

# OPEN UP

museums for everyone

## An introduction to the Open Up guide and project

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**Co-created with**

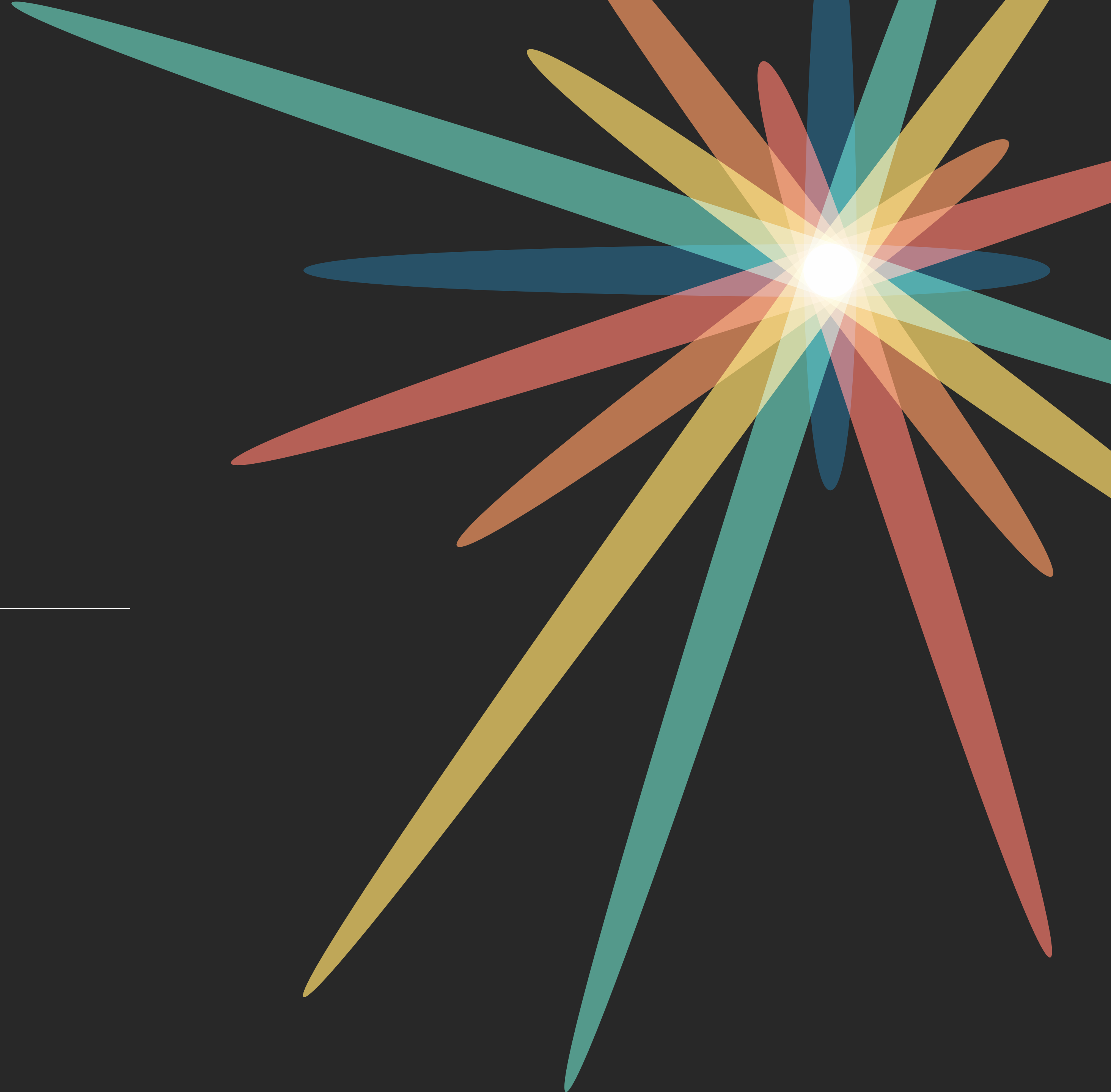
20 museums across all four countries of the UK

**Design by**

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AIM: Association of Independent Museums, MA: Museums Association, Arts Council England, the Museum Libraries and Archives Division of the Welsh Government, Museums Galleries Scotland, National Museums Northern Ireland and the Heritage Lottery Fund





# What do you hope the museum of the future will be like?

Who is it for? Whose stories does it share? And why? What is its purpose?

