

THE HERDS Art Fund Grants Evaluation Report

October 2025

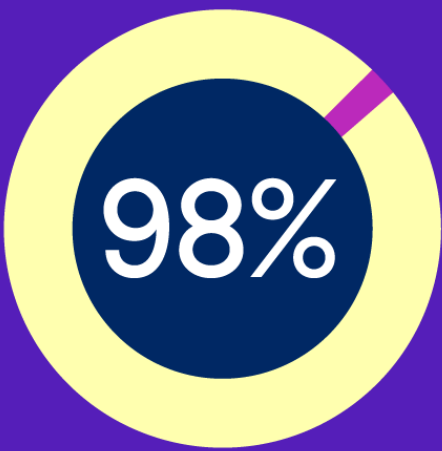
A photograph of a person working on a large, intricate sculpture made of cardboard in a workshop. The sculpture is a large, abstract head-like form with long, flowing, ribbon-like extensions. The person is wearing a dark shirt and is focused on their work. The workshop is filled with various materials, including cardboard, wood, and wires. The background is dark, and the lighting is focused on the work area.

“It inspired us to run a whole season of events themed around sustainability – so thank you!”

Art Fund_
THE HERDS

Impact

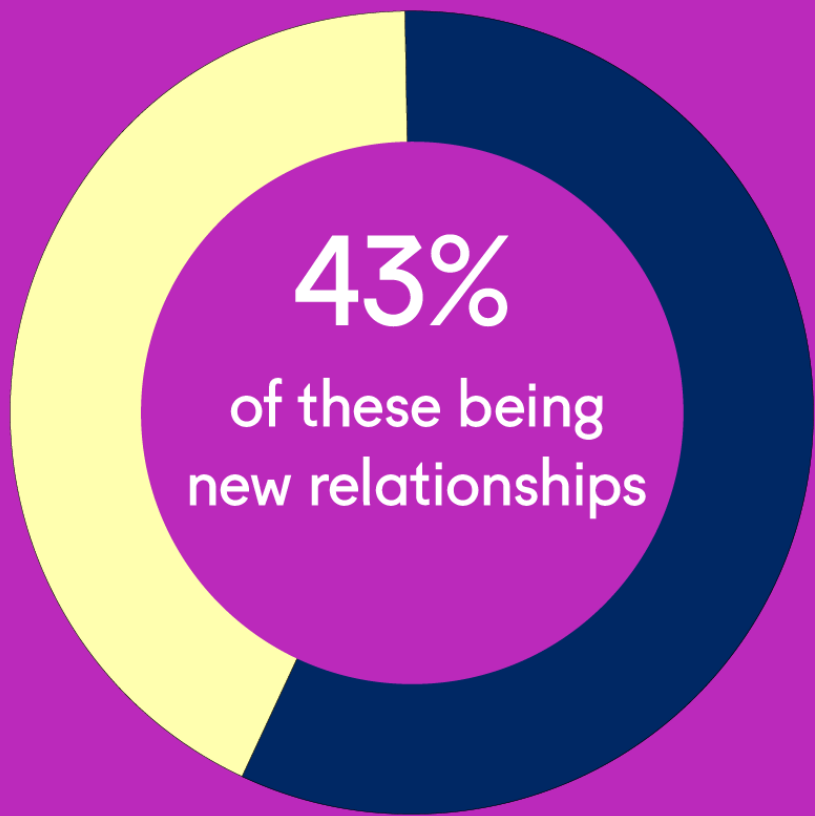
43 museums, galleries and historic houses in 40 locations across the UK



of these activities were delivered in collaboration with community groups, local organisations and artists. In total 163 partners were involved, of which 44% were new partnerships.



46 schools were involved,



Directly engaging...



