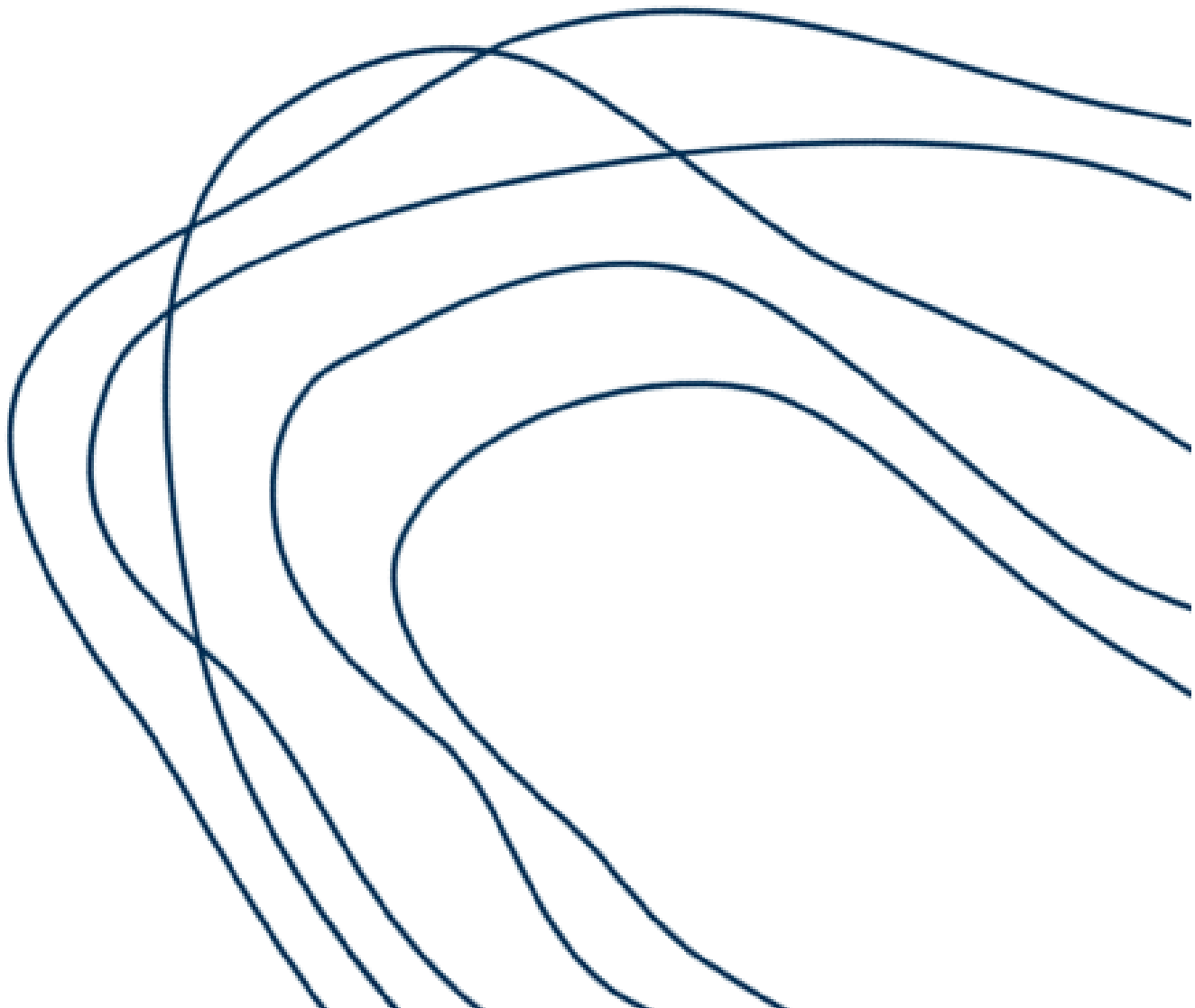




VIHP EVALUATION REPORT

We are pleased to provide an evaluation report on the activities undertaken as part of the Visual Impairment Heritage Partnership IAA Award 2024.



Introduction

This evaluation report presents the results of the activities undertaken as part of the Visual Impairment Heritage Partnership (VIHP) project, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) through one of MOLA's Impact Accelerator Account (IAA) Partnership Grants.

Our VIHP partner, Eyes4Positivity, represents people who have a visual impairment (VIPs) and assists in researching accessibility within the cultural sector. With a large network of members of varying backgrounds and accessibility needs, they provide training and educational guidance in working with VIPs.

The research of the UKRI AHRC funded *Unpath'd Waters* project (UNPATH) endeavoured to reach visually impaired people who are currently underrepresented in heritage sector audience models (Perry et al. 2024; see also VocalEyes 2022). The VIHP built on the UNPATH research into co-design methodologies and expanded on this, working with *severely visually impaired* (formally referred to as 'blind') participants, to develop accessible methods for MOLA's engagement outputs through collaboration with VIPs.

