

Margaret Kadoyama

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## **Part II**

### **Creating a Community Involvement Action Plan**

Knowing the terms to use, the history, and other sectors working in community involvement, a museum is now ready to focus on the practical aspects of involving museums in communities, with suggested actions and processes. The first step is taking an internal look at the organization, where the reader will focus on learning about their museum and learning about themselves. The next step is learning about communities, creating a community profile, and creating a community involvement action plan.

#### **Overall Planning**

The goals of Part II are to give the reader some understanding and tools to begin developing a plan of action for involving the community with the museum. Community involvement plans are aligned with the museum's mission and overall strategic plan, if there is one.

In general, the focus is on *thinking strategically*, a process to help people make decisions. As the museum leadership and staff create the Community Involvement Action Plan, they will engage with fellow staff members to think about their answers to the following:

- What are our overall goals for this project? (including addressing how the project aligns with the museum's mission)
- Why do we want fuller involvement with the community?
- What do we specifically want to happen as a result of this project?
- Who will be responsible for managing/overseeing this project?
- What is the action plan (what strategies will we use to carry out this plan?)
- What resources will we need to accomplish this, and where will we get them?
- What is our timeline for this project, and for the overall work?
- How will we measure our results? How will we know whether we've accomplished our goals, what we said we wanted to do?
- What information do we need (about our internal environment and our external environment) in order to set realistic and achievable goals? This may include:
  - Who are our audiences?
  - What is our niche?
  - What do community members think about our programs and our museum?
  - Who are our allies?
  - What are the threats and/or barriers for this initiative?

When museum staff members think about and formulate answers for each of these questions, then they are approaching their work strategically, and it becomes more compelling because they can say, with conviction, "This is what we do, this is why we do it, and these are our results." The planners guide this process.

## Chapter 6

### Learning About the Museum and Learning About Oneself

Ellen Hirzy notes in Mastering Civic Engagement:

Museums that are fully and imaginatively engaged in community have dynamic, risk-taking boards and staff leaders; committed staff who bring civic-minded values to museum work; and the ability to contend with ambiguity, reinvent conventional approaches, and learn from failure. (American Association of Museums, 2002, p. 10).

#### Intention: Why Involve the Community?

From the many experiences and stories illustrating community-museum involvement, it is clear that the work of building *internal capacity* is the first step. This is one of the most critical lessons in this book – *it is essential to be clear about why the museum leadership and staff are doing this, what internal capacity is in place, and what additional internal capacity may be needed.*

The staff may be excited to be launching into a museum-community involvement initiative and want to jump right into learning about the community. It is critical to harness that enthusiasm and begin by planning.

#### Box 6.1 Key Questions

- What is your intention for engaging in a museum-community involvement initiative?
- Why do you want to have stronger relationships with people and organizations in your community?
- What do you hope will happen as you become more fully involved in your community?
- How does increased involvement with your community align with your organization's mission, vision and values?
- How do you plan to build your internal capacity, so that when you do begin to learn about your community, you have staff and capacity to act on what you learn?

As museum leadership and staff begin to build internal capacity, they will need to consider *\*why\** each step is taken. How does this specific action move the work forward? Each step one takes is a microcosm of modeling a new way to doing things – collaborative, built on trust and respect for one another.

A museum's community involvement work will be effective when the leadership and staff are *intentional* about what they do, and when the museum is *ready to engage fully*. Deepening the museum-community relationship requires a high level of trust among museum leadership, staff, and community members. Trust is developed in part through sharing authority; the museum's leadership and staff welcome community voices in the museum's programs and are included in the museum's day-to-day practice.

How will museum leadership and staff know if/when their museum is ready to be more fully involved with its community? Consider these questions:

- What *indicators* – signposts that reveal readiness to share authority – are in place? Document the indicators and describe why each one indicates a readiness to share authority. What does authentically sharing authority look like for the museum and the community?
- How do the museum's leadership and staff *demonstrate* readiness to share authority? What internal and external processes are in place support this readiness?
- How has the institution *prepared itself* to share decision-making? This is different, but related to, sharing authority. A shared decision-making process may well be a precursor to sharing authority, and it can be practiced and honed internally. What practices has the institution embedded that support shared decision-making? Is there institution-wide support for shared decision-making?
- What does it look like for the organization to authentically share power? Institution-wide conversations can reveal much about the readiness of an organization to share authority and power.

