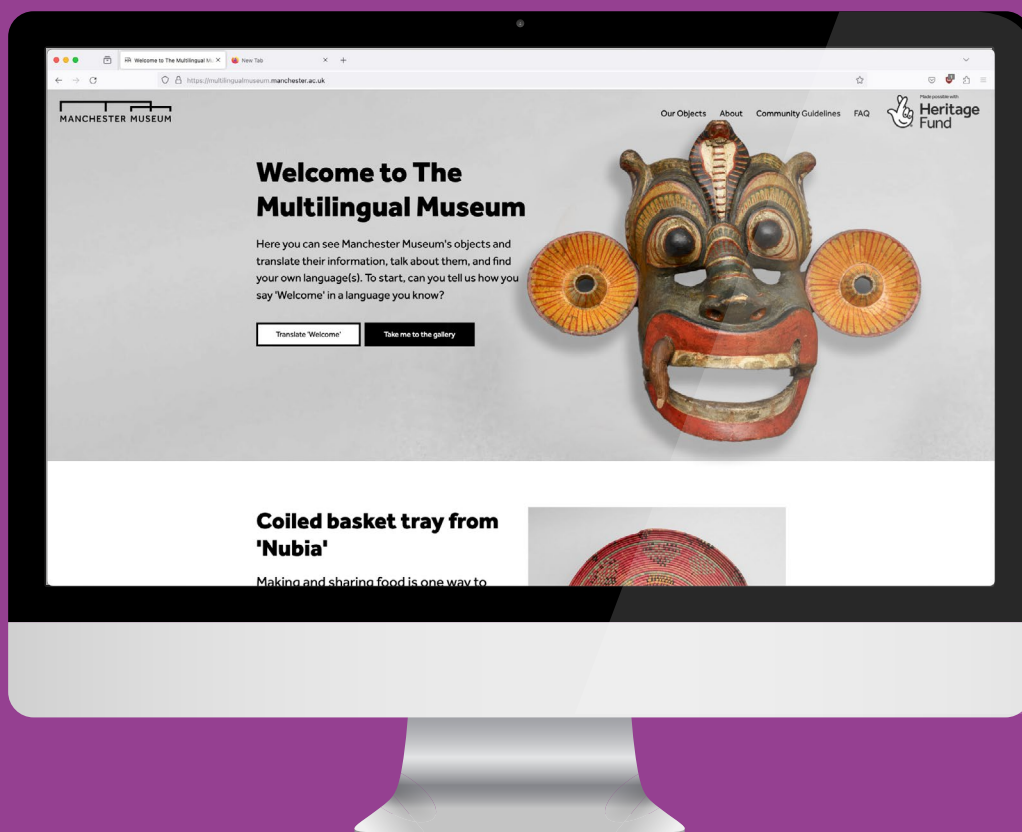


Digitising Multilingual Heritage

Report, 2022-2023



Proud to be part of

MANCHESTER
1824

The University of Manchester

Foreword

On behalf of Manchester Museum, I would like to thank National Lottery Heritage Fund for their support to deliver our Digitising Multilingual Heritage project. We were delighted to have the opportunity to be one of the 17 trailblazing Digital Volunteer awards and be part of the digital skills for heritage initiative.

Volunteers are the lifeblood of the museum, they bring energy, knowledge and passion to the organisation. With their support, skills and enthusiasm, we can create deeper connections with objects and each other, and open up our collections to more people in Manchester and beyond.

This project enabled us to pioneer a new approach to remote volunteering, engaging volunteers from Manchester's diverse communities and beyond to contribute digital content to a multilingual, interactive online platform. We've grown our digital volunteering community and connected new people to collections as well as showcasing the city's linguistic diversity, fostering pride in diverse linguistic heritage.

Through its unique participatory approach to translation, we are proud to have created a shared sense of belonging and model for multilingual engagement that we hope will be adapted and developed by other organisations.

Esme Ward,
Director, Manchester Museum,
The University of Manchester

Contents

The project	3
Background	4
Volunteer Engagement	5
Findings	13
Conclusion & Next Steps	22

The project

In 2021, Manchester Museum received funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) to launch 'Digitising Multilingual Heritage' a digital volunteering project centered around The Multilingual Museum, an online platform where people can share their languages and heritage and connect to the museum's collections.

Made possible through the NLHF's Digital Skills for Heritage initiative, which aimed to raise digital skills and confidence across the whole UK heritage sector. Manchester Museum was one of seventeen projects to be awarded funding to create digital volunteering opportunities, support volunteers to develop and contribute their digital skills.

It was hoped that by removing barriers such as place, mobility, time and commitment heritage organisations would gain the perspectives and skills of 'at distance volunteers' including many who may not have engaged before.

This report outlines the journey of the project, identifies best practice around the engagement of digital volunteers and sets out organisational learning and next steps. It shares testimonials from volunteers and presents the findings of research against our original aims.

PROJECT AIMS

The key aims of the project were as follows:

- People will have developed skills
- People will have learned about heritage, leading to a change in ideas and actions
- People will have greater wellbeing
- The funded organisation will be more resilient
- We will have created a digital platform for future engagement and volunteering.
- A toolkit will have been created to allow other organisations to replicate and develop this platform

"I thank you so much about this project, and I hope that you do more projects like that to care about the diversity of Manchester... I hope this provides a safe place for all different kinds of people to come together and meld with each other in the same community, the same society."

Mohamed, Egyptian Arabic speaker and Multilingual Museum volunteer.

Background

The Multilingual Museum builds on a previous collaboration between Manchester Museum and Multilingual Manchester, a research unit based at the University of Manchester's Linguistics Department.

The first version of The Multilingual Museum was designed and launched during the COVID-19 pandemic as a resource that would enable diverse communities to gain digital access to Manchester Museum's collection during lockdown.

The original platform was developed in-house using free software to build the website. It was well received by various community groups and individuals, providing the springboard for the Digitising Multilingual Heritage digital volunteering project.

Through funding received from NLHF, the project enabled the Manchester Museum to pioneer a new approach to remote volunteering, engaging volunteers from Manchester's diverse communities and beyond to contribute digital content to a multilingual, interactive online platform: The Multilingual Museum.

What is The Multilingual Museum?

Co-created with digital volunteers, it is a space where people can share their languages and connect online with Manchester Museum's collections.