**‘Museums want to increase their visitor numbers and ensure they are relevant and attractive to the whole of society. Diversifying visitors achieves both increased footfall which supports their financial resilience, and long-term sustainability because they are at the heart of their communities as those communities change.’**

Tamalie Newbery  
Brooklands Museum

**‘...museums are still shaped by intellectual and cultural privilege. The culture needs to change and the first step is to name the problem: the gap between users and non-users of museums needs to be bridged.’**

Tony Butler  
Derby Museums  
[Read about their story of change alongside other museums stories](#)

People across the sector have been championing the need to develop more diverse visitors for many years. So, what do we need to do differently to get better results?

What needs to change to ensure that our diverse society is served by its museums?

‘Open Up: museums for everyone’ is a ground-breaking project designed to help museums increase the diversity of their visitors. It aims to support organisations to move beyond talk to

action, and to make real and lasting change in the museum sector.

Working with 12 pioneering museums we have captured their stories of change [[openupmuseums.com/casestudies](https://openupmuseums.com/casestudies)], including the factors of success that have led to these museums significantly diversifying their visitors. They have shared the questions they regularly ask of themselves and their potential visitors to continue to improve. We hope that these stories will inspire and inform change in many other museums.

**‘Open up: museums for everyone is a great resource that gives step by step practical ways to move beyond conversation and join in the movement of change.’**

**We start by recognising that the idea of heritage is fluid and history is made up of layers that are interconnected. What we think of as ‘quintessentially English’ alters how society is made up over time. As a museum, we need new narratives that reflect and debate such societal change.**

**Who holds the pen that writes the stories? Who holds the power to influence others? Who has the authority to shoulder blame and the authority to take risks to drive change?’**

Glenis Williams  
Black Country Living Museum  
[Read about their story of change alongside other museums stories](#)



Image courtesy of Black Country Living Museum



# Join hundreds of museum leaders across the UK in making change happen

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The Open Up guide shares a range of practical tools and actions that museums can take to improve visitor diversity.

[openupmuseum.com  
/open-up-museums-guide](https://openupmuseum.com/open-up-museums-guide)

We are well aware that a guide is just the start of this journey.

**‘How we become loved by, relevant to, and part of more people’s lives sits at the heart of this guide.**

**I encourage you to read this but it’s deeds not words that will create change. So... focus on action; listening, experimenting, learning, collaborating, becoming more diverse, better. Risk we must.’**

Esme Ward  
The Whitworth Art Gallery and Manchester Museum, University of Manchester

We want to encourage a diverse mix of people from across the sector to share their Stories of Change and keep the momentum going:

- Try out some of the tools in your organisation. Identify practical steps to get you started. What small step could you take today? What will you do this week? This month? This year?

- Tell us how we might best support you to make this change a reality. What’s blocking progress in your organisation? What might enable your museum to drive forward its Story of Change?

[openupmuseums.com  
/how-can-we-support-you](https://openupmuseums.com/how-can-we-support-you)

- Share your Stories of Change with the community of museums and museum leaders committed to a diverse and inclusive future. Add your thoughts and ideas of how we might best work together to make change happen.

[openupmuseums.com  
/share-your-stories-of-change](https://openupmuseums.com/share-your-stories-of-change)

- Sign up for information and further support as it becomes available.

[openupmuseums.com  
/stay-in-touch](https://openupmuseums.com/stay-in-touch)