Key findings

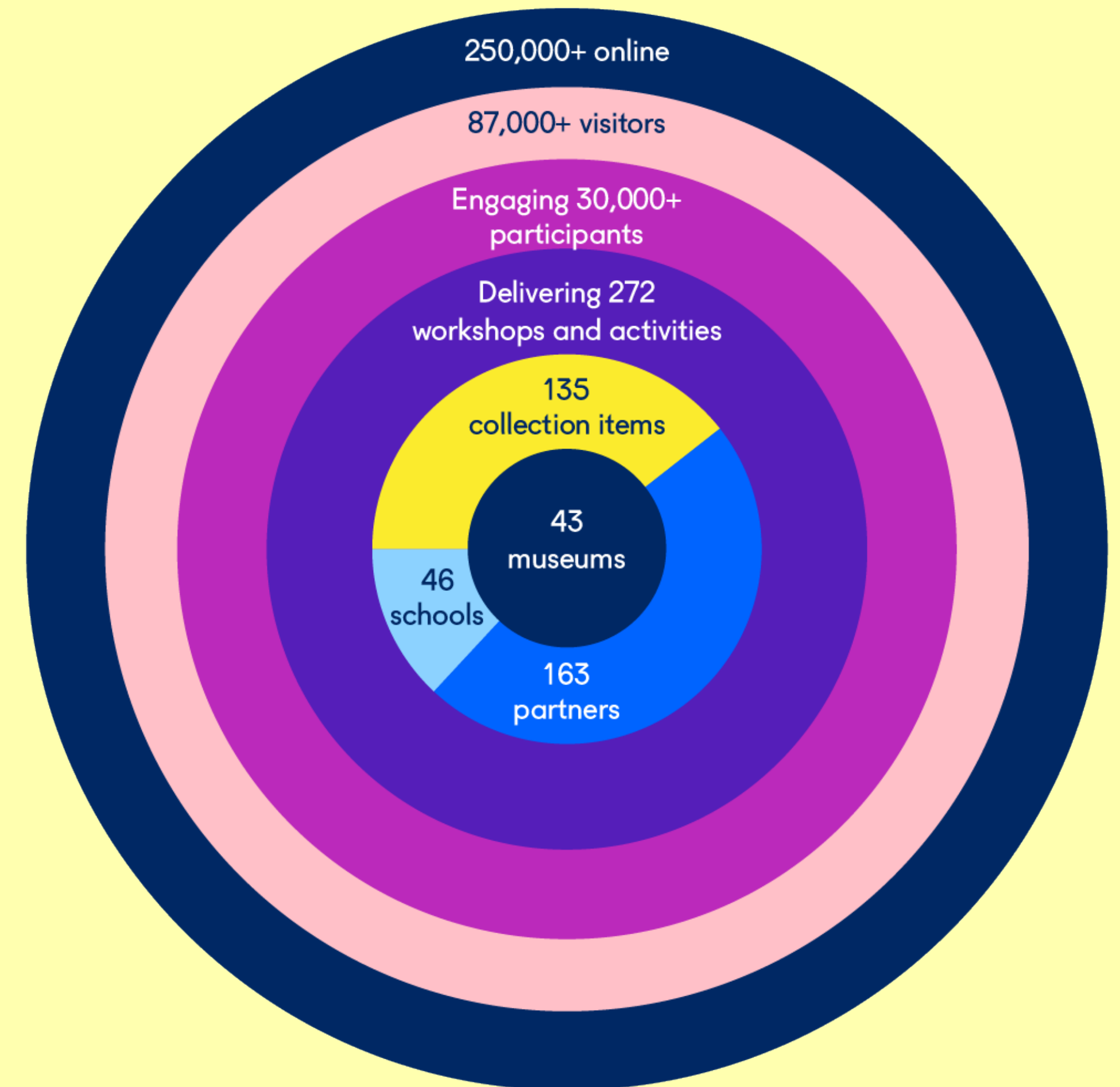
Over a period of three months, the 43 museums supported through THE HERDS Art Fund Grants delivered 106 public activities, 166 workshops and 28 displays, with 163 partner organisations, reaching 46 schools and engaging more than 117,000 participants and visitors across the UK.

Participation in the programme strengthened museums' confidence and capacity to address climate change. They made use of both their existing collections and developed new programming, while also gaining national visibility and peer support, which in turn created wider benefits.

Institutions reported high satisfaction with the creation of new climate-related activities. They noted benefits such as audience development, stronger community relationships, networking, innovation, and reinforced commitments to climate-focused work.