Through a carefully curated selection of objects from the museum's 4.5-million-strong collection, we invite contributions in the form of translations and comments. New content and translations can be uploaded in text, audio, image, and video format using the concept of 'storied translation'.

The choice of objects was led by our mission at Manchester Museum:

1. Promoting communication between cultures
2. Building a more sustainable world

In addition, care was taken to provide representation of each gallery space, as well as objects from a variety of countries as volunteers tended to show more interest in objects they felt resonated with their own culture.

Storied Translation

At the heart of this project is the concept of 'storied translation', which means that interpretations will include participants' own personal comments on the object. Audiences are encouraged to share their own stories, experiences and connections to the objects and narratives, and their insight into their own translation process. It frames language as heritage and explores the making of meaning via the process of translation and the choices made in that.

This approach is participatory and dynamic, working with the museum to bring the objects to life. Storied translation was developed in collaboration with academics Prof. Yaron Matras (Linguistics) and Dr. Rebecca Tipton (Translation Studies) from The University of Manchester.

"Whoever thought of creating this platform, oh, what a great idea. Challenging us, and wanting to connect us, and to offer us an opportunity to get involved, and kind of connect to each other and even personal experiences related to the topic..."

Oana, Romanian speaker.

Volunteer Engagement

Digital Volunteering

Digital Volunteering is a flexible style of volunteering that has many benefits for both the individuals involved and the organisation. For volunteers it can increase digital skills and confidence as well remove barriers to physical access. For the organisation it can increase capacity, resilience and provide a creative way of engaging new audiences.

Volunteers on The Multilingual Museum project have come from as far away as China, Romania and Brazil. By providing remote volunteering opportunities in this way has not only increased the reach of the museum but has also opened up the collection to new audiences by having different languages represented, enabling people from far afield to access and enjoy the collections without the environmental impacts of travel.

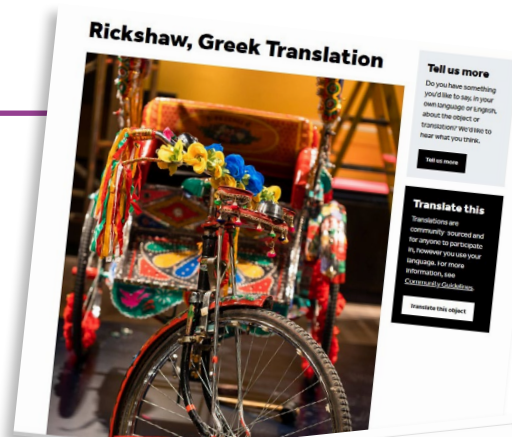
During the initial consultation period at the start of the project, the volunteers reviewed and provided feedback on the existing Multilingual Museum digital platform. Based on that feedback they helped re-configure the platform to better meet the needs of remote volunteering activity creating a more sustainable pathway towards remote engagement.

Case study: Aspa, Greek speaker

Aspa didn't want to come into the museum physically following the COVID-19 pandemic, due to health concerns. She participated in this project solely remotely and online. Her creative additions to the platform allowed her to engage with museum objects and her language on her own terms.

"The fact that the Manchester Museum emphasised that they were not expecting a professional translation helped me regulate my own emotions, ensuring I didn't become overly self-critical... This relaxing, positive and non-judgemental space makes it easier to negotiate different parts of our identities and engage with the world in a more resilient, creative, and playful way..."

The Multilingual Museum encouraged me to appreciate equally both my Greek and my British identities and experiences, fostering a more plurilingual and multi-cultural attitude. I realised that as a Bristol-born anglophile member of the Greek diaspora, I had been overly keen to switch off the Greek part of myself and become as British as possible."



Building the volunteer team

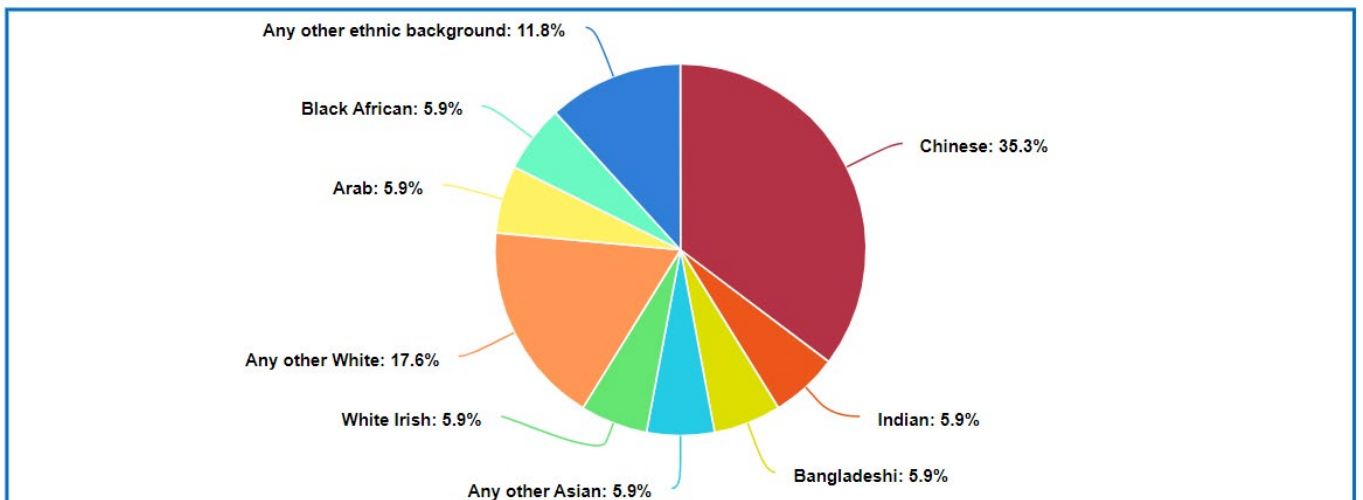
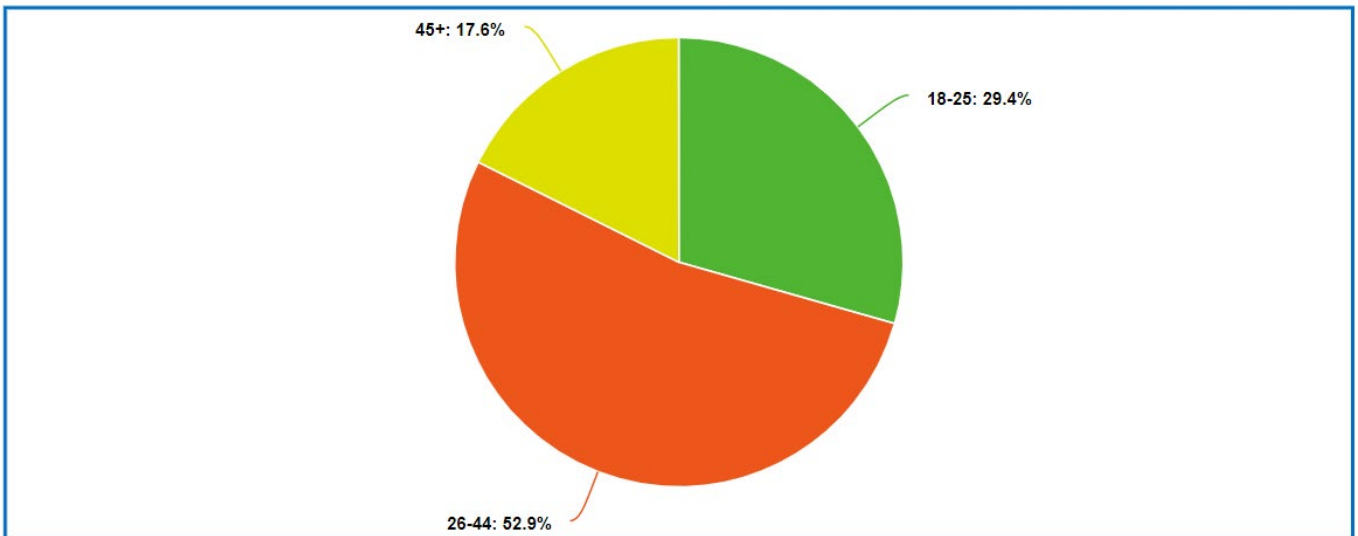
In order to effectively involve people from communities who don't traditionally engage with the museum, it was necessary to carefully plan the volunteer recruitment strategy and employ a variety of recruitment tools both online and in person. This involved spending time doing outreach to understand the audience and online volunteer recruitment campaigns to raise the profile of the project.

