



the happy
museum

Happy Museum thematic case study

Smart use of resources,
building resilience and
stewardship of the future

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This case study is relevant to:

- Senior management teams
- Learning and community engagement teams
- Curators

This case study is about how museum and galleries used Happy Museum thinking to have a new perspective on the resources available to them. This was not just about taking measures to reduce the impact of activities on the environment, but about thinking creatively about the full range of resources available – materials, money, energy, spaces and people's time. In the process, these organisations built up their resilience and improved the wellbeing of those involved.

About our Story of Change

Since 2008, the Happy Museum project has been testing a set of working principles related to wellbeing through small commissioned projects. The funded projects used a 'Story of Change' tool to define their sustainable wellbeing vision for the project and to plan the route to achieve that vision. Story of Change is also known as Theory of Change; Logic Modelling is a similar approach. Using a story of change challenges 'business as usual' thinking by starting with the

'why?' – the overall purpose of a project – and working backwards. Moving to a focus on wellbeing and sustainability is not something that can be planned and executed in the way a construction project can be. Thinking about a convincing narrative that will take us in that direction and sharing it helps everyone to align around the new direction.

More about our Story of Change can be found on [page 15](#) and [online here](#)

| Principles | How? The 'drivers' of success | What? The activity you deliver | Why? The difference we want to make |
|--|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measure what matters • Be an active citizen • Pursue mutual relationships • Create the conditions for wellbeing • Learn for resilience • Value the environment and be a steward of the future as well as the past | <p>How you go about setting up a Happy Museum approach: the drivers for change, commitments, set up and investments that underpin the approach.</p> | <p>The activity you deliver, working internally and/or externally, in partnership with staff, volunteers, participants and audience.</p> | <p>This is the reason we're here, the outcomes a Happy Museum can achieve. The difference we make to everyone, staff, volunteers, participants and audience.</p> |

About this case study

This case study looks at what Happy Museums do. It's about how they re-imagine their use of resources and explore the relationship between wellbeing and environmental sustainability. Going through this process helped many of them not only to save money but also to improve the wellbeing of audiences and staff. Creative thinking about resources encouraged these museums to look beyond budgets and business as usual to the full range of resources open to them – materials, money, energy, spaces and people's time. This kind of creative thinking also reduces the impact of activities on the environment and the demand on limited natural resources.

Museums define themselves as stewards of the past – and we believe they can also be role models when it comes to stewardship of the future by taking a lead in environmental responsibility. The experience of the museums and galleries featured in this case study is that smart thinking about resources fulfils this responsibility, but also makes them more resilient and better equipped to address the challenges and economic constraints that they face. Some had no choice but to be creative about materials because there was no funding. To be a sustainable organisation in the long term means using all sorts of resources better.



1 Be smart about the use of resources

“Natural and financial capital is finite, human capital can be thought of as infinite.”

Smart use of resources is not just about recycling. Happy Museums think about resources in the broadest sense. Some museums and galleries used people’s time more effectively so everyone in the supply chain was able to make more of a difference. Some used their space to the full. We use the project management triangle concept to make the most of our assets by thinking about time, resources and scope as being closely related.

People’s time; a ‘limitless’ resource

While natural and financial capital is finite, human capital can be thought of as infinite. Using people power is not only efficient, it builds better relationships too.

Derby Museums’ ‘Re:Make’ project looked on community involvement as a resource – local participants were invited to become designers and makers of the fixtures and fittings of the Silk Mill during its refurbishment. The Silk Mill team also found that the participants were taking things out of the museum’s skips to use in their designs – and as a result became more aware of recycling and upcycling. Derby Museums found that more personal relationships resulting from their new interactions. Now they make sure every time they do something, it creates multiple benefits either now or in the future.

[Read our case study on Derby Museums here](#)

Ceredigion Museum in Aberystwyth used Happy Museum funding for a project called ‘Harvest the Knowledge’, in partnership with Tircoed, a woodland and rural communities



charity. The people resource for this project were five young people who were trained in craft and enterprise skills. These apprentices made a range of kitchen crafts for sale in the museum shop that were inspired by and related to objects in the museum’s collection. Through the project, all involved benefitted. The young people were given training and the museum developed a lasting partnership with Tircoed and a new source of revenue, through the sale of the kitchen crafts.