Audiences were equally positively impacted, reporting high levels of engagement and inspiration and with over half making first-time visits to the museums. The programme broadened awareness of the climate crisis and encouraged both new and returning visitors to see their local museums as trusted spaces for discussion on challenging issues.

THE HERDS Art Fund Grants programme demonstrates how modest, theme-focused funding combined with targeted resources and peer collaboration can deliver outcomes far greater than individual efforts alone. With 98% of participants expressing interest in future collaborative initiatives, the programme has shown enduring value for museums, their audiences and the wider cultural landscape.



A photograph of a workshop or studio. In the foreground, a person is seated, working on a large, intricate model made of cardboard and wood. The model appears to be a complex structure, possibly a building or a sculpture, with many layers and details. The person is wearing a dark jacket and is focused on their work. The background is filled with various materials and tools, including cardboard boxes, wood, and wires. The lighting is warm and focused on the work area. The overall atmosphere is one of creative exploration and craftsmanship.

*“A new way of looking at our building and
using the collections as inspiration”*

Context

THE HERDS was a groundbreaking international public art and climate initiative designed to inspire action and renew our bond with the natural world. From April to August 2025, life-size puppet animals stormed through city centres on a 12,000-mile journey from Kinshasa in the Congo Basin to Nordkapp in the Arctic Circle, fleeing climate disaster.

Events and performances by world-class artists responded as the herds moved, bringing together the worlds of arts and science in an urgent call for climate action.

Tens of thousands of people watched live – and millions more online – as the animals of THE HERDS conveyed the ferocity and beauty of nature: proud, elegant, frightened and graceful.

The reach of this project was extended across the UK – beyond THE HERDS events in London and Manchester – with Art Fund supporting 43 museums, galleries and historic houses to get involved through a small grants programme.



Photography by David Levene, Ant Strack and Hugo Glendinning
Photography features designers Ukwanda Puppets and Designs Art Collective and students of Wimbledon College of Arts, UAL © The Walk Productions 2024



Art Fund awarded grants of between £500 and £2,000 to cover project costs, plus up to £250 for digital and social media promotion. The grants supported museums, galleries, cultural and heritage organisations across the UK to create climate-focused activities, from workshops and school visits to exhibitions and community events.

Alongside these grants, organisations received support in the format of webinars exploring how museums can use collections, storytelling and sustainable practices to engage audiences with the climate crisis; ready-made social media resources; and access to THE HERDS educational and puppet making resources.

This layered support was designed to equip museums with the funding, skills and materials needed to deliver impactful climate-focused programming.

Delivered during May and June 2025, these activities aimed to inspire local audiences and foster conversations on the climate crisis rooted in collections and place. They concluded in a coordinated social media campaign (4-6 July 2025) that coincided with THE HERDS reaching Manchester before continuing onwards to the Arctic Circle.

Impact & findings

Art Fund commissioned this evaluation to assess how well the following eight outcomes were achieved:

Museums:

- Are inspired to expand their engagement with the climate crisis
- Are satisfied with the creation and delivery of the new climate-related activities
- Have developed new or strengthened existing relationships with community groups or local organisations
- Have benefitted from being part of a UK-wide group, supported by Art Fund, engaging with THE HERDS
- Are exploring new practices

Audiences:

- Felt engaged and inspired by the climate-related activities
- Have a broadened awareness and understanding of the climate crisis
- Have visited for the first time or (re)connected with their local museums, finding them trusted and safe places for discussion



Pwill the Puffin by Small World Theatre and commissioned by Tenby Museum and Art Gallery 2025 © Image and puppet maker: Small World Theatre

Outcome one: Museums are inspired to expand their engagement with the climate crisis

Following their engagement with the programme:

- 39 of 43 museums agreed the programme encouraged them to explore new approaches to engagement with the climate crisis
- 86% of the participating museums are considering ways to reduce the environmental impact of their activities

Through the programme, organisations developed environmental policies, trialled new materials, and improved internal ecological practices. Participation facilitated the exploration of new subjects, improved internal ecological practices, encouraged experimentation with materials, and deepened understanding of audiences' relationship with the climate crisis while also helping to demystify the topic.