As part of the recruitment campaign, we had a stall at The University of Manchester Community Festival and visited venues in areas such as Oldham, Rochdale, Longsight, Levenshulme, Didsbury and Moss Side. By leaving information at community centres and hosting pop-ups in libraries, as well as taking advantage of community noticeboards, we broadened our reach in the local

area which helped recruit volunteers onto the project who represented the linguistic diversity of Manchester.

A total of 17 volunteers were initially recruited for our main training programme, while a shorter introduction to the project was then delivered to a further 26 volunteers through a mix of remote and in person sessions.

The initial cohort of volunteers was a diverse group. The chart below illustrates the representation of volunteers from different backgrounds. Just over a third of volunteers were of Chinese heritage (Cantonese and Mandarin speakers), with the second-largest proportion being of 'Any Other White' ethnicities (speaking Italian, Polish, and Turkish) with other volunteers from Black African, Indian, Bangladeshi, Arab and other backgrounds.



We also managed to engage a variety of age groups in our volunteer cohort. Over 50% of the volunteers were aged 26-44 with younger and older volunteers represented. We did not engage as many older volunteers as we might have liked.

The table below illustrates how prominent community languages from around Manchester were represented within the project across the entire volunteer cohort, with the majority of the top 20 community languages spoken by volunteers.

Number	Languages (Manchester)	This is their main language	Volunteer that speaks that language
	All	2,867,769	-
1	Urdu	35,408	Yes
2	Polish	21,448	Yes
3	Arabic	17,221	Yes
4	Bengali (with Sylheti and Chatgaya)	13,102	No
5	Punjabi	11,938	Yes
6	Portuguese	9637	Yes (Brazilian Portuguese)
7	Romanian	9225	Yes
8	Spanish	8082	Yes
9	All other Chinese (except Cantonese and Mandarin)	7984	No
10	Persian (Farsi)	6808	Yes
11	Italian	6066	Yes
12	Cantonese Chinese	4943	Yes
13	Kurdish	4909	No
14	Malayalam	4129	Yes
15	French	3953	Yes
16	Somali	2747	Yes
17	Gujarati	2713	No
18	Greek	2691	Yes
19	Pashto	2689	No
20	Tigrinya	2437	No, but some contributions

In addition to those listed here, volunteers also spoke languages such as Korean, Finnish, Romani, Sinhala, Turkish, Farsi, Hungarian, Hindi, Ukrainian and Mandarin Chinese.

“The first meeting I met different people from Ukraine, Romania, Iran, several different countries, and this meeting itself is a new experience and a new culture. In our conversations we exchanged new information about our experience, I think I gained a new part of culture I didn’t know before because of different people from different cultures I met at this project.”

Mohamed, Egyptian Arabic speaker.

“Of course I’m really proud of my culture, of my identity, and for the first time while living in the UK, and particularly in Manchester, I was given this opportunity to connect myself, to make the connection, to create this bridge between two cultures, English and Romanian, and this was like a bridge to find common things.”

Oana, Romanian speaker.

Building Volunteer Skills

The core team of volunteers who were recruited were invited to take part in three training sessions delivered at Manchester Museum by project staff. Each three-hour session was designed to grow digital skills and confidence to prepare volunteers for their role. They also gained an insight into Manchester Museum and the breadth of our collections.



Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
Introduction to Manchester Museum and tours Volunteer role and commitment (flexible, 2 hours per week) How to contribute to the Multilingual Museum online platform Introduction to platform and objects, including opportunity to shape development	Translation and language awareness skills Basic translation tasks around the museum Website consultation session with web designer	Digital skills session with the Manchester Museum digital content creator Mobile phone content creation task Practice translating text and objects on camera How to use basic editing apps such as CapCut and uploading videos



Volunteers gained a broad range of skills through engagement with the project. These included digital skills; translation and language awareness; and insights into curating heritage.

