

Findings from our new building public consultation

“Looking forward to this fabulous museum – about time a cockney accent was associated with something intellectual...”

Key findings:

- The 2019 consultation reached approximately 1,700 people through an online survey, creative workshops with schools and community groups, and stalls at local festivals
- The consultation was broadly representative of the different east London boroughs geographically, though less so of the different protected characteristics. EEWM will need to design targeted strategies to reach audiences that reflect the local population, particularly people identifying as BAME, as well as to increase representation in its workforce.
- Audiences are excited by the proposition of the new museum site, with 88% of survey respondents wanting to visit and many favourable comments.
- A number of respondents hoping to visit were from outside of London or the UK, suggesting EEWM's potential as a tourist destination.
- Audiences were especially interested in themes of 'everyday lives' rather than celebrities. Topics of home, work, politics and protest, arts and music, and sport rated highly.
- The need for an approach that prioritises diversity and intersectionality was of high concern to many, especially younger respondents.
- There was some discussion of the name and whether 'East End' accurately reflects the museum's intentions.

Founded in 2015, the East End Women's Museum (EEWM) is a not-for-profit public history project aiming to right the wrongs of historical treatment of women in London's east end. A 2016 survey conducted by English Heritage found that 40% of the British public think that women have made less of a contribution to history than men.¹ The EEWM aims to correct this through representation of local women's achievements, both ordinary and extraordinary; including setting up in a new building in Barking town centre in 2021-22, the only dedicated women's museum space in the country.

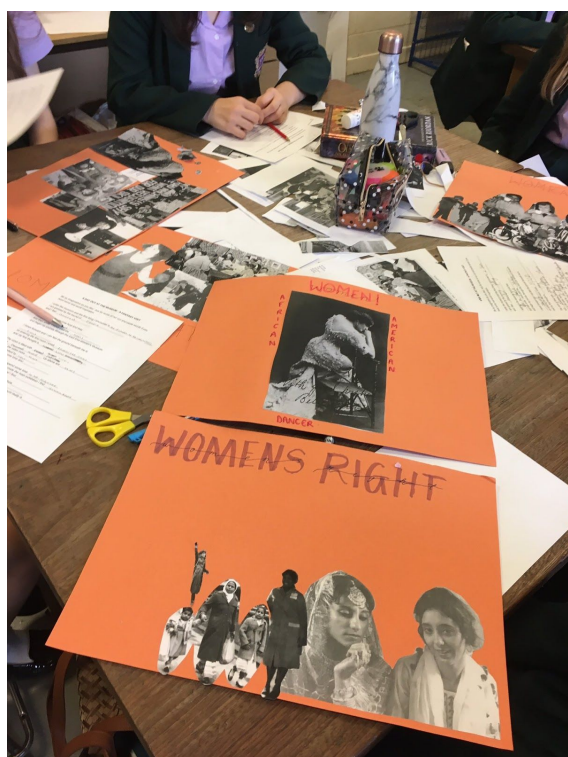
¹ <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/about-us/search-news/womens-role-in-history/>

From June to October 2019, EEWM ran a public consultation about what people want from the new Museum, including preferences around facilities, content and interpretation approaches, through a quantitative survey and creative consultation workshops. This mixed methodology sought to obtain a large number of responses via the survey with national/international reach; while balancing this with an extensive community outreach programme to reach a more diverse and representative local audience, including people who may not think a museum is 'for them'. This approach also helped build positive word of mouth for the project locally.

The whole consultation process was steered by a newly-recruited Steering Group of 17 local women from diverse backgrounds across east London (37% BAME, 10% LGBTQ+, 42% with a disability). They met monthly to give feedback on plans and supported the museum to reach new audiences - including delivering workshops to schools and groups within their networks.

The survey received almost 650 responses. The workshops were delivered to schools and community groups across the seven east London boroughs, with 320 participants. The museum also hosted stalls at seven community summer festivals, speaking to around 750 visitors about the museum and what people would like to see in it. This meant we heard from around 1,700 people in total.

Results were analysed in detail by PhD student, Vic Clarke, with invaluable support from EEWM Steering Group volunteers. Vic's placement was made possible thanks to a Researcher Employability Project grant from the White Rose College of Arts and Humanities and the University of Leeds.