They also reported greater confidence to address the climate crisis in creative and meaningful ways, with some inspired to continue confidently embedding climate change as a theme.

“It inspired us to run a whole season of events themed around sustainability – so thank you!” (Grant recipient)

The programme not only stimulated creative engagement with the theme, but also fostered a meaningful and lasting pledge toward environmentally responsible practices within participating institutions.

“It was an extremely enjoyable and beautiful project and has inspired us to explore further sustainable art projects”

Outcome two: Museums are satisfied with the creation and delivery of the new climate-related activities

Alongside the financial support, Art Fund provided grantees with access to online webinars and resources including an educational toolkit, to support both planning and delivery of their HERDS activities. The development of each museum's activities was enriched by learning from other cohort members, stimulating innovation and providing an important source of satisfaction for many organisations.

"A lot of the discussions that we had as part of the webinars fed into our project" (Grant recipient)

The grants allowed institutions not only to trial new activities or themes, but also to explore new formats and settings, test out different approaches to working with artists and experts, and offer free activities, all of which made programmes more accessible to wider audiences.

Audience engagement and development emerged as key sources of satisfaction; **95%** of grant recipients reported being pleased with audience engagement, as activities successfully reached their intended communities – many for the first time (**51% of visitors were new to the venues**).

"We've got new audiences at the museum as a direct result of THE HERDS" (Grant recipient)



Whale puppet display © Nature in Art

Outcome three: Museums have developed new or strengthened existing relationships with community groups or local organisations

“It's the contacts that we've made that will have a lasting legacy”

Participation in THE HERDS has significantly supported museums in developing new partnerships and strengthening existing relationships with community groups and local organisations. 82% of participants found engaging with THE HERDS was beneficial for fostering partnerships and sector collaboration.

95% of participating museums delivered activities in collaboration with external partners, with 44% of these representing new partnerships. Many of these were outside of the cultural sector, with organisations working with the libraries, musicians, puppeteers and local wildlife trusts.

Through dedicated workshops and visits, 20 grantees engaged with a total of 46 schools, 43% of which were new relationships.

89% of museums reported that THE HERDS enabled them to develop or reinforce relationships with community groups or local organisations, with 86% of grantees intending to continue these partnerships beyond the project, demonstrating strong legacy potential for the programme.

“I am eternally grateful for the opportunities that we have received from THE HERDS, to open this dialogue and work with partners maybe we would not have thought of working with” (Grant recipient)

Outcome four: Museums have benefitted from being part of a UK-wide group, supported by Art Fund, engaging with THE HERDS

The programme was designed to do more than simply distribute grants. It created opportunities for museums to join a national consortium and provided additional support – through offering webinars, resources, and toolkits to grantees – aiming to equip them with the means and skills to deliver impactful activities.

This support was widely valued; 93% of grantees agreed or strongly agreed that the materials offered and the chance to discuss their intended activities with peers during the webinars was useful in planning and refining their activities. Engagement with the webinars was strong: 95% of grantees either attended live sessions or viewed recordings, with an average of 70% rating the content as valuable.

Being part of a UK-wide network through THE HERDS brought a range of benefits to participating museums; the most valued include access to new resources or expertise (81%), strengthened engagement with the local community (72%) and opportunities for knowledge sharing (70%).

“I think the consortium was one of the biggest strengths of the project” (Grant recipient)

In some instances, the initial Art Fund support proved catalytic, leading to formal recognition and further backing. Following their participation in THE HERDS, Beach Creative CIC secured an additional £5,000 from Canterbury City Council, enabling more workshops, paid opportunities for local young people, extending the project's reach.

“It's been great working with other partners and hearing their great ideas. I think that was infectious as well. Seeing different ways of working and having that chance to talk with partners throughout Britain, just touching base like that”

Outcome five: Museums are exploring new practices (i.e. in programming, audience engagement etc.)

“One of the things we’ve struggled with is making the connections with our collections. [...] being part of this program has made it easier to see those connections”

Overall, 73% of participants felt encouraged to try new approaches through their involvement in the programme.