Through the training and subsequent opportunities, we aimed to:

- Develop digital skills, including how to access a different language keyboard
 - Provide deeper understanding of digital skills such as how to use a range of technologies, including capturing video; video editing apps; sound recording and capturing images.
 - Increase confidence with their varying levels of language ability
 - Highlight the importance of sharing and preserving language, with a focus on pride in volunteers' multilingualism and cultural heritage
 - Provide knowledge on how to use the platform specifically, and moderate content using the inbuilt tools
- Empower volunteers to take an active part in the curation of cultural heritage, engaging with audiences from a variety of backgrounds with digital tools to document heritage

"We went down to the Living Worlds gallery and translated certain objects, I clearly remember that I chose the Hiroshima one... we chatted with other volunteers, and did translations... and then we did the video recording in pairs. He read his own translation and I filmed him, then I read my translation and he filmed me, kind of us getting used to being filmed and interviewed, kind of thing, yeah, that was nice."

Pinar, Turkish speaker.

"One of the best aspects about this project were the in-person sessions we had at the museum. Everybody had a small story to tell about every object whenever we were engaged in translation... there are several words that are similar in Arabic, Hindi and Malayalam. So whenever somebody brought up these similar words, I could understand despite not having any profound knowledge in the language."

Divya, Malayalam speaker.

Ongoing Support

To keep momentum going and the sustained engagement of digital volunteers, a programme of continuous support and training was established, which included:

- Drop-in sessions - Online zoom sessions and in-person sessions that were delivered at the museum on a weekly basis.
- Phone and email correspondence - Project leaders kept in touch with the volunteers through regular phone and email correspondences.
- Volunteer-initiated group chat - The volunteers set up a WhatsApp group chat to stay in touch with each other.
- Meetings and social events - Volunteers were invited to attend events such as coffee mornings as part of the wider volunteer programme at Manchester Museum.

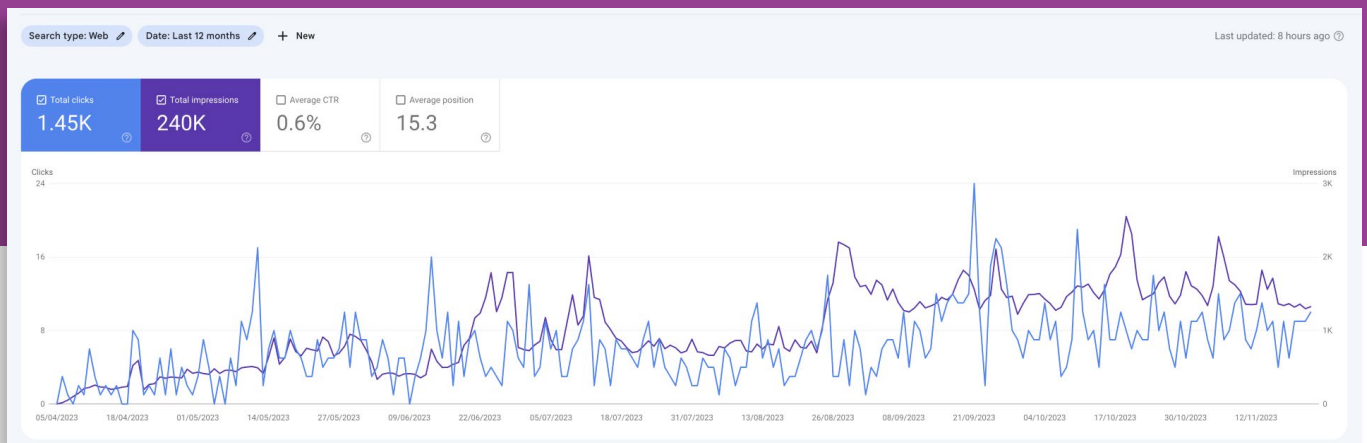
Activities & engagement

Over the lifetime of the project we carried out a diverse mix of activities which engaged with over 1500 people, this ranged from online taster sessions to community pop-ups and storytelling sessions conducted by volunteers.

Some of these in the early stages were geared towards recruitment, while those later on were often to increase the involvement of different community groups with the museum, giving the key volunteer working with those groups a chance to bring people into the physical space.



Date	Event name	Number of participants
25/06/2022	UoM Community Festival	400
18/08/2022	Rochdale/Oldham recruitment visit	15
23/08/2022	Longsight Library/Levenshulme recruitment visit	21
24/08/2022	Powerhouse Library/Moss Side recruitment visit	16
18/10/2022	Taster session (in-person)	22
19/10/2022	Taster session (online)	5
25/10/2022	Training Day 1	18
01/11/2022	Training Day 2	17
08/11/2022	Training Day 3	17
14/12/2022	Volunteer Christmas meal	12
20/02/2023	International Mother Language Day popup (Powerhouse Library)	15
21/02/2023	International Mother Language Day popup (Manchester Museum)	386
01/03/2023	ESOL open evening	15
08/03/2023	Somali Advice Link visit	12
10/04/2023	ESOL group at Powerhouse Library	11
12/04/2023	Celebrating Languages trail (in partnership with Creative Manchester)	350
14/04/2023	Communities United Ukrainian Support group	20
20/04/2023	UoM Translation students visit - The Multilingual Museum	63
28/04/2023	MAES - ESOL group	16
29/04/2023	Supplementary Schools drop-in	13
28/05/2023	ESOL learners with families visit	11
12/06/2023	ESOL group at Powerhouse Library	12
09/07/2023	PLAST Ukrainian Scouts - The Multilingual Museum	22
11/07/2023	The Multilingual Museum taster session (Top Floor)	5
11/07/2023	The Multilingual Museum taster session (online)	2
17/07/2023	Sustainability course visit - The Multilingual Museum	15
23/07/2023	Nicolae Iorga Romanian school visit	22
19/09/2023	The Multilingual Museum taster session	7
20/09/2023	Powerhouse Library popup	32
27/09/2023	The Multilingual Museum taster session	3
30/09/2023	International Translation Day popup	5
27/10/2023	Bilingual Storytelling with The Multilingual Museum	26
TOTAL		1606



The website has also had excellent engagement, with 240,000 impressions, and 1450 clicks through Google. There are likely many more hits, as this does not capture the numbers finding the platform through the main Manchester Museum website.

Volunteers could contribute to the platform in two ways: by translating whole texts, and by commenting. Most of our volunteers translated information or did a mixture of translating and commenting, and the comments were very useful for community engagement.

Of the 60 museum objects on the site, we have had 480 translations added by 97 people.

This means there are currently an average of 8 translations per object, vastly improving the accessibility for our audiences.