[Read our case study on Ceredigion Museum here](#)

and material culture, leading to ‘flow’ – immersive engagement with an activity, with an associated positive impact on wellbeing.

Bilston Craft Gallery offers a popular specialist creative play programme for children up to 7 years old called Craftplay, which has its own dedicated indoor space. Bilston’s Happy Museum project focused on developing its unused outdoor space as a new resource for use by school groups. Craft experts were recruited to train Bilston staff to make outdoor play objects and the space was improved and developed. The space and activities were tested by pupils and staff of a local school. The ‘new’ outdoor space has enabled the gallery to increase its offer to local schools and the public. Building on this, the gallery is developing a pop up craft space to bring craftplay to parks and open spaces.

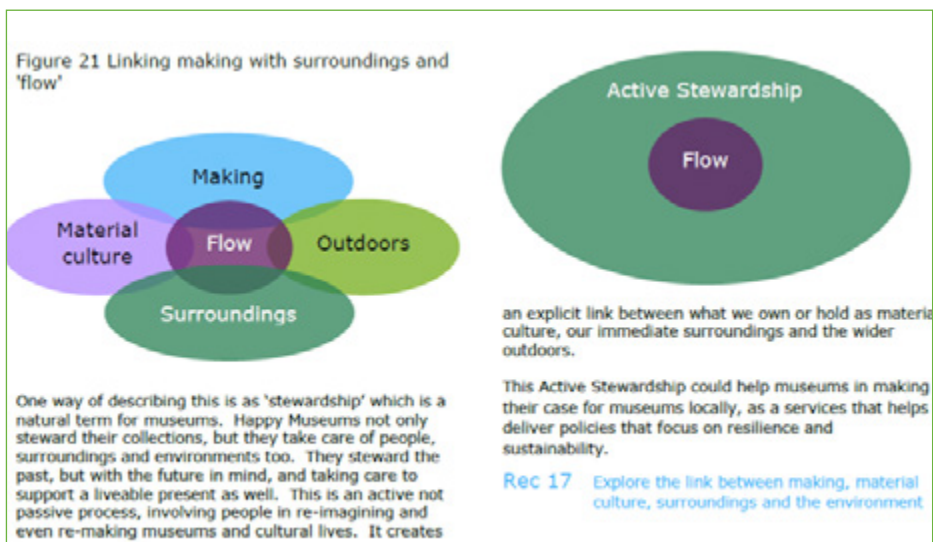
[Read our case study on Bilston Craftplay here](#)

Abergavenney Museum’s Happy Museum project tested a new approach to co-curation with local vulnerable young people. Two crafts experts led workshops in weaving with eight young carers and bee-keeping with 20 primary school children with special needs. The traditional skills workshops took place both inside the museum and outdoors. This experience with outdoor working – with links to local natural and cultural heritage – led to a decision to develop this ‘resource’ and increase the museum’s outdoor offer. A learning assistant with Forest School skills has since become actively engaged with the museum. Through the project,

“Often outdoor space was an unused or underused resource.”

Space as a rich resource

Many of the museums and galleries funded by the Happy Museum project used new space (or existing space in new ways) to maximise benefit. Often outdoor space was an unused or underused resource. This meant a significant increase in the capacity of the museum or gallery. Again, this approach to efficiency brings bigger benefits, as we begin to see the link between surroundings and the outdoors, with making



“The Museum has had zero budget for new displays and exhibitions. This has made us resourceful, we upcycle and recycle where we can.”

Jo Rooks, Museum of East Anglian Life

the museum also developed links with the local transition group and other environmental organisations. Teachers reported the children being ‘gripped’ by bee keeping and teachers described how absorbed they were – examples of the state of ‘**flow**’. The young carers talked about the relaxing and addictive nature of working with hands.

[Read our case study on Abergavenny Museum here](#)

The Garden Museum in London was another to spot untapped outdoor space. With the support of Lambeth Council, the museum took over some public land outside the premises to use as additional growing space. The museum used the plot to teach children from a local nursery school and older people (some with dementia) from a local Healthy Living Club to plant a hardy, native winter cutting garden that would become a permanent part of the museum.

[Read about the Garden Museum project here](#)

Recycling for austerity, ethics and aesthetics?