A significant majority of museums reported their participation will lead to innovation in key areas: 91% in education and learning, 89% in sustainability and environmental responsibility, 84% in audiences and community engagement, 82% in partnerships and sector collaborations, and 70% in evaluation approaches.

“We’re definitely taking that forward as something that we trialled through this project and bringing it into our future programming” (Grant recipient)

Twenty-two museums out of 43 used a total of 135 collection items in their HERDS activities, 44% of which (60 items) were taken out of storage

“It’s a nice way to look at our collection in a new way as part of this project, which I don’t think we would have done if we weren’t working on it with Art Fund” (Grant recipient)

Participation has also encouraged 80% to programme *more* activities to engage audiences with the climate crisis while 57% will explore new practices in exhibitions and interpretation.

Outcome six: Audiences felt engaged and inspired by the climate-related activities

Evidence for this outcome was particularly positive and encouraging, demonstrating how the Art Fund-supported activities successfully engaged and inspired audiences across participating museums.

Across the programme, museums delivered 28 public displays, 106 public activities, and 166 workshops (72 public and 94 closed), reaching over 87,000 visitors to the displays and engaging more than 30,000 participants through public activities and workshops.

Among students, 73% reported feeling inspired or happy about THE HERDS workshops or activities they took part in; 95% felt actively engaged.

Teachers unanimously reported positive experiences, with 100% agreeing or strongly agreeing that the workshops or visits were engaging and inspiring for their pupils. Furthermore, 87% stated that following their visit, they were interested to find out more about climate action and ways to get involved, and all participating schools indicated interest in returning to the museum for similar activities in the future.

Amongst general audiences (attending public activities and visiting public displays) 92% found the activities or displays inspiring and 85% reported high levels of engagement.

"We didn't realise how emotional people would be, how important it was to them"
(Grant recipient)



Outcome seven: Audiences have a broadened awareness and understanding of the climate crisis

"I am so impressed with how much the pupils have learnt! The project has been fantastic with cross curricular activities to engage the class – thank you!"

73% public activity participants and visitors to displays reported learning something new about the climate emergency while 70% expressed interest in finding out more about climate action and ways to get involved following their visit.

For school audiences, this impact was even more pronounced: 100% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that the activities had clear links to the curriculum and would support students' ongoing learning, and 93% confirmed that students' understanding of the climate emergency had been broadened.

"It's been great to see the children being creative and thinking about climate change at the same time." (Teacher feedback)

Furthermore, 93% of teachers felt the workshops were useful for their own practice. They also reported high levels of motivation, with 87% expressing personal interest in exploring further climate action engagement opportunities.

Among students, 67% learned something new about the climate emergency. 75% indicated increased interest in the issue, and 85% wanted to continue learning about topics explored through THE HERDS workshops or activities.

"It was so fun can you come and do it again please?"

"It was so amazing and I would love to learn more"

(Student feedback)

Outcome eight: Audiences have visited for the first time or (re)connected with their local museums, finding them trusted and safe places for discussion

As reported by museums during interviews, THE HERDS activities attracted new audiences to their local sites, a finding confirmed by audiences' questionnaires showing that 51% were visiting the museum for the first time.

"A lot of people hadn't been before and would then consider coming again" (Grant recipient)

Furthermore, 53% of visitors cited the HERDS activity or display as their primary motivation for attending, while 42% also explored other exhibits available or took part in additional activities.

For many museums, attracting new audiences was a major motivation for taking part in THE HERDS, and a key legacy they hope the project will leave.

Most visitors (79%) felt the museum was a welcoming space for discussions on current social topics such as the climate crisis.

"It was helpful and friendly, I like how conversations about climate and nature are being discussed in different settings, makes it feel like a holistic voice rather than limited to conservation organisations." (Grant recipient)

This is a notable achievement, especially as several museums acknowledged finding this subject challenging to address and were eager to explore it further.

***"Our visitors
have seen us in
a new light"***

A photograph of an art installation made of cardboard and wires. The installation features large, abstract shapes made of corrugated cardboard, some of which are suspended by thin wires. A person is visible in the lower left, working on the installation. The background is dark, and the overall scene is dimly lit.