Effective community involvement happens more readily when a museum:

- ◆ *Is aware of perceived power differentials*  
Do the museum's leadership and staff understand how they are perceived in the community? Do they understand and value the perspective of each community stakeholder they are working with, regardless of whether they are associated with a large organization, a small organization, or are an individual stakeholder? How do they demonstrate that they value these perspectives? What are they doing to balance the power differentials?
- ◆ *Values and respects what every person and organization brings to the table*  
Do the museum's leadership and staff fully value the unique perspectives that community members and organizations bring to the table? Are they considered as assets – and not as issues, needs, or problems? Is each person's contributions valued and respected? How does the museum leadership and staff demonstrate that they value and respect community members' perspectives?
- ◆ *Shares authority*  
Do the museum leaders and community leaders have an equitable and balanced decision-making process, and is this clearly articulated? Are the roles of each person and organization clarified, and are they equitable? There is much more involved in shared authority, and these are early questions to address on the path to museum-community involvement.

Jeremy Liu, Senior Fellow for Arts, Culture, and Equitable Development at PolicyLink in Oakland, California, notes that there are museums, such as the Wing Luke Museum in Seattle, that do share power, and are core to the community's life and identity. *These museums act as an organizing mechanism for a community.* The power dynamic is vitally important. Institutions that receive hotel tax money from the public sector need to demonstrate commitment to community power and influence. Organizations need to understand, recognize, and embrace what influence and power they have. (J. Liu, personal communication, December 21, 2016).

### **Internal Capacity**

As museum leadership and staff begin to talk about the *intention* for increased involvement with their community, they will need to consider whether they have the internal capacity to more effectively involve their communities. This work is time-intensive, and requires sufficient staff time and energy to establish and nurture relationships over the long term. Is there enough staff bandwidth so that staff members can spend sufficient time in the community? This often means evenings and weekends – when neighborhood associations and other community groups meet, and it is important for museum staff to be present and active in these meetings. If the museum does not have sufficient staffing to accommodate this, it will need to move more slowly and on a smaller scale. Perhaps the leadership and staff can identify one or two people in their community to get to know better and nurture a relationship with them. As those relationships deepen, museum staff can slowly add more connections to develop and nurture.

### **Institutional Assessment**

The beginning of the journey to embrace community involvement starts with a consideration and analysis of intention and internal capacity. These are part of the institutional assessment process, which looks at all aspects of an organization and assesses each area according to a number of criteria. An *institutional assessment* is an important first step in creating a plan for community involvement. It is a picture of the institution, past and present.

In an institutional assessment, staff and leadership collect and analyze many types of detailed information from throughout the institution, including attendance data, store sales, membership data, grants received, number and types of exhibitions and programs, staffing, board composition, marketing data, and many other sources of information. Institutional assessments are an essential part of understanding an organization. They show what past and present practices are and what the future may hold. The internal organizational environment is not the only focus; institutional assessments also look at and describe the external environment.

In conducting an institutional assessment, staff and leadership look at many types of information, from the museum's website, past and current grant proposals and grant reports, past and present strategic plans, visitor research, members' surveys, etc. Through an institutional assessment, museum leadership and staff are able to identify internal barriers, and they may also indicate what needs to happen differently for the organization

to thrive. This is especially relevant as the museum seeks to become more fully involved with its communities.

When one is learning about their museum and conducting an institutional assessment, consider:

- What can be learned about an organization by reviewing its website? A website is often one of the first points of entry for someone to learn about the organization. What does your website say about you?
- What can be learned about an organization by reviewing its grant proposals? In a grant proposal, a museum presents its best self. What does the museum say about what matters to them?
- What can be learned about an organization by reviewing its attendance data? How does the museum collect this data, and what information do they collect? What is important for museum leadership and staff to know about the people who visit, and do the staff have the tools to collect and analyze this information?
- How do the museum leadership and staff think about audiences? How do they identify and describe current audiences, including audiences served onsite and offsite?
- What are the internal workings of the museum? As the museum leadership and staff begin to develop a community involvement action plan, they will need to know more about every aspect of the organization. Who should be involved in creating and providing information?
- How will the leadership and staff analyze the information that they collect about their organization? What will they look for? Why might that information be important?