Many Happy Museums found creative ways to use recycled materials. Others had no choice but to be creative about their use of materials because there was no funding. Moving away from consumption is one of the bigger Happy Museum messages, shared in the wider world in concepts like ‘Stuffocation’ and sustainable prosperity.

One of these was the **Museum of East Anglian Life**, in Stowmarket, Suffolk. (It was the museum’s innovative work on wellbeing, community engagement and impact evaluation approaches that inspired the creation of the Happy Museum Project). Financial necessity led the museum to be creative about resource use, as Jo Rooks, Museum Learning Officer, explains: “Basically, since the 1960s the Museum has had zero budget for new displays and exhibitions. This has made us resourceful, we upcycle and recycle where we can.” This attitude of thrift also influences the design activities aimed at audiences. “When we have a steam tractor [show] weekend, we get the tractors to crush stones and repair any potholes we have.”

[Read our case study on the Museum of East Anglian Life here](#)

The Story Museum is independently funded and has gradually been transforming a large, dilapidated building in the centre of Oxford. The museum used Happy Museum funding to develop its vision of being ‘happy



"37% of visitors said they felt 'happy' after their cultural treatment, while 15 % felt 'very happy' and 12% felt 'inspired'."

from the beginning', with a focus on wellbeing and sustainability. One of the co-directors was a founder of Friends of the Earth and the museum team felt that sustainability was something they had in hand. "But one thing we learnt through the refurbishment and building process was that this wasn't always taken as read by all our contractors," says Kim Pickin, co-director of the Story Museum. "Things improved throughout the process and the builders started coming up with their own ideas. We've managed to incorporate much more 'upcycling' into the fitting out than we originally thought would be possible – we've used people who are good at being 'Borrowers' and the spaces and exhibitions are also made out of odds and ends." Recycling and upcycling support the museum's aesthetic, as well as its vision as an organisation. The decision to pursue sustainable refurbishment and material sourcing has released creativity and engaged staff and suppliers.

[Read our case study on the Story Museum here](#)

Another museum to use a focus on recycling to unlock other benefits was **The Beaney House of Art and Knowledge**, in Canterbury. The Beaney used Happy Museum funding to commission a 'cultural apothecary', a full-size antiquated apothecary's shop made out of card and other recycled materials, staffed by performers who dispensed cultural 'happiness prescriptions' to some 6,700 visitors over a two week period. Using recycled materials was an important part of the aesthetic – and it also reduced costs, making more

funding available for investing in people's time. The project was deliberately labour intensive. To create the 200 different cultural prescriptions – the project team and museum staff working with four local schools and by over 100 members of the public. Visitors to the 'Paper Apothecary' described how they were feeling to the apothecary's resident chemists and were given an appropriate cultural prescription. The apothecary was enormously successful and was widely covered in the local media. Some 37% of visitors said they felt 'happy' after their cultural treatment, while 15 % felt 'very happy' and 12% felt 'inspired'. The project is being adapted and revived in other parts of the country by other museums and galleries.

[Read our case study on The Beaney here](#)

Participants in Derby Museums 'Re:Make' project began taking things out of the museum's skips to use in their designs for the museums furnishings and fittings – and as a result the museum team were reminded of their commitment to recycling and upcycling, which had slipped down the agenda.



2. Extending the role of the senses

“Other Worlds had a remarkable level of engagement, with 6,000 written contributions in 18 days.”

By joining things up, museums are not just becoming more financially efficient and sustainable, they are working with many of the other Happy Museum principles about sharing and wellbeing and resilience.

Many Happy Museums have explored how the act of making (creative and craft activities) – and the experience of ‘flow’ – helps people to engage with and care for their surroundings, especially the natural world. One of the key principles of the Happy Museum project is to encourage ‘active stewardship’ – a term we use to describe the link between making, caring and an impact on wellbeing and the environment.

[Read more about the Happy Museum principles](#)

At the **Beaney House** in Canterbury, ‘cultural prescriptions’ were given out in a full scale apothecary’s shop made out of recycled materials. The Paper Apothecary was designed to appeal to visitor’s senses and emotions. At the **Imperial War**

Museum North, different object handling approaches were tested. Using veterans to support object handling at TimeStacks was the most successful approach the museum tested, “This highlighted to us the importance of first-hand or eye-witness testimony to the experience on site and we have built upon this since the project completed,” says Head of Exhibitions Zoe Dunbar. “There are now more veterans in the galleries sharing their stories and object handling still forms a strong part of what we do.”

