

Museums and Heritage Highland Trustees' Impact Report 2025

Chair's Message

This year has been one of reflection and renewal for Museums and Heritage Highland (MHH). Amidst a challenging funding landscape and ongoing recovery across the sector, our network has continued to demonstrate resilience, creativity and compassion. The 'Future-Proofing the Highland Museum Workforce' project has been a shining example of what collaboration can achieve - empowering museums to reimagine volunteering, embed wellbeing and build inclusive practice. We are proud of the collective progress our community has made and look forward to deepening this work in the year ahead. On behalf of the trustees, I want to thank our members, funders and partners for their commitment to the Highland heritage community. Together, we continue to ensure that museums remain vibrant, relevant and rooted in the people and stories of the Highlands. – Chair, Museums and Heritage Highland Board

Introduction

Over the past year, Museums and Heritage Highland (MHH) has continued to champion collaboration, resilience and inclusion across the Highland heritage sector. Building on the momentum of previous years, 2025 has been a period of learning, experimentation and deepened connection with our members and partners. Our major funded initiative, 'Future-Proofing the Highland Museum Workforce', has been a defining project - helping us explore innovative ways to engage volunteers, improve wellbeing, and ensure that Highland museums remain sustainable, inclusive and future-ready.

Our Year in Review

Highlights from 2025 include:

- Supported over 30 member organisations through training, peer exchange and advocacy.
- Delivered four major training workshops and 10 Heritage cafes
- Produced three new toolkits to support youth volunteering, remote volunteering and wellbeing.
- Delivered the third 'Breathing Space' residential weekend, supporting freelance heritage professionals.
- Strengthened partnerships with national organisations including Museums Galleries Scotland, Make Your Mark, The Space and the Museums Association.

Focus Project: Future-Proofing the Highland Museum Workforce

This flagship project, delivered between October 2024 and June 2025, aimed to build a more skilled, confident and diverse museum workforce. Working with three test-bed museums - Dingwall Museum,

Brora Heritage Centre and the Arctic Convoy Museum - we explored innovative approaches to volunteering and wellbeing in rural contexts.

Key Outputs

- Four training workshops on inclusive volunteering, accessibility, anti-oppression and live streaming.
- Three toolkits co-created with partner museums, now freely available on our website.
- A two-day workforce summit focusing on inclusion, representation, and sustainability (delivered in May 2025 so not included in the 2024-25 financial year)
- A residential 'Breathing Space' weekend for freelancers to share practice and strengthen wellbeing.

Highlights

- Youth Volunteering at Dingwall Museum: The introduction of young volunteers transformed the museum's energy and approach, fostering intergenerational collaboration.
- Remote Volunteering at the Arctic Convoy Museum: Over 40 volunteers joined from across the UK and beyond, expanding the museum's reach and capacity.
- Wellbeing at Brora Heritage Centre: Although full implementation was delayed by redevelopment work, the pilot laid the foundation for future wellbeing-focused initiatives.

Impact

The project achieved significant outcomes for both MHH and the wider network, including:

- A more skilled and confident workforce: staff and volunteers across the test museums reported greater confidence and capability in inclusive volunteering and digital engagement.
- Greater diversity and inclusion: remote volunteering opened doors to participants with disabilities, caring responsibilities, or geographical barriers.
- Enhanced wellbeing and organisational learning: initiatives such as Breathing Space reinforced the importance of wellbeing in governance and culture.
- Stronger networks: the summit and heritage cafés fostered peer support, new collaborations and continued sector dialogue.

Participant feedback was overwhelmingly positive: "Being part of the project has been like a breath of fresh air... The mix of experienced older volunteers working with younger energy is proving to be successful." – Anne, Dingwall Museum

"It made me feel part of such a great community with a common goal... I felt closer to my grandfather who served on the convoys." – Rowan, Arctic Convoy Museum Volunteer (Tasmania)

Focus Project: Developing Your Travel Trade Offer (2024)

In partnership with VisitScotland, Museums and Heritage Highland delivered the ‘Developing Your Travel Trade Offer’ programme to help Highland museums create high-quality, bookable visitor experiences and strengthen their connections with the travel trade.

Aims

Support museums to develop and market authentic, high-value visitor experiences
Build confidence and readiness for engaging with travel trade partners

What We Did

Delivered two webinars with VisitScotland, engaging 12 museums
Provided one-to-one mentoring for all participants, including six joint sessions with VisitScotland
Produced a Travel Trade Toolkit – a practical step-by-step guide to building and promoting bookable products
Supported six museums to develop new experiences and pitch at VisitScotland Connect 2025 in Aberdeen

Results So Far

Increased awareness of travel trade processes and readiness across the network
Six new bookable, authentic cultural experiences developed
25+ trade partners engaged at Connect 2025, generating new opportunities for collaboration
Toolkit and tailored action plans shared with 10 Highland museums

Next Steps

We will continue to share learning across the network, supporting more museums to become “travel trade ready” in 2025 and beyond, ensuring that Highland heritage experiences remain authentic, sustainable, and visitor-focused.

Looking Ahead

We’re committed to building on this momentum through future projects defined by our network – supporting wellbeing, nurturing best practice and building connections. Our work will continue to strengthen organisational approaches to wellbeing and inclusion, foster collaborative leadership, build confidence in sustainable development and keep wellbeing at the heart of our support for the sector. We’ll also continue to develop our anti-oppression and accessibility work, ensuring that Highland museums are welcoming, inclusive spaces for all.

Environmental Responsibility

- Delivering most training and meetings online to minimise travel.
- Using recycled and sustainable materials where print is essential.
- Encouraging use of public or active transport for in-person events.

- Supporting local suppliers and sustainable catering practices.
- Sharing best practice from across the sector to encourage more sustainable activity

Thank You

This year's achievements were only possible thanks to the commitment of our member museums, volunteers, funders and partners. Special thanks go to our project funders, Museums Galleries Scotland, High Life Highland and our collaborators including Make Your Mark, The Space, the Museums Association and National Museums Scotland. Together, we continue to strengthen and celebrate the rich heritage of the Highlands.

Governance and Future Priorities

The MHH Board of Trustees has continued to provide strategic oversight, ensuring the organisation remains transparent, accountable and responsive to the needs of its members. Trustees have met quarterly, supported by regular sub-group discussions on projects, advocacy and funding development. This year also saw the strengthening of our governance framework, with renewed focus on diversity, wellbeing and succession planning within the Board itself.

Key highlights include:

- Review and refresh of MHH's strategic priorities for 2025–28, aligning with member needs and national sector strategy.
- Continued progress on equality, diversity and inclusion, with consultants undertaking Museum Activist training.
- Ongoing commitment to digital transparency and open sharing of resources via our online Members' Hub.
- Strengthened partnerships with national and regional heritage bodies to amplify the Highland museum voice.

Looking ahead, our priorities for 2026 include expanding wellbeing and inclusion projects, developing a sustainable funding model for Breathing Space and supporting museums to embed digital and environmental sustainability in their operations. We remain committed to listening to our network, responding to their challenges and advocating for a strong, resilient and connected Highland heritage sector.