Image courtesy of The Museum of Cambridge



# Some golden rules for success

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- Open Up is not project focused. It's a whole organisation approach. While you could use the tools to explore a short-term project, they are designed to help you review the approach you take as a whole organisation. This is important to avoid short-term, silo thinking – projects that build initial relationships with new visitors, but don't sustain them.
- Developing a diverse range of visitors is not something that can be achieved by just the learning team, or the marketing department. It requires top-down leadership from the Director / CEO and it also requires a bottom-up approach to include everyone in defining what diversity means for your museum, who it exists for, and what difference it seeks to make to their lives.
- Change is much more likely to be realised if everyone works collaboratively and agrees a shared, compelling vision for diversity. People across the museum have a clear view on how they contribute regardless of their position or their role. To be open and inclusive to visitors, organisations need first to be open and inclusive with staff.
- You don't need to have all the answers. And you don't need to have a huge team or big budget. There is no one 'right' place to start and no one right solution to success. The guide is designed to help you plan practical actions to take at whatever stage you're at within your organisations thinking about diversity. Move backwards and forwards through the guide.
- Treat it like a work-in-progress. Print (or copy) the Story of Change template (see next page) out onto a large sheet of paper. Use the model to map out ideas and hypotheses. Identify things that you might try and test, and talk to your potential visitors about, to take you closer to your vision of diversity.
- The Story of Change is designed to be a working template to support your team to identify actions to take next. You'll probably never consider it 'finished'. The story gradually builds and adapts over time as you learn more about the people you want to reach and how you might best create value for them.
- A good story has a strong beginning, middle and end. However, when exploring how to adapt and become more meaningful to people within an ever-changing society you need to think about developing the story with the public overtime, building and adapting your approach in light of getting to know current visitors more, and in light of building relationships with potential visitors, participants, and partners.
- Think through and agree your measures of success at each stage of the story – what needs to have happened for this story to come to life and by when?



Image courtesy of The Whitworth



# Designing your story of change

A Story of Change (often called a ‘theory of change’) describes and illustrates how and why a desired change is needed and how it will be achieved.

You start with your vision. Think about what success will look like for you. Why is diversity important? What does it mean in the context of your museum? What impact are you seeking and who for? This will vary for each organisation. Think about your whole organisation, not just one particular project.

The left-hand side of the Story of Change helps you map out what your organisation needs to **do** (the activities, the work, the insights you need to gather) to achieve your vision for diversity.

The right-hand side helps you map out what your organisation needs to **have** and **be** (the team, the way of working, the partnerships, the resources and budget) to achieve where you want to get to.

Working backwards, you gradually create the story of what might need to change in

the things you do, the way you work, and who is involved in that work, to achieve your vision for diversity. These ideas are then tried, tested and improved over time as you learn more about your current and potential visitors and what they value.

What do you need to put in (the ‘inputs’), and what relationships do you need, in order to achieve benefits both for your organisation and the people you want to engage? What is required to realise your vision for diversity?

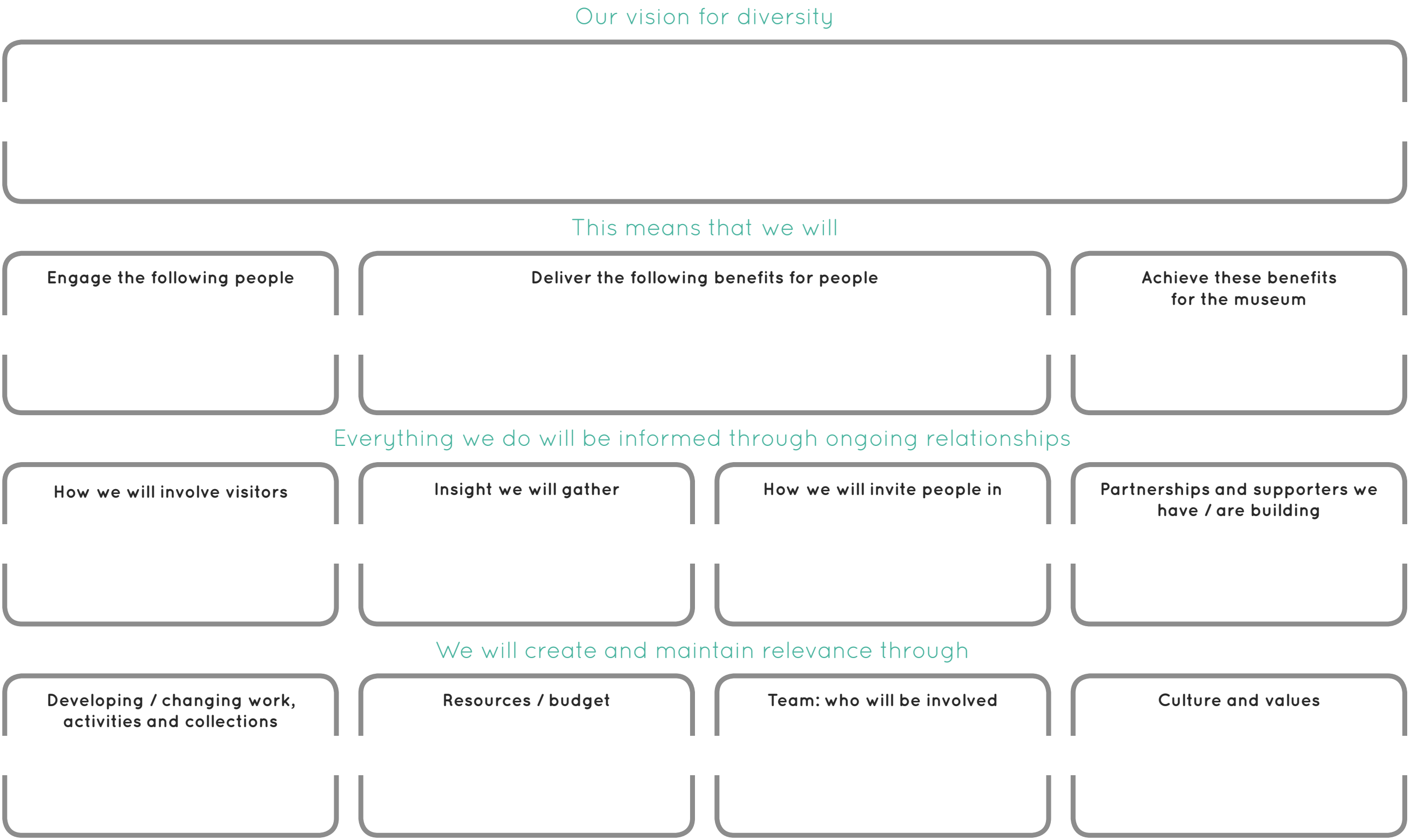
The guide accompanying this template has advice, case studies, practical exercises and tools to help you as you map out ideas at each stage.