Clockwise from above:
schools workshop;
festival stall;
our team analysing the data

Who took the survey?

EEWM were especially keen to hear from people based in East London, as the museum aims to tell the stories of local women. 639 people took part in the survey. Just over a third (36.2%) were from the 7 boroughs the museum serves, split as below, with the other responses being split nearly equally between the rest of London (30.5%) and the rest of England, Wales and Scotland (30.9%).

East End boroughs (of East End total)

Barking & Dagenham	Hackney	Havering	Newham	Redbridge	Tower Hamlets	Waltham Forest
13.55%	26.5%	6.02%	13.85%	13.55%	9.93%	16.56%

As anticipated - given the self-selecting nature of an online survey - it reached a narrower demographic than the diverse communities of east London.

The average respondent was an able-bodied white British woman from London, aged 35-44, who visits museums 3-10 times per year. Only 5.7% of respondents identified as Black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME), with a further 5.8% as 'Other', which is some way from being representative of east London, in which 50% residents identify as BAME.

EEWM is committed to telling the stories of women in all their diversity and puts great emphasis on outreach to the communities not represented in this survey. The creative consultation workshops were designed to help address this under-representation.

What did we learn from the survey?

“I feel that museums should be spaces that build community, that are collaborative, and that are critical and analytical of the past.”

EEWM needs to be a resource for the current community as much as it celebrates women of the past. The most popular requests for the museum were to be:

- A place to learn 24.2%
- To share people's stories 19.93%
- A place to celebrate history 18.9%

Respondents primarily wanted to feel inspired in the museum but also empowered and entertained. Several respondents saw a museum as a place for community building - to forge dialogue and to connect local communities with their history.

In terms of facilities, 52% respondents requested a cafe (second most popular behind toilets); with a relatively small building footprint, EEWM will need to give consideration for how to

accommodate this or to manage expectations. Several respondents noted accessibility needs, including Changing Places toilets, seating areas and an autism friendly approach.

A majority of respondents were willing to pay for entry to the museum, with 55.9% participants willing to pay between £4 and £10. A still significant number, 30.5%, would prefer the museum to be free or paid for by donations.

“I would visit as long as it included ordinary women, not just the great and good.”

The overwhelming majority of respondents stated they would probably (24.7%) or definitely (63.7%) visit the museum, with just under 10% of respondents expressing concern that its location is too far away, about public transport links, and access to parking.

EEWM as a potential tourist destination

- 30% of survey respondents to the question about how far they would travel to visit EEWM reported that they would travel from outside of London, or even outside of England, in order to visit the museum.

This suggests that the museum could be a tourist destination in its own right, potentially linking up with other local sites, such as Barking Abbey and Eastbury Manor House, to offer a fuller day trip.

- 95% of Barking & Dagenham residents surveyed would be happy to travel locally to the museum,
- 60% of respondents would be happy to travel within London to reach the museum in Barking.

What people want to see in EEWM

“I’d look, listen, dance if necessary, to hear decent stories of REAL women.”

Respondents were overwhelmingly interested in seeing stories about homes and everyday lives represented in the museum. Stories about famous people received 300 fewer votes than homes and everyday lives. This suggests that potential visitors to the museum have a real hunger to learn about ‘everyday lives’, and that they have a lack of access to knowledge on the subject.

This was followed by stories of politics and protest, arts and music, and work. Stories of crime and the law came fourth, before science and health in fifth position. Diversity and representation was also specifically requested to ensure BAME people are included in the museum. BAME respondents were more likely to select themes of religion and faith, and politics and protest.

“I want to see for sure all different races, different ethnic groups, different religions, different backgrounds...”

Respondents had a particular hunger for representation of women of colour, politics and protest, home and everyday lives, local stories, and motherhood.

When it came to presenting these stories, oral histories, objects in cases, photographs and interactive/new technologies were by some way the most popular choices.

Challenges - what is in a name?