[Read our case study on the Imperial War Museum North here](#)

At the **Story Museum** in Oxford, visitors were asked to make use of a ‘mood tree’, putting a coloured leaf representing their mood on the tree when they arrive and another when they leave. This way, museum staff could get a visual snapshot of the difference that the museum experience had made to visitors. Some Story Museum exhibits allow visitors to write their reactions and comments onto labels and tie them on or next to an exhibit. The museum’s first exhibition, Other Worlds, had a remarkable level of engagement, with 6,000 written contributions in 18 days.



3. Being a good host, and a broker of relationships

“We encourage museums and galleries to act as hubs and use the multiplier effect to create many different relationships between organisations, groups and individuals.”

Relationships are an asset. Happy Museums that developed partnerships, acted as a host to other organisations and a broker of relationships, enjoyed mutual benefits as well as developing resilience among all the parties.

We encourage museums and galleries to act as hubs and use the multiplier effect to create many different relationships between organisations, groups and individuals.

Examples of being a good host, and acting as a broker or a hub include: **Godalming Museum**, which developed new partnerships with a range of local organisations

including the environmental group, Greening Godalming; the **Story Museum**, which developed links with Oxford’s Transition movement; the **Chilterns Open Air Museum**, which also developed links with their local Transition group; and **London Transport Museum**, where the project created a conversation hub for homeless people.



4. Active stewardship and the role of making

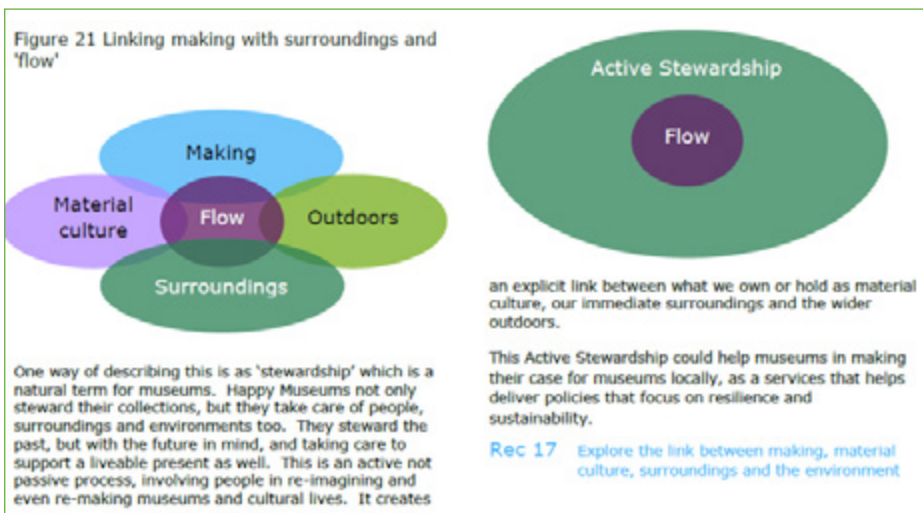
“Every time I went home after weaving I was chilled out and happy.”

Young carer

The concept of ‘stewardship’ is something that all museums will understand. Happy Museums take this further into the realms of active stewardship, which begins with a focus on wellbeing and taking a lead within a community.

The stewardship concept goes well beyond preserving collections to seeking environmental stewardship. For many, this also means exploring the relationship between making, material culture, our surroundings and the outdoors.

The young carers involved in **Abergavenney Museum’s** Happy Museum project got a lot of pleasure from weaving. “Every time I went home after weaving I was chilled out and happy,” said one participant. Another referred to the power of the “busy with your hands thing” to create a sense of wellbeing. For the participants this was a rare taste of ‘flow’, the satisfying and immersive state of “energised focus” identified by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihayli. The younger group of participants were observed to be “gripped” and fascinated by their involvement in a bee keeping project.



Bilston Craftplay also noted the change in children’s behaviour as a result of being given creative freedom. The local school groups involved in the unstructured outdoor sessions showed greater innovation in their play. Using a wooden railway set they started “going off the tracks”. Bilston also showed “active stewardship” by encouraging school groups to walk to their Craftplay sessions.