THE IMPACT WE SEEK

OUR OUTCOMES

OUR RELATIONSHIPS

OUR INPUTS



# Before you start

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You will be creating a story of how your organisation will develop relationships with a more diverse range of people. You could create this by yourself, but it's much more effective when everyone works collaboratively to agree and commit to bringing to life a shared future direction.

- 1. Gather a mix of people** with a broad range of skills, experiences and viewpoints from across your organisation – the more diverse the team the better the conversation. Think about inviting volunteers, board members, etc. Who needs to be involved in making change happen?
- 2. Appoint a facilitator** from within the group or invite an external person to provide an objective voice and manage the process.
- 3. Find a space to meet** that gives you these things:
  - A light space with no distractions
  - Lots of blank wall space that you can fill with your ideas
  - Pens, sticky notes, blank paper
- 4. Brief everyone in advance** that this is an ideas space, everyone's opinions and views can be shared, and that you'll all learn together over time.
- 5. Book in several sessions** with the group to split the steps throughout the guide into bitesize stages.
- 6. Print or copy out the Stories of Change template** onto a large sheet of paper (the bigger the better) fill your wall with it ready to add notes, insights, and ideas as you progress. Use sticky notes to enable you to move things around as your insight develops.



# Five key steps

## 1. Define why you are exploring this

Identify what difference you want to make. Discuss this within your team and note your initial thoughts about the difference that you want to make in the 'Impact' box at the top of the Story of Change template.

### Consider who you want to engage

Add a note about who you want to engage in the 'Engage the following people' box.

Use the vision exercises within the guide to help you.

Allow a session of approx. one hour to explore this with the team.

## 2. Empathise and build understanding

Explore the world from the visitor perspective. Why might they want to visit the museum? What are they seeking to gain? How might it fit with the things they are interested in? How is it relevant to their lives?

Complete the Empathy Map in the guide.

Allow a session of approximately one hour for this.

Add your initial ideas to the 'Benefits' box on your Story of Change.

Note where you're making assumptions. Do you know the answers to the questions on the Empathy Map?

Add any notes about things you need to find out and who you need to ask to the 'Insight we're gathering' box on your Story of Change.

See the 'Who, how many, what, and why' exercise in the guide to help you plan how you might generate deeper insights. Allow a further session of approx. one hour to explore this.