Many of the questions in the survey gave the respondents the opportunity to raise issues not addressed in the survey itself. One that was raised by a small but vocal minority was the use of ‘East End’ in the name of the museum. Of the 16 responses that highlighted issues around the East End specifically, two raised an issue with the loose definition of ‘East End’ as applicable to Barking, being specific about the older definition of the East End as being constrained by the River Lea:

“You really need to change the name, since the easternmost boundary of the East End is the River Lea. Your site will be considerably beyond that, and it sounds like you will take in stories from a wider area too (and rightly so).”

EEWM has always had an open and generous interpretation of what it means to be from the East End. It is an area that has experienced many waves of immigration as communities have moved in and out of the area. East End identity is about community as well as geography. How do strict geographical definitions capture those who consider themselves to be of the east end but have moved away? EEWM is keenly aware of the importance of identity and belonging to the mission of the museum, and will use the name to start conversations about what it has meant historically and means today to be from the East End.

Challenges - representation in the workforce

There were a small but important number of concerns raised around ensuring the museum is inclusive of diverse perspectives and stories. The lengthiest of all feedback received was particularly concerned about the cultural diversity of the Museum’s board and staff team.

Currently 2 of the 7 board members are from a BAME background. This does not reflect the communities that the Museum seeks to serve where 50% of the population identify as BAME. EEWM is committed to taking action to ensure local communities are properly represented among its decision-makers at staff, trustee and volunteer level, as well as to support BAME visitors to feel welcomed into the space and to tell stories inclusive of the rich ethnic diversity of East London.

Creative Consultation Workshops

“Looking back on my morning I think about how much I have learnt and I feel overwhelmingly glad of what these women did for us. Overall, The East End Women’s Museum really is exceptional and I look forward to my next visit...” (6th form student)

The creative consultation workshops were designed by socially-engaged artists Edi Whitehead and Alice May Williams and refined by the Steering Group. There were two workshop exercises - one asking participants to imagine a day at a fantasy museum, the other a collage exercise to explore the stories that should be told at the museum.

Workshops were delivered to nine school classes (248 pupils) ranging from Year 3s to Year 12s (ages 7 to 17), and to four community groups (72 people) including an older women’s group, and a group of young women of colour. Though demographic information was not collected, we know from statistics that 76.6% of east London school pupils are BAME, suggesting that those workshops reached a more representative local population in terms of ethnicity than the survey.

Though offering less clear-cut or hard data results than the survey, the workshops enabled fun, creative participation, high-quality discussion, and awareness raising about the museum. Nevertheless, they were also analysed for findings in terms of the words and images selected.

Across both exercises, it was clear that diversity and intersectionality were particularly important to younger audiences.

Fantasy Museum Exercise

Younger children tended to associate their imaginary museum with banners, flags, chandeliers: bright, grand buildings as opposed to the historical space. They also overwhelmingly considered the museum as an institution to be full of pictures, art, and photographs, often specifically by or about women.

Older students, especially sixth formers, made references to celebrity women, including actresses and models. There was furthermore a significant number of references to sports and professional sportswomen, a category that was neglected in the survey design for adults. Children furthermore seemed to value outdoor space heavily: shops garnered fewer mentions than sports or transport. There was even representation of the Suffragettes across the different groups, suggesting that students of all ages have at least heard of the suffragette movement, potentially owing to the recent centenary of the 1918 Representation of the People Act.

Collage exercise

There were significant differences between age groups in what the collages represented, with intersectionality being far more important to younger participants. The Breakaway club, for instance, a group of women aged 65+, largely chose images related to well-known events in British history: a woman drinking tea atop rubble during the wartime Blitz, the Ford machinists’