A further 54 people added 140 comments, though some of these comments were under the umbrella name of a community group and thus counted as one (e.g. PLAST Ukrainian Scouts, who added many from different scouts). The comment sections were very popular with groups that were not confident writing long texts in their language, so the languages represented there included Zaghawa, Lusoga and Balochi - languages that do not often get much attention or exposure.

Type of contribution	Number of contributions	Number of people using this function
Translation	480	97
Comment	140	54

Findings

We surveyed 21 volunteers who took part in the project through a mix of short surveys and more in-depth interviews. There were some strong themes that emerged as a result of their engagement, which included:

1. Better connections
2. Increased confidence and skills (including digital)
3. Increased access to heritage
4. Increased sense of belonging and pride
5. The value of digital volunteering (through flexible and inclusive opportunities)

In this section, we look back at how we have met our original aims:

1. People will have developed confidence and skills

Our main cohort of volunteers took part in a training programme, they learnt about digital skills including recording audio and video, and gained insight into the stages of building a website. We also covered basic principles of translation and introduced museum objects through curator led sessions.

"The training was very interesting and useful, especially the part about filming and recording. My children are always filming themselves and putting it online, so it was nice to know a bit about what they are doing and try it myself. Maybe now I'll be able to do that too!"

Lina, Mandarin Chinese speaker.

"When I translate or try to answer the questions, I learnt lots of new words, new vocabulary. I had to research and use dictionaries, online, to find words... I can also do this."

Tarteel, Sudanese Arabic speaker.

Although volunteers did not cite improving their confidence with digital literacy as a main aim for getting involved with the project, participants reported an improvement in their confidence using digital tools after engagement with the project.

There was an increase in the volunteers who rated themselves as the highest confidence (5) from 25% at the start to 58.3% at the end of the project. By the end of the project there were no longer volunteers who rated their confidence below a 3.

"I'm starting to think that I can do that and that and that... I feel more confident in myself and using my voice. I shared my recordings with other people, with other friends and my English neighbours, maybe they will start with it in the museum as well, you know!"

Oana, Romanian speaker.

Volunteers also noted that their confidence in using their language had a marked improvement over the course of the project. Volunteers who rated their confidence at the highest level (5) went from 46.2% to 83.3% at the end of the project.

"It was a challenge that I really needed because I wanted to see if I can do this, to see if I can still manage to express myself in Romanian."

Oana, Romanian speaker.

"At the beginning I didn't think I could do it, you know, translate for the museum... but then I did it and I had fun doing the translations. I thought, yes, I can do this and my husband also."

Alex, Polish speaker.

2. People will have learned about heritage, leading to a change in ideas and actions

Almost 20% of the volunteers surveyed had never visited Manchester Museum before. This project was instrumental in connecting new groups of volunteers and their family and friends to the museum, helping to break down barriers and encourage first time visits.

"I brought my family into the museum to see how much is beautiful, and yes, I told many friends about the place, about Manchester Museum and the project... I didn't visit the museum before I volunteered, it was a very big surprise for myself to see all these ancient pieces originally from Egypt. I was surprised, but I felt very proud... I've loved this place since I first visited."

Mohamed, Egyptian Arabic speaker.

As well as covering heritage topics and the different ways that language feeds into that as a part of the training, the platform objects and interactions with other volunteers also led many volunteers to research further into their own heritage.

"It was so interesting, every time I did [a translation] I thought 'well, what is this one', and I wanted to learn about it and do the one after that and did so many in a short time!"

Kirsi, Finnish speaker.

"Some [objects] are quite easy to find a cultural story behind it related to the translation. Some others it was a little more like hmm, yeah. I had to think about it and make research and find that bit of my heritage to include it as part of the comment. So that was good as well, that I had the chance to find something new about my own culture and share it with you, that was amazing."

Chrysoula, Greek speaker.

We asked volunteers whether they worked with others on this project, as a key part of the project was to promote cross-generational communication and for communities to use their language with one another. Many said they did, and the survey showed that 53.9% worked with relatives, while 23.1% worked with friends.

"(I translated with) my 6-years-old daughter. She was really interested to listen to Mummy, and also while I was doing the translations, there was one about butterflies, and she started to draw."

Oana, Romanian speaker.

"Amma who used to be a history teacher twenty years back left her job to take care of us. She now finds it very interesting to read more about the objects, and get back into learning more histories, while translating them to Malayalam."

Divya, Malayalam speaker.

3. People will have greater wellbeing

A staggering 92% of volunteers reported an improvement in their wellbeing as a result of being involved in this project. We also had a significant amount of positive feedback about how the flexible nature of the project meant volunteers could get involved and create meaning and connection on their own terms.

"It was good for me at this time because I was busy with my ESOL courses, my family, my daughter is very young and needs lots of care and time. Also my health situation, I am pregnant but I could do it any time, that's very good for me."

Tarteel, Sudanese Arabic speaker.

Volunteers also attributed improvements in wellbeing due to feeling like they were part of something bigger, stating that their contributions were valued and meaningful.

"It makes you feel, I would say... it's something priceless, that you can contribute to the core of the museum because I think when you contribute like that you feel like you're doing something good, and something quite big... it's a huge satisfaction. It's amazing that I can share my culture."

Chrysoula, Greek speaker.

4. The funded organisation will be more resilient

This project has provided the platform and tools to empower more collaborative ways of working in the future. The Multilingual Museum website enables Manchester Museum to share our collections with a wider range of people and open up access to different audiences through increased understanding and representation.

By fostering and celebrating linguistic diversity in this way, digital volunteers have been able to add their voices and languages to provide more context and deeper understanding to museum objects, which then becomes part of the wider story and increases our knowledge base.

"It's very important to listen to some Egyptian person who talks about this piece of art, from Egypt originally. It was very beautiful to talk about something from my country in my mother language."

Mohamed, Egyptian Arabic speaker.

"[I added information] for Finnish speakers to understand a little bit better... sometimes I added some more definitions about the place or a date, a little bit of background information."

Kirsi, Finnish speaker.

5. We will have created a digital platform for future engagement and volunteering.

The project has greatly improved people's sense of connection with the museum by providing a sustainable platform to share their heritage and language.

"I saw these parrots one day when I was out in the park and I couldn't believe they were really here in the park in Manchester. And then I saw the text [about them] on the site and I had the feeling I can connect my stories to those of the objects. This is what I like here with British museums, it makes me feel connected. In Greece it's very passive the way we transmit the history, not like here."

Chrysoula, Greek speaker.