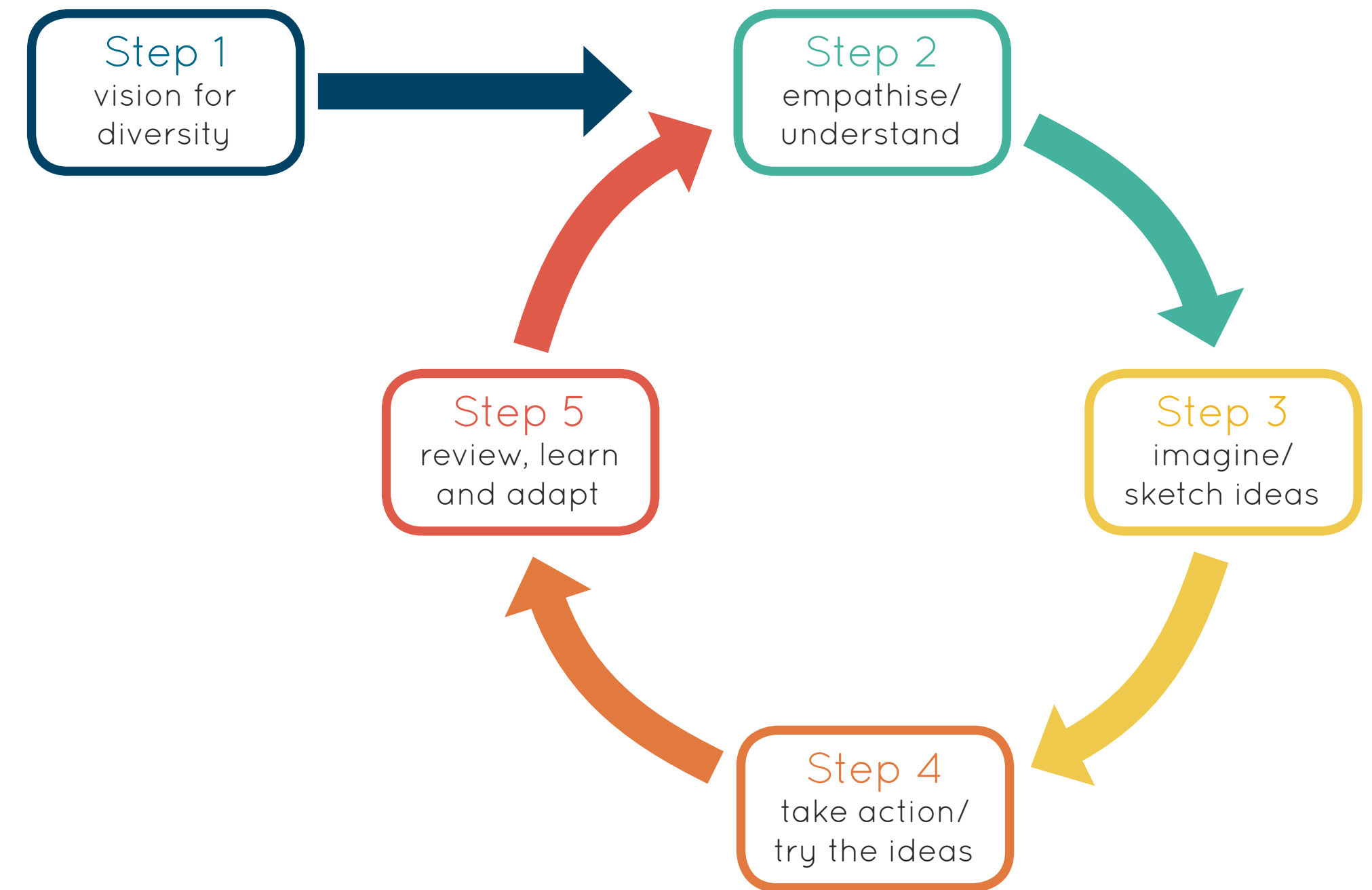
## 3. Imagine

Sketch out your ideas for the 'Developing work, activities and collections' part of the Story of Change model based on your insights and empathy exercises. Don't worry if you don't have all the answers right now, start with empathy, draw out hypotheses for the rest of the model, and build and adapt it over time as you build relationships, understanding and insights.

This might be done as a team planning day – allow approximately six hours plus breaks – perhaps go off site to inspire your thinking. Or split this into a couple of separate sessions.

**a.** From your insight about potential visitors make notes in the 'Deliver the following benefits for people' box of your Story of Change.

**b.** What might you change about what you do to generate the desired benefits and impacts? Add the ideas to your 'Developing work / activities / collections' box. See the Not for the Likes of You exercise in the guide to help you see things from a first-time attendee's point of view.