"It's given us more confidence in being able to talk about those kinds of topics"

Learnings: Small grants, big impact

Modest funding (grants of between £500 - £2,000, with an average grant of £1600), combined with the visibility of high-profile partners and supported within a consortium model that promotes shared learning, can drive meaningful change.

"Although it's a small amount of money, it is really meaningful for our museum"
(Grant recipient)

Museums particularly valued the opportunities to connect with one another through the webinars facilitated by Art Fund, and through onward connections.

"I would really like to see some kind of continuation of those relationships because I think that there would be a richness in what we could offer each other"
(Grant recipient)

THE HERDS showed that theme-focused programmes can create collective momentum, inspire change, foster innovation, unlock creativity and achieve outcomes far greater than individual efforts alone, multiplying impact across the sector.



HERDS activity at The Exchange Erith
© The Exchange Erith

Learnings: The power of museums as safe spaces for big conversations

THE HERDS activities helped museums approach the climate emergency in ways that were positively engaging, informative and accessible. Participating organisations highlighted how the programme helped to strike a careful balance between addressing a serious issue and avoiding fear or judgment.

“Because obviously, it can be very doom and gloom, but I think it was really positive” (Grant recipient)

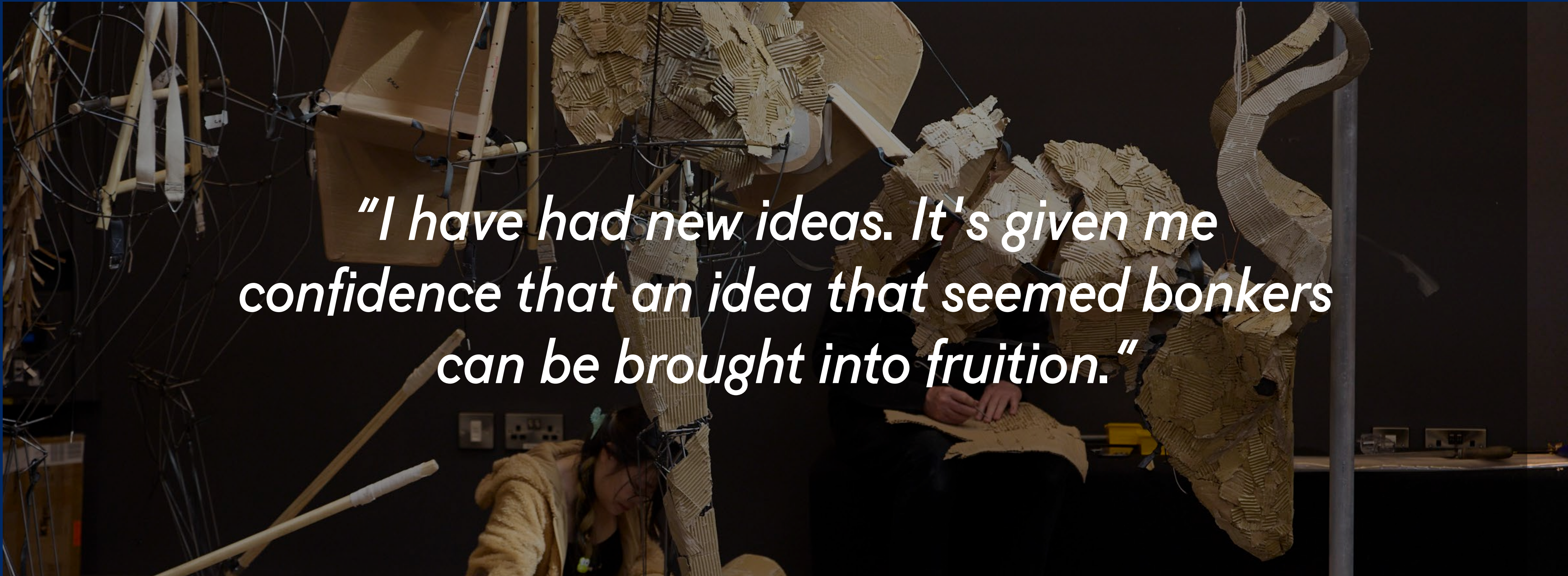
Museums also reported that this approach gave them confidence to initiate and / or continue conversations about climate change with their audiences.