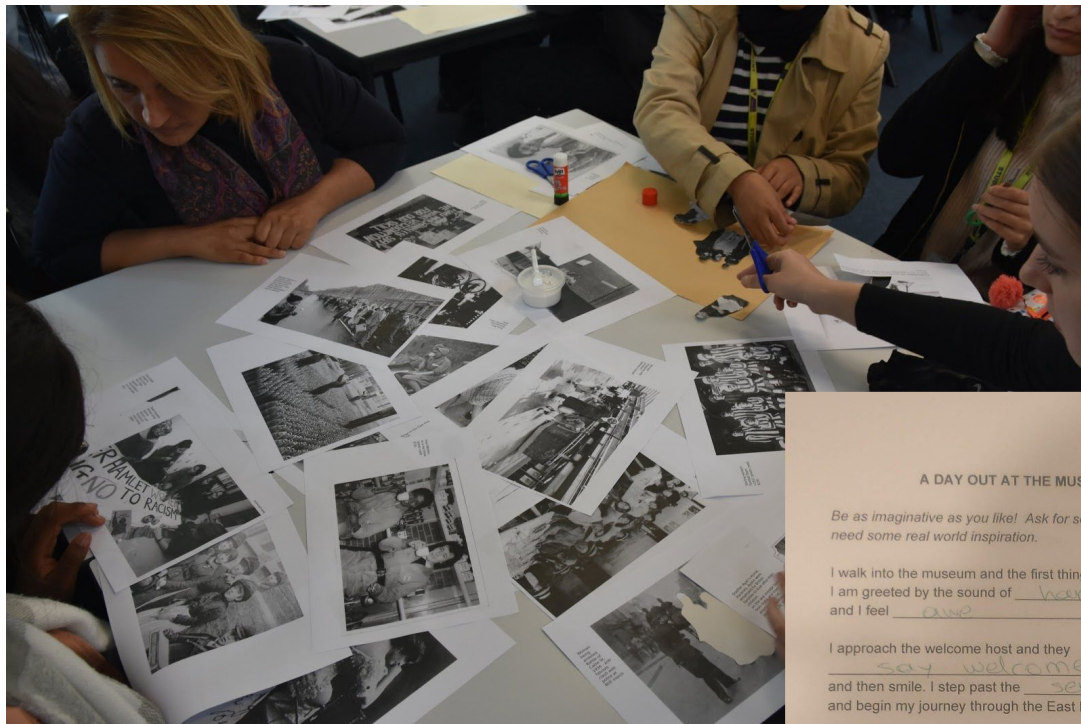
strike in 1960s Dagenham, and the Suffragettes. The majority of these images relate to well-known stories of women throughout British history, and, perhaps significantly, depict mostly white women.

Eastbury Sixth Form students chose, in addition to the Ford Machinists' strike, images of the Fight Against Facism, and two unnamed Asian women. Furthermore, the youngest of the participants, aged 9-10, were the most likely group to choose images of the Ayahs' home, the only image to contain a large group of faces of women of colour. The youngest children, furthermore, also overwhelmingly chose images of the Sterling workers football team, suggesting a greater interest in sport and games than other age groups.

Sixth form students tended to prioritise images of Rosa May Billinghurst, the disabled mayor and Suffragette, as well as the Ford machinists' strike, the two unnamed Asian women, and Michael Ferriera's funeral. The accompanying comments and slogans on the images reflected this tendency to intersectionality among younger participants: "fighting for rights," "no to racism," and "choose who you are" were slogans found in Sandringham Primary's Class D, while the Girls' Brigade youth group were most likely to select images of Black women.

“Equality now! Stop the pay gap! Speak out! Power of the people!”

(comments overlaid on a collage, created by a 6th form student)



Above: collaging as part of a schools workshop
Right: fantasy visit exercise

A DAY OUT AT THE MUSEUM - A FANTASY VISIT

Be as imaginative as you like! Ask for some of our cut and paste words if you need some real world inspiration.

I walk into the museum and the first thing I see is a big picture of two women
I am greeted by the sound of herp
and I feel awe

I approach the welcome host and they say welcome
and then smile. I step past the senses room
and begin my journey through the East End Women's Museum.

I move forward and I can feel the ground beneath me is shaking
on entering the first room I smell lavender
and my first thought is women - cleanliness - care

The room is filled with bubbles colourful
and clutter. Up above are materials hanging
and to the sides more mirrors
I am absorbed by the oral histories
and spend some time also at the photo booth

After the exhibits I spend some time in the outdoor space
and am excited that outside the main exhibition I find an audio guide
I head out into the sun and I find a kiosk with a man serving coffee & biscuits

Looking back on my morning I think of women's multitasking
and I feel overwhelmingly strong
Overall, The East End Women's Museum really is an experience
and I look forward to my next visit..... unforgettable