

**The Museum Group
10th Anniversary Conversations • Boston, 2006**

Conversation Topics and Hosts

Thursday 10:00 - 11:30 a.m.

April 27 The Boston Stories: So what? Does it matter?

**Hosts Anne Butterfield and Michael Spock, Senior Researcher,
Chapin Hall, University of Chicago.**

Boston Children's Museum was amazingly productive and often pacesetting in the 1960s, 70s and 80s. If the products were clear and exciting, the underlying processes were often obscure and the lessons learned unexamined. Will an examination of that work through first person stories, case studies and an accompanying DVD be inherently useful to the field? Will it illuminate some best practices? Could the approach be useful for building other collections or case studies in book, electronic or web format? Join us and share your thoughts and needs.

Thursday 12:30 - 2:00 p.m.

April 27 What Did You Do With What Steve Weil Taught You?

Hosts Gail Anderson and Elaine Heumann Gurian

The late Steve Weil taught many people using a number of vehicles. He was a great teacher, a fluent and articulate writer, and a wonderful friend who especially mentored gifted younger people. Because he wrote and taught so much, it is quite clear what he thought and wanted to be teaching, but there is no documentation on how people used what they had learned. If we are going to assess Steve's legacy then we will need to know what people in the profession did with the information, the style, and the kindness that Steve brought to us all.

Thursday 3:30 - 5:00 p.m.

April 27 Evolution - Presentation and Use of a Basic Scientific Theory in Museums

Hosts Robert "Mac" West, with Warren Allmon, Director, Paleontological Research Institute, Ithaca, New York; Emlyn Koster, Director, Liberty Science Center, Jersey City, New Jersey; and Ioannis Miaoulis, President and Director, Museum of Science, Boston.

The controversy involving evolution and Intelligent Design has impacted state and local school boards and classroom teachers in significant ways, consider the recent trial in Pennsylvania. It has affected museums in different ways as well. "Biblically Correct Tours" at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science, confrontations with gallery interpreters and docents, pickets at exhibition openings are just some examples.

Will museums continue to be affected, especially those with significant tax-base funding? Will there be pressure on funding sources including NSF and NEH as well as local governments? How can museums continue to present and use this fundamental scientific theory? How do museums reconcile themselves with the world of multiple religions with regard to questions of origins? Share with us your thoughts on this complex issue.

Friday 8:45 - 10:15 am.
April 28 The Museum/Community Disconnect: Can We Reverse the Trend?

Hosts Mary Kay Ingenthron and Mary Ellen Munley

As museums move toward adoption of businesslike indicators of success they struggle to achieve often unrealistic attendance and earned revenue goals. Failure to show impressive return on investment figures has museums in the spotlight of community scrutiny. Ironically, many community leaders ask for indicators of public value and place a higher priority on contributions to quality of life than on bottom-line performance when examining the role of museums in their community. Why this disconnect between what museums are providing and what communities want from their museums? How best can museums demonstrate their public value by being more fully engage with their communities, adopting new strategies for programming and service while meeting bottom line realities?

Friday Noon - 1:30 p.m.
April 29 Dreams Die Hard
Host Laura Roberts

When museum expansion or other ambitious projects fail, they bring down with them the hopes and dreams, as well as the wealth, wisdom and work of staff, boards, donors, politicians and communities. The downward spiral of financial crisis, finger-pointing and bad press seems unrelenting, further damaging the ailing institution and often other museums in the community or region. Inevitably, collections and valued programs are at risk.

Surely there are lessons to be drawn from these sad stories. All too often the warning signs were there, ignored in the heady mix of great ideas, strong egos, and civic boosterism. This conversation offers participants an opportunity to consider how museums can nurture sustainable growth. If things start to go wrong and the warning signs were there retrospectively, how can we learn to recognize them prospectively and act on them individually and collectively?

Friday 2:00 - 3:30 p.m.
April 28 Museums and Social Responsibility
Hosts Carol Bossert, Mary Ellen Munley, Anne Butterfield

Museum responses after tragic events such as 9/11 and hurricane Katrina show our capacity as institutions to minister to the needs of our communities. But how many institutions have integrated social responsibility into their strategic plans and day-to-day operations? Aren't museums, particularly those that are family focused, well-positioned to play catalytic roles in their communities to effect positive social change?

Join your colleagues to discuss these questions and identify internal and external factors that may be preventing museums from taking on a more central role in their communities.

Saturday 10:30 a.m. - Noon

April 29 The Balancing Act

Hosts Janet Kamien, David Ellis, Michael Spock

Does our romance with business models to run our institutions get in the way of our missions? The image of the fuddy-duddy museum trapped in the lost age of philanthropy for philanthropy's sake has been enlivened and transformed by liberal doses of business models and practices. But are all business models equally suited to our needs? Do we need models that are not solely based in the corporate world?

How can trustees whose leadership models are business-based understand the other over-arching mission and goals upon which our institutions are based? How can directors, especially those increasing numbers who themselves come from the corporate sector, keep the balance? While we have been dogged in learning business-speak, have we been able to teach our sponsors, trustees, and civic leaders mission-speak? Share your experiences and perspectives as we struggle with these questions.

Saturday 1:45 - 3:15 p.m.

April 29 Reimagining Museums as Corporate Creativity Gyms

Hosts Daryl Fischer and Rob Kret, Director, Hunter Museum of American Art

According to Business Week, "The Knowledge Economy as we know it is being eclipsed by the Creative Economy." (August 1, 2005) Its core competence? Creativity.

Successful corporations like GE and Proctor and Gamble have added creative directors to their executive ranks and are investing big money in infrastructure like "innovation gyms," where managers are trained in creative thinking. Institutions of higher education from Stanford to the University of Toronto are creating new business school programs in design thinking. Is there an opportunity for museums to play an active role in this kind of creative skill building? Could they use their collections to stimulate creative thinking on the part of corporate citizens? What kind of coaching and partnering would make museums into places where employees at all levels could flex their creative muscles? What would be the impact on their communities?

Saturday 3:30 - 5:00 p.m.

April 29 Fresh Air: Retelling the Outdoor Stories

Host Jane Clark Chermayeff

For many years we have tended to separate inside and outside interpretation, missing opportunities for a more integrated approach that can yield a sense of place and identity for future generations. How can we

make sure that historic site interpretation is both inside and outside and create that full sense of place? What types of expertise should we be drawing on? Who can be our partners? Have we created a needless dichotomy through the building vs. natural landscape approach to interpretation? What are the challenges to helping visitors experience cultural landscapes? What are strategies for creating interpretation that lies lightly on the landscape? What resources usually offer stories related to natural resources?