

## Temporary and Touring Exhibitions Practice, Economic Production and Partnership Models A report published in March 2026

### Executive Summary

This research, commissioned by the Exhibitions Group, supported by Arts Council England and undertaken by Cultural Associates Oxford, provides an analysis of trends in temporary and touring exhibitions. It builds on a sector-wide survey, 48 responses, interviews with 22 cultural leaders and three thematic roundtable discussions with 24 expert participants. Why this research is important Temporary exhibitions are fundamental to what museums, galleries and some other cultural organisations do. They are key drivers for audience development, partnerships, research, income generation and institutional profile. However, this research reveals significant gaps in strategic planning, impact evaluation, skills and shared knowledge that limit the potential of this vital work. Key findings

Number one The strategy gap Exhibitions are often treated as ad hoc programming rather than strategic tools for achieving organisational goals. Almost all organisations cite diversifying and reaching new audiences as a primary motivation for temporary and touring exhibitions, but a striking 69% do not include touring exhibitions activity in their strategic plans.

Number two The impact evaluation deficit Despite exhibitions being positioned as core drivers for audience engagement, over 70% of organisations lack adequate research or data to understand the impact of their exhibitions and what they are achieving. Most organisations rely solely on footfall data and basic visitor satisfaction surveys. This severely limits organisations' ability to make evidence-based decisions and demonstrate value.

Number three Barriers to realising ambitions for exhibitions The research identifies significant barriers preventing organisations from fully realising their temporary and touring exhibition ambitions.

Skills and knowledge gaps There are skills gaps in impact measurement and evaluation. Navigating the Government Indemnity Scheme, or GIS Claiming Museums and Galleries Exhibition Tax Relief, MGETR Post-Brexit Transport Logistics and Customs Partnership Brokering and Management Digital Exhibition and Experience Development Financial Constraints Rising Transport and Insurance Costs, coupled with post-Brexit Customs Complications Create Substantial Financial Barriers The low take-up of MGETR Among smaller institutions is a significant missed opportunity. Geographic Inequalities 35% of respondents highlight concerns caused by their location. Northern Ireland was repeatedly cited as facing particular challenges due to post-Brexit complications, higher insurance and transport costs, terrorism threat assessments affecting GIS access and fewer touring opportunities. Government Indemnity Scheme Government Indemnity Scheme Security costs and environmental condition requirements disproportionately affect smaller and less well-resourced institutions, leaving some venues unable to access the scheme

independently and reliant on partnerships with larger organisations. Number 4. Economic Models for Exhibitions London-based and larger museums are more likely to charge for exhibitions, while in Northern Ireland and regionally across the UK, institutions predominantly offer free entry to avoid barriers to engagement, though there are many variations. Even ticketed exhibitions rarely cover costs. Even ticketed exhibitions rarely cover costs. Features of the way the sector is currently trying to bridge the gap include Pay as you can An emerging trend showing promise for widening access while generating income. However, best practice is not clear. Secondary Spend Some organisations attempt to recoup exhibition costs through shops and cafes, but success is mixed. National museums with large international visitor numbers see healthier returns, but smaller regional venues often face the dual challenges of limited staffing and a restricted visitor base, making significant exhibitions-related secondary income less achievable. National museums and galleries exhibition tax relief. Partnership and models Partnership and models There is growth in museum-to-museum partnerships, exemplified by Magnet, Tate Plus, Hayward Touring and UK National Museum programmes. Co-production Co-production is increasing but brings challenges. Funding is typically short-term, sometimes creating picked-up and dropped relationships that can lead to mistrust, and co-production risks, and co-production risks becoming exploitative and tokenistic without dedicated resources for fair payment and sustained relationships. Local adaptation Rather than bought-in formats, there is a trend towards locally adapted touring exhibitions to reflect local content, history and communities. Digital exhibitions Digital exhibitions Some respondents Some respondents and interviewees see digital experiences as attracting new, younger audiences who might not otherwise visit museums. There is some evidence of longer dwell times and enhanced accessibility. However, many museums lack infrastructure, digital skills or technical support. There are also concerns about energy use of digital formats. There are significant opportunities for the sector to develop and realise the full potential of exhibitions. Appetite is evident. Appetite is evident. Organisations want to do more with temporary and touring exhibitions and respondents to this research generally did not find staffing a key constraint to bringing in touring exhibitions, but they need targeted skills development and practical support. Models of excellence are available. From National Museums Liverpool's strategic approach to exhibition programming and impact measurement to the Museum Exhibit User Experience Evaluation Toolkit developed by Oxford and Warwick Universities, best practice exists and can be adopted across the sector. Innovation is happening. From Magnet's partnership model to Photo Gallery's lean digital touring and from experimentation with community co-production to PAYC pricing experiments, the sector is testing new approaches.

You can download the PDF of the full report on the website at [www.theexhibitionsgroup.org.uk](http://www.theexhibitionsgroup.org.uk)

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