# Five key steps

**c.** Who might need to be involved – the team, the partners? How might you involve them? What relationship(s) do you need to establish with potential visitors? How will you invite people in? Add your ideas to the relationships boxes in your Story of Change. See the case studies throughout the guide to inspire your thinking.

**d.** What are the things you will need to have in place to make the ideas work? What budget, resources etc.? Add a note to the ‘resources and budgets’ box to ensure your plan is realistic.

**e.** Consider what might need to change within the organisation to enable you to effectively bring the ambition to life. See the Culture Map in guide. Add notes on things that are essential to maintain or things that you might need to adapt to the ‘Culture’ box in your Story of Change.

**Read your story (so far) aloud.**

Does it make sense?

How does this fit with the difference you initially wanted to make in your vision exercise?

Iterate between ideas in your template boxes – what impact do you want to have for people? What benefits or outcomes are they seeking? What work, activities, collections etc. might lead to these outcomes?

Do your proposed activities and inputs enable you to build the right relationships?

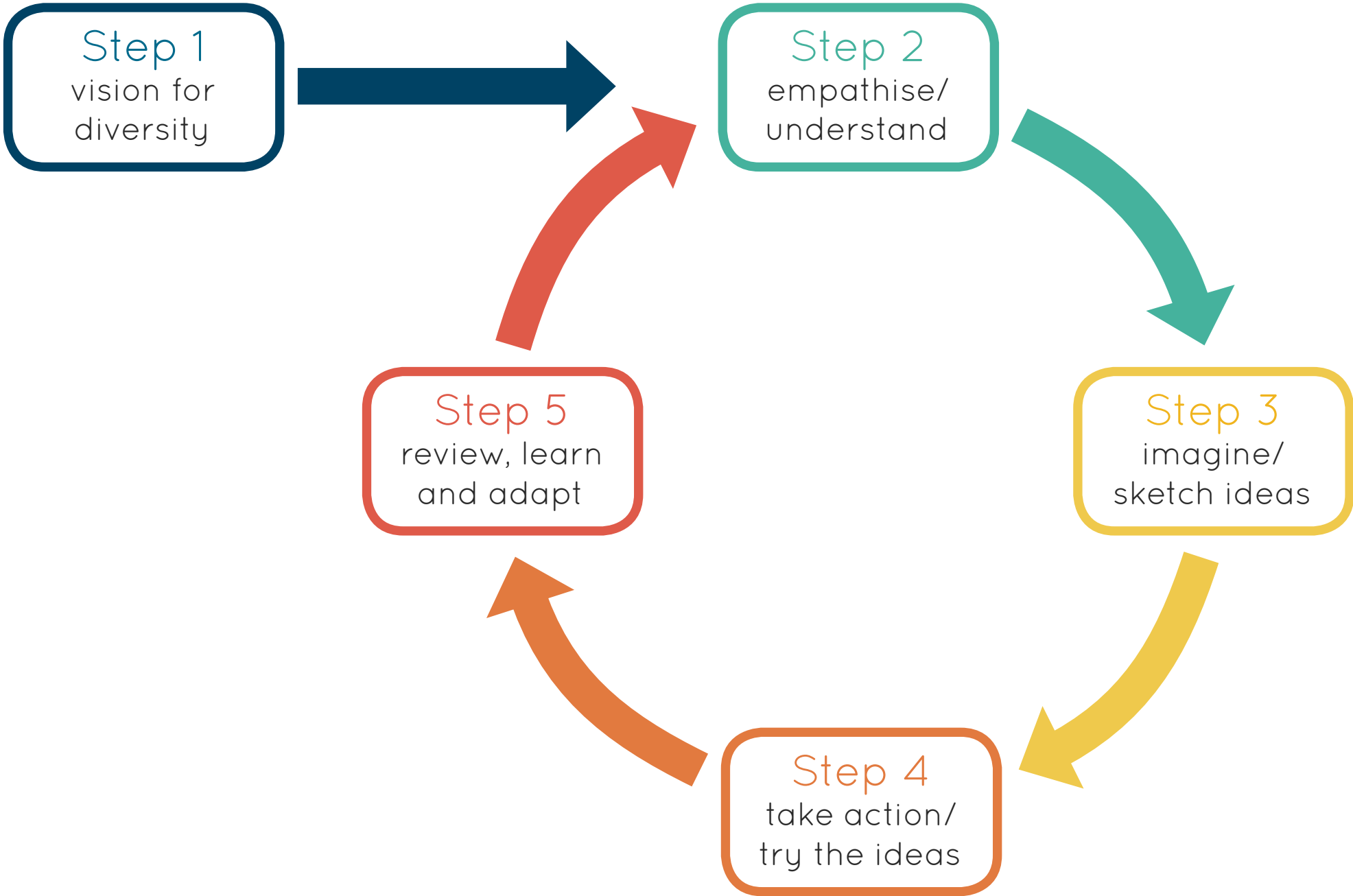
Is it feasible? Do you have the resources, budget, partners etc. needed to make this work? Add a note in the ‘resources / budget’ box about what might be needed. Can you access these resources or do you need to make changes to your story? Keep iterating until you have a realistic, feasible story.