"I feel that it makes the museum more welcoming to speakers of languages other than English."

Anon, survey response.

Participants said that a main reason for getting involved was wanting to promote their language and culture (76.9%). We gathered feedback to ensure that the platform met the needs of the users - it came out very strongly that there was a need for simplicity and ease of access, especially for groups such as older volunteers or those who were not confident navigating the internet.

"There were no issues at all. Everything was perfect – this was one of the most perfect platforms I tried to connect, and log in, and download. Not at all, everything was perfect... I was actually even more puzzled, like oh my god, it's so easy to get on that platform and to work on it, it's so easy, I can do it any time you know! I thought that it'd be a bit complicated, but it wasn't."

Oana, Romanian speaker.

The platform itself provided a vital way for people to feel that their voice was heard and they were represented within the museum collection.

"You help the museum to transfer the meaning behind the object, and the importance, because every single object is important, every object has a history behind it... when you contribute like that and give the museum a chance to open these objects up to other cultures, it's important, it's extremely important for me as a person."

Chrysoula, Greek speaker.

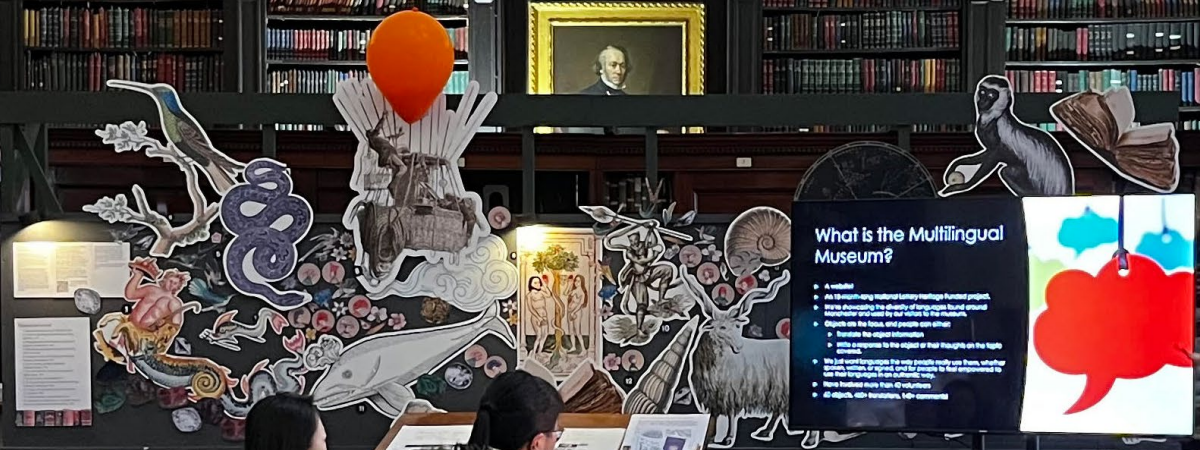


6. A toolkit will have been created to allow other organisations to replicate and develop this platform

A toolkit has been developed to help other organisations replicate the project's success and engage new audiences in this way. This aims to create a legacy for the project's impact and inspire the broader adoption of digital volunteering within the museum sector. The project culminated in a showcase event at the Portico Library. Project staff, volunteers and colleagues from organisations across the North West attended to celebrate and hear about the project and its legacy going forward.



BIOGRAPHY



What is the Multilingual Museum?

- A website
- An interactive digital history museum project
- The discovery of language-based cultural
- Objects on the floor, and possible connections
- Translate the object's meaning
- Links everyone to the object or their thoughts on the topic
- The first museum was the first to be built by a man, who was
- The first museum was the first to be built by a man, who was
- The first museum was the first to be built by a man, who was
- The first museum was the first to be built by a man, who was
- The first museum was the first to be built by a man, who was
- The first museum was the first to be built by a man, who was

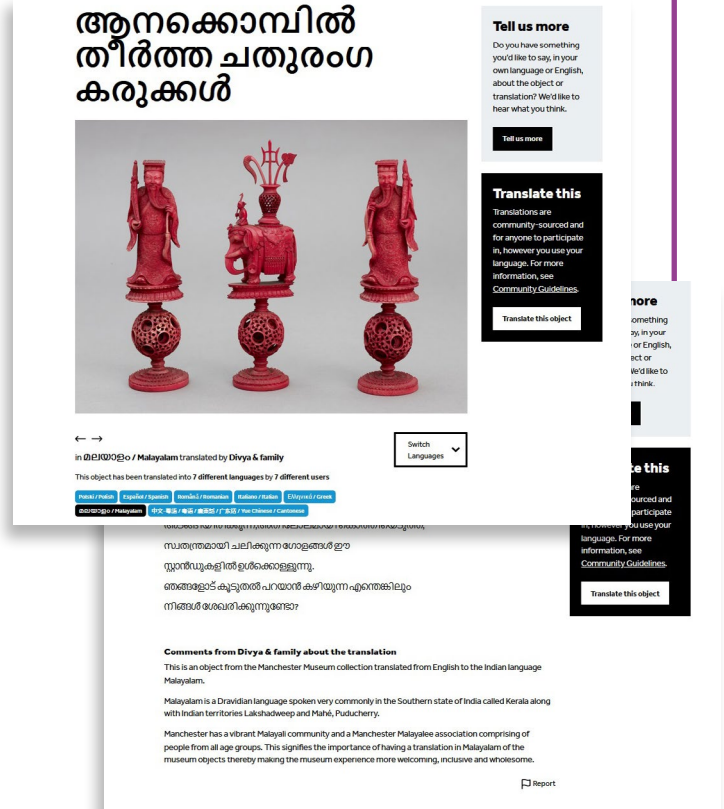


Case study: Divya, Malayalam speaker

Divya started off as a volunteer for The Multilingual Museum and later joined the in-person volunteering programme as well. She has connected several other members of her community, including her mother and sister, with the platform and takes great pride in telling museum visitors about it.

“Every time I open the Multilingual Museum webpage, and get to see object descriptions in my mother tongue Malayalam, I feel very happy and proud. I feel like I have the responsibility to promote my language, and to educate people about the history of the language anytime I get into a conversation with them.

I have also been able to show the translated descriptions in the webpage whenever I meet Malayali visitors in the Museum on the days that I'm volunteering and I could see the excitement in their faces when they see their language represented.”