For **Ceredigion Museum** making an explicit link between their

“In some ways it has been transformative – here was an initiative that was not just about the past, but that also shows how we can live in the future.”

Alice Briggs, Ceredigion Museum

collection, the outdoors and stewardship of the environment was a powerful experience. In commercialising the products made by young apprentices, the museum took care to emphasise that they were made by local craftspeople using local materials sourced from properly managed woodlands. The stories of the makers, and the tools used to make

them, were told and the link made between the products and the museum’s collections. Curator Alice Briggs believes the project has had an enduring legacy. “In some ways it has been transformative – here was an initiative that was not just about the past, but that also shows how we can live in the future.”



5. Lead by action and example

Museums have two opportunities to persuade, firstly by what they do and secondly by how they do it. Museums and galleries can use their 'position' in the community to show leadership, either through their expertise on a subject and putting on exhibitions and events, or by showing civic responsibility through their actions.

"The idea is to question the continual upgrade culture we live in."

Rib Davies, The Lightbox



With its second Happy Museum project, **The Lightbox** in Working demonstrated leadership with a project on environmental sustainability. Called 'Waste Not ...' the project asked local people about the objects they have been keeping and repairing rather than replacing. "The idea is to question the continual upgrade culture we live in," says special projects manager Rib Davies. The exhibition displayed the objects and showed of three minute films about the objects and their owners. There was also an environmental stall with information about sustainability and alternatives to upgrading.

[Read about the Waste Not project here](#)

Godalming Museum has taken on an explicit role as a civic institution of good environmental practice. There are now labels up around the museum on energy use and where waste goes. Environmental sustainability as a theme for the museum grew out of a Happy Museum project on co-creation. Working with local people and organisations, the museum developed a new interactive

exhibit linking local history and geography with the theme of environmental sustainability. The group developed the concept of a 'Living Landscape' gallery, which was then built with the help of local artists and craftspeople. The leadership went on to review the museum's environmental impact and then committed to investing in low energy lighting.

[Read our case study on Godalming Museum here](#)

By shifting its focus from historic buildings and agriculture to promoting traditional crafts and sustainability skills, the **Chiltern Open Air Museum** showed leadership and "active stewardship". Reviving the concept of 'make do and mend' is essential if our society is to reduce the drain on natural resources.

6. Making an impact

Focusing on what museums do around wellbeing, resilience and sustainability changes their role. They can become more embedded in the fabric of society while also making more of their unique resources.

“The museum became a trusted advocate and influential agency to support its communities to be active in shaping public policies.”

Reading Museum used a community history project to pilot a new approach to working closely and engaging with communities. The project focused on the most deprived areas of the city. During the Hidden Histories project, 60 different participants worked with the community groups, museum staff, local historians and others to research past lives of these areas. Temporary ‘pop up’ exhibitions were set up in the neighbourhoods and colourful ‘pocket history’ pamphlets were created – more than 15,000 were distributed. The project was a great success and as a direct result of the project the museum was invited to contribute to ‘Reading 2050’, a multi-agency initiative that is part of the central government’s Foresight Future of Cities programme.

In a subsequent project called **Where’s Reading Heading?**, the museum became a trusted advocate and influential agency to support its communities to be active in shaping public policies. The project created promising new partnerships with IMUSE, RISC, Reading 2050 and local environmental groups, and by being a key partners in the local development plan, the museum has the potential to bring communal memory to the development of plans which advanced wellbeing within a sustainable environment – a role that could inspire other local authority museums.

[Read our case study on Reading Museum here and more about Where’s Reading Heading? here](#)

Being smart about resources means making every museum activity go further – into the future in this case. The museum’s role has evolved into being a community historian and conscience.



7. More about the Happy Museum's 'Story of Change' tool

The projects funded by the Happy Museum project used a 'Story of Change' tool to define their vision for the project and to plan the route to achieve that vision.