“It's given us more confidence in being able to talk about those kinds of topics” (Grant recipient)

By framing challenging topics in a constructive and supportive way, THE HERDS enabled museums to engage visitors meaningfully without overwhelming them, creating a safe space for learning and reflection.



Octopus puppet in Mazey Day procession © PK Porthcurno

A person is working on a large, complex sculpture made of cardboard and wire in a workshop. The sculpture is made of many pieces of cardboard, some of which are cut into long, thin strips and are being used to create a large, abstract form. The person is wearing a yellow jacket and is focused on their work. The workshop is filled with various materials and tools, including cardboard boxes, wires, and a workbench. The lighting is warm and focused on the work area.

"I have had new ideas. It's given me confidence that an idea that seemed bonkers can be brought into fruition."

Conclusions

Over a period of three months, the 43 recipients of THE HERDS Art Fund Grants delivered 106 public activities, 166 workshops and 28 displays with 163 partners, reaching 46 schools and engaging over 117,000 participants and visitors.

Participation in THE HERDS programme has had a clear impact on both museums and their audiences across the country.

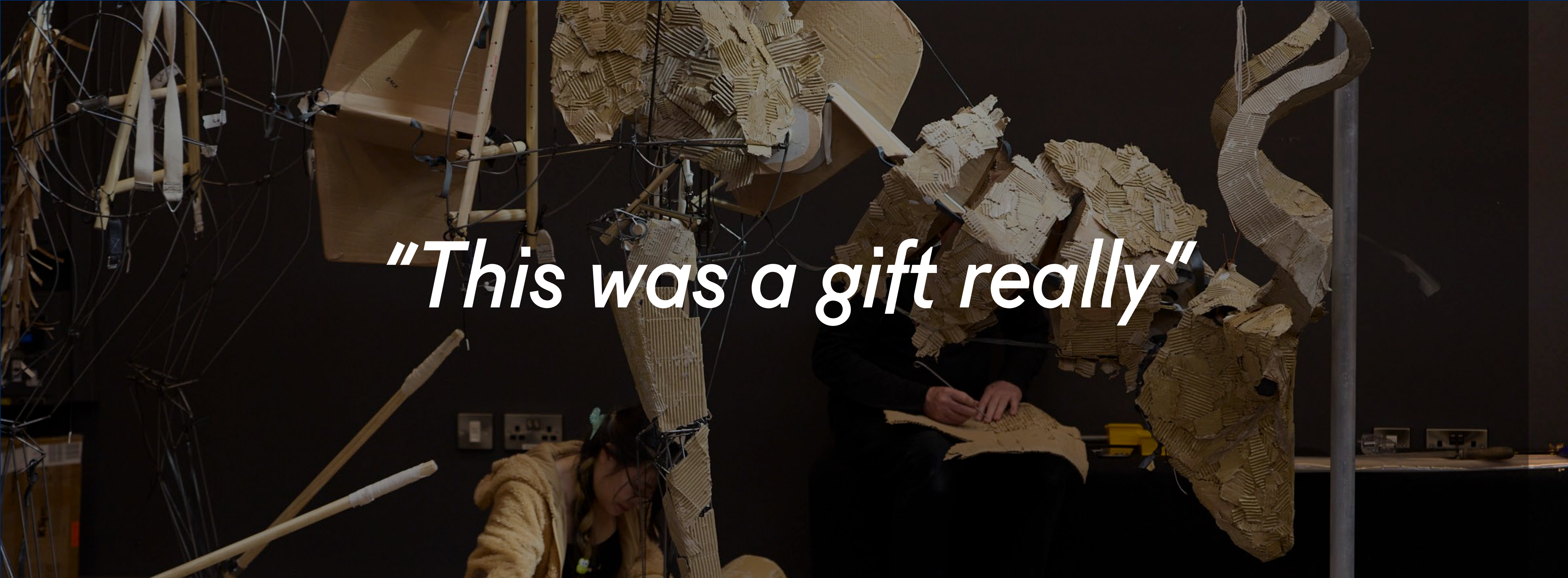
Museums have benefited from being part of a national programme giving them access to Art Fund-organised support and to THE HERDS' profile and visibility.