Organisational Learning & Practice

Digital volunteering has become increasingly popular in recent years. During the COVID-19 pandemic, museums had to pivot quickly to the idea of making their collections available digitally and engaging with audiences remotely. The Multilingual Museum presented an exciting and timely opportunity for Manchester Museum to grow our digital volunteering community and connect new communities to our collections.

Opportunity

Manchester Museum has a well established volunteer programme. However, when this project began, it had been notably impacted by the pandemic and followed by the subsequent closure of the building for a significant period due to the *hello future* capital project. Although a core group of volunteers remained engaged and a small number

of roles continued, there wasn't scope for active volunteer recruitment until we reopened and the demographic of volunteers reverted to that of more traditional heritage volunteers.

The Multilingual Museum provided a way to pioneer a different kind of volunteer engagement, one that could provide opportunities irrespective of the museum being closed, and one that prioritised audiences outside of those we usually reach. This inclusive project allowed people with variable or inflexible schedules, as well as people with an inability to travel due to health problems, caring commitments, distance restrictions the opportunity to volunteer remotely and contribute to the online platform.

Overcoming barriers

The Multilingual Museum project proved that 'harder to reach' is really dependent on the opportunities that people are given to engage with the museum on their own terms. Despite the short duration of the project, we recruited many volunteers from a variety of backgrounds who have really enjoyed their time volunteering in the museum, and in several cases visited the museum for the first time.

This project was a fantastic way of representing Manchester's Museum's commitment to its mission and values, by promoting that communication between cultures and really allowing people a

voice and a place to talk about the objects. We engaged volunteers from many different language backgrounds, with 480 translations in 35 different languages, and the commenting feature captured still more languages from people who were not confident translating. Several volunteers from this project went on to join the in-person wider volunteering programme, and have become involved with the museum further as a result of this opportunity – one volunteer was successful in gaining paid employment, where her language skills are valued and put to good use communicating with visitors.

Case study: Pinar

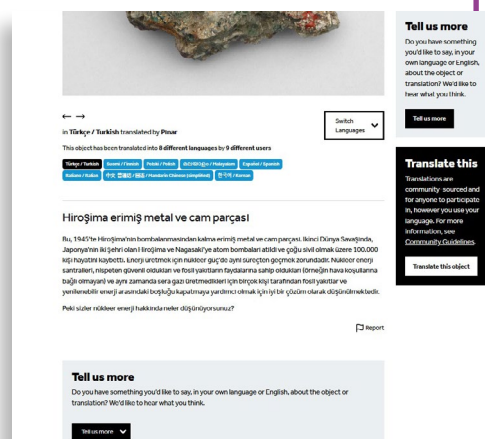
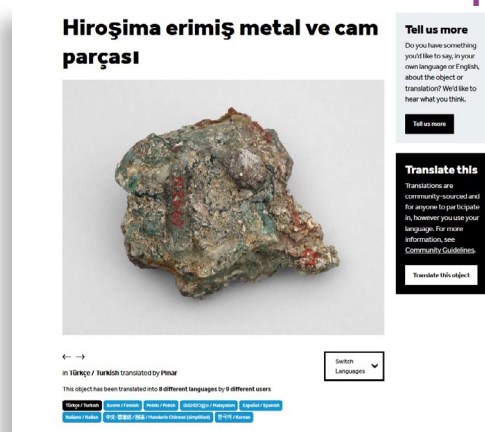
Pinar is a Turkish speaker who is also learning Korean. As a result of her volunteering with the Multilingual Museum, she went on to gain employment at Manchester Museum on the Visitor Team.

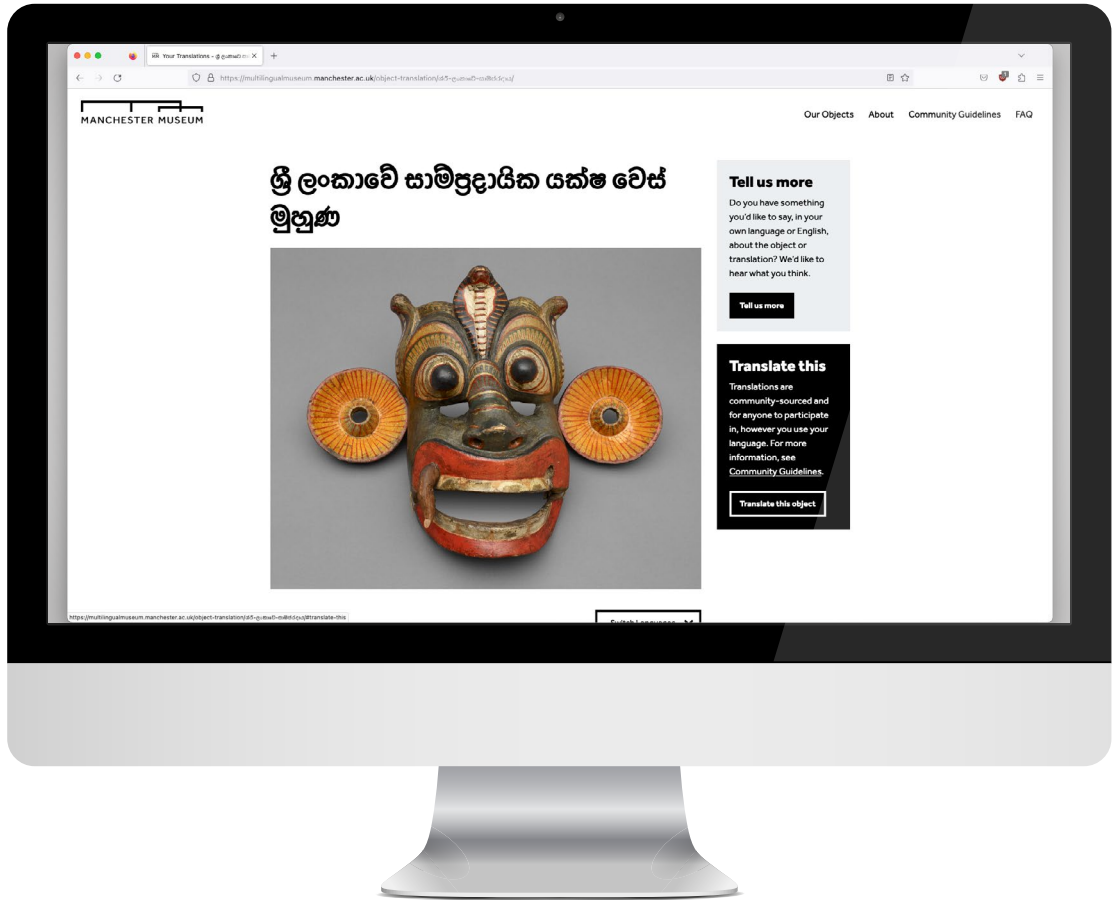
"In November 2022 I was unemployed, and I came across the Multilingual Museum digital volunteering opportunity. I thought it sounded interesting translating museum objects into different languages and I thought it was a great opportunity to get involved with the Museum. I then saw a job vacancy at Manchester Museum working within the visitor team and I applied for the job and in my interview mentioned the Multilingual Museum. When I talked about it in the interview, I described what I had been doing, translating stories of museum objects into Turkish and Korean.

