
ADVICE SHEET

Checklist for new museum building projects: Technical considerations



Your responsibilities

The responsibility for the success of a museum building project falls to you, the museum organisation. It is vital that staff and trustees have researched what is required, in order to be able to inform and advise others working on the project, such as architects, engineers and consultants. It is a truism to say that “You get what you ask for”, so make sure that you are asking for what you want! **Always** brief **any** contractor: don’t expect them to do it for themselves.

The Project Manager

It is often a good idea to appoint one person as Project Manager. The role of the Project Manager is to have overall responsibility for the project on behalf of the museum. The Project Manager may be one of the staff or Trustees, but they need not be. It is more important that the Project Manager has the right skills than that they are closely involved personally. These include:

- Experience in design or contract work and in planning
- Experience in financial management
- Problem-solving abilities
- Enthusiasm, commitment
- Management skills: ability to make decisions and give clear instructions
- Objectivity and listening skills
- An ability to gather data, co-ordinate scattered information and record it effectively

(Scottish Arts Council publication *Designing Galleries: the complete guide to designing spaces and services for temporary exhibitions*, Mike Sixsmith, ISBN 0 7287 0780 2)

The Trustees may possess all or some of these skills. By all means work together, combining talents, but try to have one person as a pivotal point, as this means that information is not lost. It is easier for consultants to have one contact rather than many.

Getting advice

Take any expert or professional advice offered, but make sure that advice is not coming only from the contractors. There are independent experts out there: use them. Free sources of

advice that you should make use of include the Museums Galleries Scotland and your Curatorial Adviser or Heritage Officer. It is also a very good idea to make contact with others who have worked on a similar project. Museums Galleries Scotland can advise you on other members who have undertaken similar projects.

Working out costs

Make sure that you have calculated all the costs for the project. Remember to include them in any bid, particularly if you are applying for public money, for example through the Heritage Lottery Fund. This might include your own and your consultants' time, the resources required for an environmental audit or survey or the costs of training staff to undertake new tasks, such as the running of an environmental monitoring programme. It should also include the equipment and services that you will need, such as environmental monitoring and control equipment, racking and shelving for stores, storage boxes and transport crates, new lighting and cases. Don't forget that costs will rise as the project progresses, due to inflation, so make sure that someone on the project team has experience of this area of work.

Things that need to be checked for all museum building projects are detailed below.

A. The Building

Check	What you need
Is there an architect's drawing of the building and a written description?	Make sure that the architect provides a written and drawn plan for the building.
Have materials and methods of construction been included in any drawn or written plans? Do they contribute to the energy efficiency of the building?	Ask the architect to provide details. Discuss with them the reasons for their choices and make sure that you are happy that they meet your needs. If necessary consult with a conservator who has experience in working on new buildings. Independent conservators (and advice on how to commission one) can be found on the Conservation Register, an online directory, at: www.conservationregister.com
Are there details of the environmental control equipment to be used? Are there technical specifications and details of energy consumption?	This might include heaters, humidifiers, dehumidifiers or even air conditioning. Beware of installing unnecessary environmental control equipment as this will reduce energy efficiency and increase costs. Check with a conservator that what is proposed seems reasonable and effective.
Has evidence been provided on how the environmental conditions required will be met?	Brief the contractor with your needs. Often this will include specifications about the environment, such as ranges of acceptable temperature and relative humidity. Ask for a written report on how the environment inside the building will be achieved. Ask for it to include the

	expected ranges of temperature and relative humidity under normal operating conditions.
Have security issues been addressed?	Make sure that you meet minimum standards for security, including fire exits, security shutters, and so on. Seek advice from Museums Galleries Scotland if you are unsure who to contact to discuss security needs. If you intend to borrow objects from other museums you may need to meet Government Indemnity standards for security in a part of the museum. Information on this scheme and the standards involved is available from MLA.

B. The needs of the collection

Check	What you need
<p>Have you specified relative humidity and temperature levels?</p> <p>On what have the specifications been based?</p>	Use published standards, such as those specified by MGC/Resource (detailed in Museums Galleries Scotland factsheet Temperature and Relative Humidity). Do not specify tighter controls than you need. This will make the scheme more costly, less energy-efficient and will have no benefits for the collections. If you intend to borrow objects from other museums you may need to meet Government Indemnity standards for environment in a part of the museum. Information on this scheme and the standards involved is available from MLA.
<p>Have you specified light and ultraviolet radiation levels?</p> <p>If the design proposes to use daylight, how will it be controlled?</p>	Again, use published standards, such as those specified by MGC/Resource (detailed in Museums Galleries Scotland factsheet Conservation and Lighting). Advice on controlling, reducing and maintaining low light levels can be sought from conservators.
How will you manage the environment after the work is completed?	You will need to show that you intend to have an environmental monitoring programme in all areas where collections are displayed or stored. Costs of equipment should be built in to any funding bid if it is not already available. You will need to demonstrate how you intend to gather and use the environmental monitoring data.

C. Management and costs

Check	What you need
Is there a detailed breakdown of equipment costs?	This will need to be noted in some detail, in other words, the actual costs from supplied estimates.
What will the running costs be? Have maintenance costs been calculated?	An engineer should be able to provide you with the likely running costs of the equipment to be installed. The annual maintenance costs should also be investigated. Often it makes sense to draw up a maintenance plan with a supplier; the costs may seem high, but it is better to be realistic about them from the outset
Have the costs of staffing and staff training been calculated?	“Costs” can include time, and these should be properly calculated from the start. Research time, learning about new techniques, investing in proper training, in handling of objects or environmental monitoring, all need to be included. Even the time it takes to go and visit other museums and learn from others should be included.

This is only a start and there may be other things to consider. Please keep in touch with Museums Galleries Scotland throughout the planning of the museum project and don't hesitate to ask for help and advice. Even if we don't know, we may be able to find someone who does.

Further information and advice

This is one of a series of advice sheets produced by Museums Galleries Scotland. For more details and signposting to further sources of advice, see our website at: www.museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk.

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