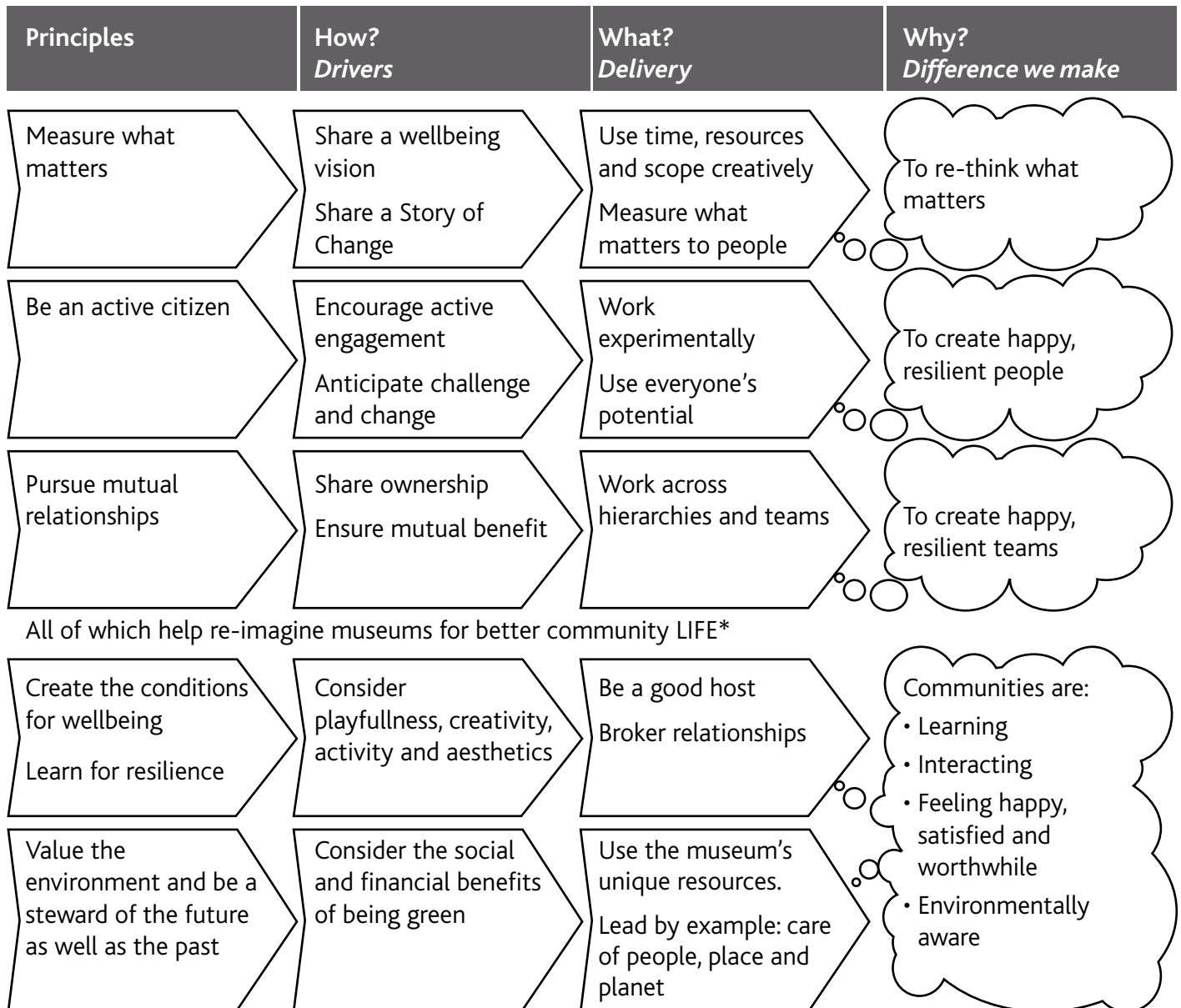
The purpose of this tool (which is similar to theory of change, or logic modelling) is to make sure we start by focusing on the difference we want to make rather than on the activities we may use to achieve those ends. Using a Story of Change challenges 'business as usual' thinking by starting with the overall purpose and working backwards. The process of 'measuring what matters' can then start at the planning stage – by

defining the success factors for a project, a strategy or a change of direction. The tool is also valuable for helping to communicate a vision to staff, volunteers and all stakeholders, as well as the thinking that underpins it.

[Read more about the Story of Change tool](#)



See below for our own Story of Change which shows success factors for Happy Museums. An [online version](#) contains links to further case studies and resources.



* The Happy Museum Project is conducting a national LIFE survey, where LIFE = Learning, Interactions with others, Feelings and emotions, and Environmental awareness. More: www.happymuseumproject.org