**4. Take action / try the ideas**

Agree the changes you’re going to make and consider what the first step might be.

**5. Review the results so far**

Seek additional insights as you get to know your potential visitors further. Review the results of things you try and note any changes you might want to make in light of this. **Adapt** the story as you **learn** more. Make further changes to your Story of Change and agree next steps.





# Sharing Stories of Change

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We are building a bank of Stories of Change. This includes stories from museums that have made change already and have seen great results, from those who have learnt from insights generated, as well as from those sharing ideas about what they plan to put into place. We will be sharing these stories widely to inspire change across the sector and to build a platform for exchange where people can offer support and advice in line with their experience and expertise.

- **Read and listen to stories so far**  
[openupmuseums.com/casestudies](https://openupmuseums.com/casestudies)
- **Add your own**  
[openupmuseums.com/share-your-stories-of-change](https://openupmuseums.com/share-your-stories-of-change)
- **Offer your advice or expertise**  
[openupmuseums.com/offer-your-advice-or-expertise](https://openupmuseums.com/offer-your-advice-or-expertise)



Image courtesy of National Museums Liverpool © Robin Clewley



# Supporting you to make a difference

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This is just the start. To achieve change we know that museums will need further support and facilitation to overcome barriers and enable new ways of working. The project steering group ([see page 12](#)) are now reviewing recommendations for next steps and will be planning a programme of support shortly.

Share your thoughts on what might have the biggest impact for you.

[openupmuseums.com/how-can-we-support-you](https://openupmuseums.com/how-can-we-support-you)

Sign up to keep up to date on the project and be among the first to hear when the next stage of this programme of support is announced.

[openupmuseums.com/stay-in-touch](https://openupmuseums.com/stay-in-touch)



Image courtesy of National Museums Northern Ireland



# About the project

The guide and Story of Change process has been designed by a trio of consultants, Julie Aldridge, Mel Larsen and Pam Jarvis in collaboration with 20 museums:

- Amgueddfa Cymru National Museum Wales (pioneer)
- Beamish Museum (pioneer)
- Black Country Living Museum (pioneer)
- Colchester + Ipswich Museums (pioneer)
- Cardiff Story Museum (pioneer)
- Derby Museums (pioneer)
- Doncaster Heritage Services (explorer)
- Egypt Centre, Swansea (explorer)
- Glasgow Women's Library (pioneer)
- Museum of Cambridge (pioneer)
- Museum of Croydon (explorer)
- National Justice Museum (explorer)
- National Museums Liverpool (pioneer)
- National Museums Northern Ireland (pioneer)
- National Museum of the Royal Navy, Northern Ireland (explorer)
- Paisley Museum, Renfrewshire (explorer)
- People's History Museum (explorer)
- V&A (pioneer)
- Wellcome Collection
- Whitworth Art Gallery

national  
museum  
wales  
amgueddfa  
cymru



BLACK COUNTRY  
LIVING  
MUSEUM

Colchester + Ipswich  
Museums



Museum of  
Cambridge



THE  
NATIONAL  
MUSEUM



wellcome  
collection

the Whitworth



# Partners

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The project steering group is led by the Association of Independent Museums (AIM) together with the Museums Association, four other organisations who are funding the project – Arts Council England, the Museums Archives and Libraries Division of the Welsh Government, Museums Galleries Scotland and National Museums Northern Ireland – and with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund





[openupmuseums.com](http://openupmuseums.com)

This guide is available in large print,  
electronic format and on the Open  
Up website.



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[aim-museums.co.uk](http://aim-museums.co.uk)

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