Chairs report 6th March 2023

Introduction

The year 1st September 2021 to 31st August 2022 has been a watershed year for the the organisation. At the start of our financial year we had just recruited two new people – Maura Hunt and Clara Parada – to work on the newly funded Plastic Packaging Portal project and by the end of August 22 we had three more people – Phoenix Andrews, Shanice Blair and Matt Pullen join to develop and deliver our work and start to establish solid back office systems.

At the start of September 2021, the world was starting to re-emerge from COVID lockdowns and the need to maintain social distancing. It was uncertain if we would really need to have an office base to work from even though we had already found a new home at Holyoake House, the home to the UK Cooperative movement. Despite the fact that most of our programme was taking place online, we made the commitment to move out of our co-working space into our new offices on the second floor. Although they weren’t being fully utilised at the time, it felt as though Open Data Manchester had set down roots enough to sign a long-term lease.

Given the expanded team and taking on premises, the last couple of years have seen the organisation reflect on what it does, who it is doing it for, and why. The development of our organisational strategy 2022-25 has been a challenge, but through teamwork, input from our friends and force of will, we have a strategy that distilled the essence of who we are and enabled us to communicate our vision, mission and goals with confidence.

This confidence and surety about who we are and what we do has enabled us to build a team that has a strong sense of social purpose. From our diversity and inclusion work in the previous year and the identified need to ensure that the work we do is for the benefit of all, we created a unique role of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Data Research Lead that takes a critical look at current data practice and supports ODM’s work to promote trust, rights, and ethics within data practice.

Our position at the intersection of data practice, society and place is unique. And even though some of our projects are technical in nature our focus is resolutely about people and how they interface and interact with, and are impacted by, data enabled technologies.

With the help of an inclusive recruitment organisation, Collaborative Future, we have now developed a process of supportive and CV-less recruitment that focuses on the potential of the person in the role instead of the standard CV-based recruitment processes. This method of recruitment has enabled us to reach a deeper socially focussed pool of talent than would normally be accessed through traditional recruitment.

Solid foundations

Coming out of COVID and as we have started to grow, there has been a certain amount of organisational reflection as to how to prioritise activities with increased project workload and finite capacity of the people within the organisation. With the help of the board, we have developed a programme of policy and process creation to enable us to grow. These building blocks are essential in enabling us to tender for the larger pieces of work which will help us become more sustainable.

The development of these processes and the reproducible tools and methods that we have created and used over the past few years has allowed us to develop projects with focus and confidence.

Events consolidation

Over the last twelve months there has been a reduction in the general community events that we’ve run. As we came into the year, we were starting to notice that our general online events were being less well attended. The reasons for which are many, but anecdotally might have been a hangover from COVID where everyone was stuck in front of a screen and the ability for people to socialise made an evening in front of the computer less attractive. We have also been hampered by access to venues to as pre-COVID we were fortunate to be able to have access to the events and workshop spaces within the Federation. Within this environment we sought partnerships with communities such as Her+Data, PyData Manchester, PythonNW and R Ladies to co-produce events, allowing the burden of event delivery to be shared and increase attendance through bringing together our respective communities.

To maintain our presence and also build on the enlarged community that we built over the previous twelve months, we continued to develop the Data Cooperative Working Group, which engages a broad group of academics and practitioners from around the world and runs in partnership with the Aapti Institute in Bangalore. This has led to a number of conversations with both UK-based and international organisations around the development of data cooperatives and an accompanying handbook, which helps organisations understand the opportunities and challenges of mutual data ownership.

In addition to this we facilitated the development of the Design Justice Network Node for the North of England. As an organisation we are subscribed to the [Design Justice principles](https://designjustice.org/principles-overview) for empowered communities and more sustainable practices.

Projects

The projects we have been working on over the past twelve months may seem eclectic and unrelated, yet their core feature is the centering of the person and their lived experience, whether it is the lived experience of those that experience digital exclusion within policy, or giving space for those working in the plastic packaging value chain to identify the challenges faced when trying to do the right thing.

Over the last year, we have developed a data standard for the plastics packaging industry to reduce the amount of resources used in packaging and its impact on the environment. We were successful in winning a 12 month contract to provide user research services to the University of Manchester to create a Digital Services Hub for the National Environment Research Council. We also developed a bid with Greater Sport to map the lived experience of crime and safety in relation to active lifestyles and sporting opportunities for women and girls, and with Manchester City Council developed a programme that will help the council understand the experience of volunteering in Manchester along with work to challenge traditional top-down data-led policy making regarding digital exclusion.

Social focus

Building on last year’s Our Streets Chorlton project and our Data for Communities programme we have started to co-design a community data handbook with a community partner in Manchester to help community activists to collect data to help them to better represent their communities in policy discussions.

This year there have been a number of open workshops that Open Data Manchester has run as a convenor to help people to respond to consultations. The first was a series of workshops unpicking the Data: A new direction, a data reform consultation supported by the GMCA, and the second was to help people understand and respond to the Bill of Rights consultation.

We have also started to work with Foxglove Legal on the development of Algorithmic Transparency consultation guidelines with public sector organisation within Greater Manchester as part of our Declaration for Responsible and Intelligent Data Practice programme.

### Financial stability

From September 1st 2021 to 31st August 2022, our turnover increased from £118,809 in the previous financial year to £163,387.

The organisation will continue to diversify its income given that a CIC aims to have a roughly 50:50 mix of commercial to grant funded income.