I believe the opportunity with the multilingual museum introduced me to the museum and gave me a foot in the door of the museum sector.

The Multilingual Museum helps me in my day-to-day role as a Visitor Team Assistant as I have met many Turkish visitors who come to the museum. This allowed me to introduce The Multilingual Museum to visitors and because I have translated so many museum objects, I know the information about many collections in both English and Turkish.

I hope the Museum gets a similar project to the Multilingual Museum once the project finishes, not only involving volunteers but visitors too."





Flexibility

Flexibility and adaptability are key to a project like this, and it was a learning curve for the organisation to make that provision for people to engage completely remotely. It was also important for staff to be adaptable to the needs of the project, and staff gained new skills, such as setting up hybrid or Zoom versions of training, or taking on different roles, such as curating objects.

Once the system was in place to put objects on the Multilingual Museum website, it was simple to add new objects (in particular those that had pre-existing labels on the galleries), and curators and project staff were both able to do this. It allowed us to do a lot without putting undue pressure on staff time, which is the strength of the platform prioritising ease of use.

As mentioned previously, volunteers often appreciated the digital volunteering model, and the flexibility it afforded them.

"The project was well organised, the instructions were clear, communications worked very well, and I felt that my involvement in the project was appreciated. Communications worked especially well."

Anon, survey response.

"I believe that the flexibility around this project was very positive. It gave me the chance to volunteer from home at a convenient time during the week."

Anon, survey response.

"Going to the museum at a certain time was challenging because of my son and needing to pick him up at certain times, so it was really more easy for me to do this work online and remotely, and then there were always these opportunities to meet face-to-face (although I never actually managed to come!)"

Kirsi, Finnish speaker.

Challenges

There were some challenges that arose during the lifetime of the project, these are outlined below:

Firstly, as the staff on this project were all part-time as well as working within a short time frame, progressing aspects of the project sometimes took longer. Staff on this project had other jobs besides this, which impacted flexibility - keeping up with volunteer communications was particularly time-consuming.

In addition, working with new communities is a process that requires investing time into building trust and building a connection before being able to ask about volunteering. This project was initially a year, which meant that our initial volunteer cohort was recruited without having laid the groundwork with communities in the way we had envisaged – this step had to come later in the process, and we implemented ongoing onboarding sessions to offer to communities that we had been able to invite in and talk to after the initial recruitment.

The project did encounter some delays with the recruitment of staff at the start of the project. Being bound by the processes and time scales of a larger organisation such as a University did mean that getting staff in post took longer than anticipated and it is something we would definitely factor in for future short term projects.

The combination of having mostly ESOL learners and a digital delivery of the project made things difficult for many volunteers. Although a key target for this project was people whose strengths lay more with their mother tongue than English, this meant that written communications, such as the regular update emails, were measurably harder for these volunteers to read, and so often these emails weren't read or weren't understood by several volunteers.

Possibly due to this, our feedback had several people expressing a wish that a project like this could in future be run in the physical museum space. It's worth noting that we did offer optional weekly in-person drop-in sessions, but there was no volunteer that regularly attended – this seemed to be utilised mostly for troubleshooting, though we had presented this also as 'if you'd like company'.

"It would be nice if it was more in-person stuff... I kind of felt like... I mean it was really good that you emailed consistently, that was nice, but it was so distant."

Pinar, Turkish speaker.

"I wish there could be more in-person sessions. But that said, I can understand the difficulties in organising one, especially during the earlier periods of Museum re-opening."

Anon, survey response.

"I hope the project to be at the real location not just online."

Anon, survey response.

As a result of that feedback, one of the legacies of the project will be a in-person volunteering opportunity in the museum spaces, where volunteers will talk about the project and encourage others to use and contribute to the website.

"I'd messaged my mother and little sister if they'd be interested to have a look at the Multilingual Museum website and if they could try translating a few objects. To my surprise they'd shared with me this document that they'd managed to compile and they're still working on more objects."

Divya, Malayalam speaker.

Conclusion & Next Steps

This project has provided a powerful tool to expand the reach of Manchester Museum to diverse communities both locally and further afield through remote volunteer opportunities. It has empowered individuals to take an active part in the curation of cultural heritage, as well as establishing itself as an important language resource for the local community. Ultimately, it has played a significant role in increasing access to collections in a variety of languages, building volunteer confidence and digital skills, and improving volunteer diversity immensely.

The legacy of the project will continue in a number of ways. The website will remain active, and volunteers will be encouraged to engage, adding translations and comments on an ongoing basis. Hosting the website as part of The University of Manchester's systems ensures that it will be functional and present as long as we need it.

The project will have a visible presence in the Museum, including in the Belonging Gallery, where we have introduced an iPad on a fixed stand providing visitors access to the website and the ability to translate while at the museum.

We have also secured one of the cases in the Collections Reimagined gallery, where objects and translations will feature promoting the project and website. In 2024, we will introduce a volunteer role in the Collections Reimagined gallery providing the opportunity for volunteers to engage with visitors in-person by showcasing The Multilingual Museum website and running object handling sessions with objects from the platform.



This groundbreaking project has not only embedded digital engagement within our volunteer programme and provided all museum departments with a long-lasting tool that will be used and useful for many years, but has created the foundations for other heritage venues to open up their own collections to multilingual communities.

This project was made possible through the NLHF Digital Skills for Heritage initiative. Manchester Museum would like to acknowledge their investment and thank its staff for their support and guidance.

Bryony Rigby
Project Manager



multilingualmuseum.manchester.ac.uk

Proud to be part of

MANCHESTER
1824

The University of Manchester