"It was a really impressive project and I'm really glad we were a part of it"
(Grant recipient)

From being inspired to expand their engagement with the climate crisis to developing or strengthening relationships, or feeling encouraged to explore new practices, they reported high satisfaction levels with the creation and delivery of the new climate-related activities.



Hairy Moth Cardboard Puppet at Sustainable Shakespeare Day
© Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

A photograph of an art installation. The central focus is a large, abstract sculpture constructed from various materials, including cardboard, wood, and wire. The sculpture has a complex, layered structure with many protruding and recessed parts. A person is visible in the lower center, working on the sculpture. The background is dark, and the lighting is focused on the sculpture. The text "This was a gift really" is overlaid in white, italicized font.

"This was a gift really"

Thank you

With thanks to THE HERDS Art Fund grant recipients, and the huge number of local partners and communities who collaborated to create activities, workshops and displays.

HERDS activities Herefordshire Museums - Three Counties Show
© Herefordshire Museums & Galleries



Art Exchange – Colchester, University of Essex

Bankfield Museum – Halifax

Barnsley Museums & National Trust –Wentworth
Castle Gardens, South Yorkshire

Beach Creative CIC – Herne Bay, Kent

Broughton House and Garden – Dumfries and
Galloway

Chapter – Cardiff

Co-operative Heritage Trust – Rochdale

Culture Coventry Trust – Coventry

Dales Countryside Museum – Hawes, North
Yorkshire

Falmouth Art Gallery – Falmouth, Cornwall

Great North Museum: Hancock – Newcastle upon
Tyne

Gwella, Flintshire Libraries and Leisure – Mold,
North Wales

Haslemere Educational Museum – Surrey

Hay Castle Trust – Hay-on-Wye

Herefordshire Museum Service – Worcestershire

Judges' Lodgings Museum – Lancaster
Kirkleatham Museum – Redcar
Manchester Museum – Manchester
Museum of Oxford – Oxford
Natural History Museum (First Light Festival) – Lowestoft
Nature in Art Trust – Gloucester
Norton Priory Museum and Gardens – Cheshire
Our Big Picture – Grimsby
PK Porthcurno - Museum of Global Communications – Porthcurno, Cornwall
Quaker Tapestry Museum – Kendal, Cumbria
Rockingham Forest Trust – Stanwick, Northamptonshire
Science and Industry Museum – Manchester
Silk Heritage Trust – Macclesfield
St Barbe Museum and Art Gallery – Lymington, Hampshire

Stevenage Museum – Stevenage
Storiell – Bangor, Gwynedd
Tenby Museum & Art Gallery – Tenby, Pembrokeshire
The Art House – Wakefield
The Brunel Museum – London
The Exchange Erith Ltd. – Erith
The Mint House – Pevensey
The Museum of Land Speed – Pendine
The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust – Stratford-upon-Avon
The Watt Institution – Greenock
UCL Grant Museum of Zoology – London
Wheal Martyn Trust – St Austell, Cornwall
Wigan Museum – Wigan
Yr Ysgwrn (Eryri National Park Authority) – Trawsfynydd, Gwynedd

Many thanks to the following grant recipients who were interviewed to gather testimonies on the impacts of the funding, discuss their experiences and explore the legacy of their participation:

Fareeda Atwan, Natural History Museum
Noel Griffin, Watt Institution
Frances Hall, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust
Rebecca Hilton, Natural History Museum
Hannah Jones, Art Exchange
Rhys Lloyd Jones, Storiell
Kate Toomey, Museum of Oxford
Kay Topping, Haslemere Educational Museum
Jenny Wilkie, Kirkleatham Museum
Liz Williams, Rockingham Forest Trust
Gillian Wilson, Beach Creative CIC

And Sam Cairns, THE HERDS Art Fund Grants Independent Educational Adviser, who was interviewed to reflect on her role and experiences

Evaluation undertaken and written by Amanda Cusimano

Edited by Art Fund