 is the period in which Year 1's foundational signals can be tested against delivered outcomes, and the evaluation can move from describing what is plausible to describing what has worked. The questions surfaced in this section are the ones that we will return to.

**Find out more**  
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