The VIHP project had three key aims:

1. To explore and document barriers and opportunities for VIPs in MOLA's current engagement methods and outputs.
2. To encourage greater dialogue with VIP audiences via Eyes4Positivity, laying the foundations for further collaborative work to the benefit of MOLA, Eyes4Positivity and VIP audiences.
3. Through collaboration with VIPs and Eyes4Positivity, to provide and promote needed guidance on VIP inclusivity strategies.

No exact output (other than a publicly available guidance document on VIP-inclusive strategies) was anticipated but the VIHP team rather sought to learn further ways to embed VIP friendly practices into their upcoming and future engagement projects.

The below table lists the activities undertaken.

Activity / Output	Venue	Date
Sight loss awareness training	MOLA London office	24 th April 2024
Workshop 1	Shoreditch Town Hall	28 th May 2024
Workshop 2	Shoreditch Town Hall	11 th June 2024
Workshop 3	MOLA London office	16 th July 2024
Workshop 4	MOLA London office	30 th July 2024
Guidance document	N/A	

Project Activities

Sight loss awareness training

Although this project has been delivered in collaboration with people who have a visual impairment, there is a large spectrum of sight loss, with differing presentations and accessibility considerations. As such the team undertook VIP accessibility training prior to the co-design workshops. This supported staff in learning ways to embed VIP friendly practices into this, and future projects.



MOLA staff experiencing different sight impairments as part of the training with Eyes4Positivity

Feedback quotes from MOLA staff show the impact after Sight Loss Awareness training:

"I feel that I have a greater understanding of the daily challenges faced by those with different types of impairments and how this can impact choices (of what a VIP decides to do with their lives!)"

"I now feel deeper understanding and therefore more confidence to speak up and support VIPs."

“It’s essential that people who have no experience of sight loss are educated in the everyday realities for people with sight loss, in order to create a more inclusive society.”

“I think it is invaluable to have someone with site loss leading the training, it gave me a unique insight into the challenges people with sight loss face and what can be done to overcome these challenges. Overall, it felt incredibly positive.”

Pre-design consultation

The VIHP team took on the logistical learnings from UNPATH and incorporated VIP research findings in relation to heritage engagement.

Ahead of the workshops with VIPs, a pre-design consultation with Eyes4positivity was held to determine the best practice approaches for the workshop design and the recruitment of the consulting VIPs.

It was important there was a representative range of participating VIPs, including both sight-impaired and severely sight impaired participants. Additionally, the number of participants for the workshops was limited to ensure individuals could meaningfully contribute.

Logistical considerations for the co-design workshops included:

- assessing the venues to ensure suitability regarding:
 - how to accommodate different needs, VIPs need time to get acquainted with any new spaces.
 - comfort (e.g. access to welfare and amenities, seating, and breaks), creating a safe space for VIPs to share their experiences.
- booking of transport for all VIPs, a logistical challenge that required time and good communication with an accessible and reputable taxi company.
- refreshments: dietary requirements and hygiene were also considered
- remuneration for consultants, considered with VIPs needs in mind. Remuneration as a shopping voucher was provided following each workshop to the participants.

It was also agreed that the VIHP team would chair the sessions and agendas would be approved and circulated to the VIPs prior to delivery of each workshop. Additionally, the VIHP team would be responsible for documenting the workshops by taking notes, and sessions were recorded using a Dictaphone, of which the VIPs were notified and consented to.

Co-design workshops

The methodology consisted of four workshops, which were initially structured according to different themes, before further development in consultation with Eyes4Positivity.

Workshop 1:

This workshop started with an introduction to the project, an icebreaker activity, and setting of ground rules to support the co-design relationship. The collective establishment of ground rules at the beginning of the session helped facilitate the smooth running of the workshops. They covered the way discussions were conducted (by circulating around the group and regularly changing the starting point and direction), and behavioural expectations. These were circulated after the workshop and agreed upon collectively. They were also reviewed and reiterated at the beginning of subsequent workshops to ensure they remained relevant and that everyone understood and accepted them.

The VIPs were asked about their perceptions and experiences of engaging with heritage. Discussions around exhibitions and museums were held, partly as this was the most common aspect of heritage engagement the VIPs had undertaken. VIPs were asked to identify barriers they had experienced and their initial thoughts on how these might be overcome. Positive adaptations and accessible evaluation methods were also discussed.

The following workshops were then planned in consideration of themes the VIPs discussed in workshop 1.



Participants in discussions at Workshop 1

Workshop 2:

In this workshop the UNPATH research was introduced and conversations delved deeper into how to improve accessibility for VIPs. The idea that ‘audio is ideal’ was discussed and the group revisited inclusive evaluation methods.

Workshop 3:

For the first part of the session the VIPs were divided into two groups and after being provided with a fictional brief, they were asked to design a VIP accessible exhibition. Designs covered accessibility requirements and inclusivity strategies, as well as desired content.