The answers to each of these questions reveal a great deal about the organization. For example, if an organization's website includes information about the organization's processes, it indicates that this is a more transparent organization. Websites that invite people to become involved in those processes (not just how to become a member, but how to propose exhibitions and how to become part of a community advisory group) are indicators of more inclusive organizations. Websites that include extensive information for people with disabilities indicate more inclusive and welcoming organizations. Examples include the Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience, whose website includes descriptions of their community process, values, and principles; the San Francisco Public Library, whose website includes policies, guidelines and forms for proposing exhibitions and programs; and The Contemporary Jewish Museum, whose website includes programs and services available for a range of abilities.

A review of a museum's grant proposals reveals a great deal about what is important to a museum's leadership and staff at a particular moment in time. Proposals to fund specific projects indicate where the museum is focusing its energy, and what its intentions are. They reveal how strategic the museum is in its approach, and how well the leadership and staff articulate their goals and intended outcomes. Organizations that do not clearly articulate goals, strategies, and intended outcomes may be less structured or less linear in their approach. This does not mean that they are less effective in building relationships or involving their communities, but it does merit a deeper look into how the organization operates.

Reviewing attendance data reveals a number of things: How important is it to the organization to understand who attends? What information do they collect, and what do they do with this information? Do they regularly review and analyze this data, noting trends, raising questions about who is (and who is not) visiting, and considering how the answers to these questions impact their practice? Do they have the capacity and tools to collect additional information and use it to inform their practice? If they are collecting demographic information, what methods are they using, and are these appropriate? The answers to these questions provide an understanding of how nuanced the museum's understanding of its audiences are.

Reviewing the internal workings of the organization is a primary task, and it reveals a great deal about the organization overall. How inclusive is the internal culture of the organization? To what degree is community-focused work spread throughout the institution, and to what degree is it the responsibility of just one department? In conducting an institutional assessment, it is important to look at who is involved and who supports this work.

Planning for community involvement means identifying what makes one's organization unique, which is also part of the institutional assessment. A good place to begin a discussion about the museum's unique niche is to ask staff, board members, volunteers, community stakeholders, and members, "What do you consider to be the unique and distinctive characteristics of your museum?". This internal assessment process examines the museum's unique role in its community and establishes a foundation for strategic thinking about community involvement. When the museum's leadership and staff can articulate that – when they can say it in an expressive and significant way – they can communicate it effectively to their community. This will be an important part of the organization's community engagement.

The *Reinventing the Museum Tool*, from Gail Anderson's book *Reinventing the Museum: The Evolving Conversation on the Paradigm Shift*, helps frame the ideological shift in thinking over the past century.

Within an institution, an illuminating dialogue can unfold using the Reinventing the Museum Tool to discuss where a museum currently stands in the continuum between the traditional museum and the reinvented museum and where it wishes to be. Issues about relevancy, institutional vitality, and alignment with contemporary museum practice can be discussed relative to a specific institution. (Anderson, 2012, p. 2).

The tool uses carefully crafted terms organized under two headings – traditional and reinvented – grouped in relation to institutional values, governance, management strategies, and communication ideology. Anderson's point with this tool is to spotlight the differences as a trigger to encourage museum Boards and staff to examine their institutional stance in contemporary times. In conversation with Anderson, she pointed out that many museums have never had this level of institutional examination before and find it illuminating and meaningful to have such an open dialogue. Some institutions have realized they are more in agreement than previously thought, while others engage in a lively discussion over conflicting viewpoints. Further, Anderson points out, the goal isn't to be squarely in the reinvented column; rather the goal is to be honest about where an institution is today and where it would like to be. It is about honesty, institutional-

reflection, capacity, and attentiveness to what an institution says it does and what its true convictions are.

## REINVENTING THE MUSEUM TOOL

This tool is an excerpt from *Reinventing the Museum: The Evolving Conversation on the Paradigm Shift*, edited by Gail Anderson, + published by AltaMira Press in 2012. It is revised from the 2004 first edition.