In the afternoon a selection of MOLA engagement outputs, including the “*Dig box*” activity, the A428 Pop-up exhibition, soundscapes from CITiZAN’s outreach project “*Echoes*” (Arts Council), and the podwalk produced for *Brentford Waterside* were reviewed to assess inclusivity. This process was an excellent tool for engaging the VIPs beyond the theoretical.



VIP participants assessing MOLAs “Dig box” activity

Workshop 4:

The final workshop undertook a review of some of the currently available assistive technologies and tactile resources used within museum exhibitions, and the importance of layers of information.

Following this the VIPs were asked to undertake a ‘tabula rasa’ exhibition design: VIPs were given a short brief to work in groups to design their own fictional exhibition or museum. This was a successful activity for codesign and for gathering insight, although facilitation was required to ensure that everyone could have their say.

Finally, a discussion on the format of the guideline document and evaluation of the workshops was completed.

VIHP Inclusivity Guidance

Whilst there are existing resources in the cultural sector that recommend accessibility practices for VIPs, the VIHP is unique in that it has co-designed guidelines to inclusivity with VIP audience members through consultation and the co-design workshops.

The guidance represents a useful resource for any organisation interested in improving their practices. While the information explored in the document has an emphasis on exhibitions, many of the findings can be applied in other projects and engagement settings.

The document should be seen as a collection of ideas and strategies to be drawn from, rather than a comprehensive model that can be applied holistically, as VIPs may come from any social and cultural background, may have differing or even contrasting preferences in engagement and accessibility methods, as well as learning styles and interests. In addition, generational differences can vary attitudes, behaviours and technology use. Many VIPs also have multiple disabilities, requiring additional accessibility considerations.

The guidance document will be available from both MOLA's and Eyes4Positivity's websites.

Evaluation and reflections

Meeting the project aims

We addressed the project aims in the following ways:

1. During this project MOLA and Eyes4Positivity delivered four workshops that explored and documented the barriers faced by the VIPs with current museum practices. We also reviewed a variety of current MOLA engagement outputs and identified opportunities for greater VIP inclusivity.
2. Throughout this project, MOLA has enhanced its existing working relationship with Eyes4Positivity and developed new connections with VIP audiences, laying the groundwork for future collaborative work in both our research and commercial projects.
3. The experiences and insights shared by the VIPs in the workshops informed the development of the inclusive guidance document, which is available on both MOLA's and Eyes4Positivity's websites.

Lessons learned

Preparation and administration

There were several learnings around the administration and logistical organising of the workshops, which need to balance the level of support needed by the VIPs and the time needed to accommodate that. Clear definitions of what is reasonable need to be identified and clearly communicated to participants. While it is the aim that we can support everybody in the way that they need, it is also important to set limits of what can be achieved with the time and resources that are available.

Key administration points:

- Provide clear and concise information and instructions in advance. Include contact details should there be further questions or clarifications needed.
- Being mindful about taking photographs of VIPs (who may not be able to see the images). Providing options in consent forms as to how and where they can be used is a must, and ongoing consent with regards to the use of images is highly recommended.
- The remunerations (in our case in shopping vouchers) must be considered with VIPs needs in mind. Do they require digital or physical vouchers? Be sure to check and make time to work through this administrative task.

Running the workshops

One key ground rule that must be considered is that everyone respects the different levels of visual impairment experienced by the individual participants, and that each individual is open about their level of sight loss. This minimises the risk of assumptions being made.

Managing the room and facilitation techniques are very useful skills to draw upon, for the following reasons:

VIPs, having been asked to be open about their experiences visiting museums and exhibitions, needed space to declare mental exhaustion, frustrations and risks. Skillful facilitation provided space to vent, and by asking VIPs to offer what they consider solutions enabled the VIHP team to avoid negative stagnation.

Balancing a thorough exploration of themes against the structure of the workshop agenda was constantly discussed by the team. Keeping on point and enabling everyone in the room to 'have their say' required active chairing.

Evaluation methodology

While we did discuss accessible evaluation methodology and implement some of the suggestions from the VIP participants, more research and trials are needed in this area. The request for the ability to provide feedback anonymously is especially challenging if VIPs are also not able to access online surveys.

Final thoughts

The VIP participant contributions were, and continue to be, invaluable. VIPs have lived experience and are best placed to identify barriers and accessibility requirements. It is vital that we continue to work with these audience members to enhance our own activities and resources, and we look forward to working with them in our forthcoming and future projects.

References

Perry, S., Foxton, K., Gargett, K., & Northall, L. (2024). 'Centring Audiences: What Is the Value of Audience Mapping for Influencing Public Engagement with Cultural Heritage?' *The Historic Environment: Policy & Practice*, 15(2), 248–272.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/17567505.2024.2341361>

VocalEyes (2022) [Heritage Access 2022](#), VocalEyes.