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The **Reinventing the Museum Tool** captures the essence of the paradigm shift occurring in museums. The terms on the left depict the assumptions and values that capture traditional museums. The terms on the right illustrate the characteristics typical of the reinvented museum. Museum trustees and staff are encouraged to use this tool to clarify where a museum stands in the continuum between the traditional museum and the reinvented museum, and where it wishes to be. This can trigger discussions about relevancy, institutional vitality, and responsiveness appropriate to a changing world. Each museum will determine which qualities of its operation to retain and which new approaches to adopt in support of an intentional direction. This institutional reflection may trigger varying levels of change and transformation for a museum.

| <b>TRADITIONAL MUSEUM</b> | <b>Institutional Values</b> | <b>REINVENTED MUSEUM</b>     |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Values as ancillary       | .....                       | Values as core tenets        |
| Institutional viewpoint   | .....                       | Global perspective           |
| Insular society           | .....                       | Civic engagement             |
| Social activity           | .....                       | Social responsibility        |
| Collection-driven         | .....                       | Audience-focused             |
| Limited representation    | .....                       | Broad representation         |
| Internal perspective      | .....                       | Community participant        |
| Business as usual         | .....                       | Reflective practice          |
| Accepted realities        | .....                       | Culture of inquiry           |
| Voice of authority        | .....                       | Multiple viewpoints          |
| Information provider      | .....                       | Knowledge facilitator        |
| Individual roles          | .....                       | Collective accountability    |
| Focused on past           | .....                       | Relevant and forward looking |
| Reserved                  | .....                       | Compassionate                |

**TRADITIONAL MUSEUM**

**REINVENTED MUSEUM**

**Governance**

|                         |       |
|-------------------------|-------|
| Mission as document     | ..... |
| Exclusive               | ..... |
| Reactive                | ..... |
| Ethnocentric            | ..... |
| Internal focus          | ..... |
| Individual vision       | ..... |
| Single visionary leader | ..... |
| Obligatory oversight    | ..... |
| Assumed value           | ..... |
| Good intentions         | ..... |
| Private                 | ..... |
| Venerability            | ..... |
| Caretaker               | ..... |
| Managing                | ..... |
| Stability               | ..... |

|                       |
|-----------------------|
| Mission-driven        |
| Inclusive             |
| Proactive             |
| Multicultural         |
| Expansive perspective |
| Institutional vision  |
| Shared leadership     |
| Inspired investment   |
| Earned value          |
| Public accountability |
| Transparent           |
| Humility              |
| Steward               |
| Governing             |
| Sustainability        |

**Management Strategies**

|                             |       |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| Inwardly-driven             | ..... |
| Various activities          | ..... |
| Selling                     | ..... |
| Assumptions about audiences | ..... |
| Hierarchical structure      | ..... |
| Unilateral decision-making  | ..... |
| Limited access              | ..... |
| Segregated functions        | ..... |
| Compartmentalized goals     | ..... |
| Status quo                  | ..... |
| Fund development            | ..... |
| Individual work             | ..... |
| Static role                 | ..... |

|                            |
|----------------------------|
| Responsive to stakeholders |
| Strategic priorities       |
| Marketing                  |
| Knowledge about audiences  |
| Learning organization      |
| Collective decision-making |
| Open access                |
| Integrated operations      |
| Holistic, shared goals     |
| Informed risk-taking       |
| Entrepreneurial            |
| Collaboration              |
| Strategic positioning      |

**Communication Ideology**

|                        |       |
|------------------------|-------|
| Privileged information | ..... |
| Suppressed differences | ..... |
| Debate/discussion      | ..... |
| Enforced directives    | ..... |
| One-way communication  | ..... |
| Keeper of knowledge    | ..... |
| Presenting             | ..... |
| Two-dimensional        | ..... |
| Analog                 | ..... |
| Protective             | ..... |

|                        |
|------------------------|
| Accessible information |
| Welcomed differences   |
| Dialogue               |
| Interactive choices    |
| Two-way communication  |
| Exchange of knowledge  |
| Facilitating           |
| Multi-dimensional      |
| Virtual                |
| Welcoming              |

Focused institutional assessments are very useful in looking more deeply and intentionally at a specific area of a museum's operations. Shining a light on a particular realm of museum work reveals themes and information that may not become evident in a more general overview. In the story below, a project at the California Center for the Arts, Escondido Museum provided an opportunity to look with a focused lens at current and potential audiences.

### Stories from the Field: An Example of a Focused Institutional Assessment

In 2010, The California Center for the Arts, Escondido Museum (CCAIE) engaged in an audience development initiative to attract and serve adults ages 25 through 45. The Audience Development Project was intended to gather information about this specific target audience, analyze the information gathered, and create a list of recommendations to attract and serve this audience. The California Center for the Arts, Escondido includes a concert hall, theater, contemporary art museum, art and dance studios, and a conference center. The research process for the institutional assessment began with a preliminary analysis, with the intent to *benchmark* – to better understand where CCAIE was at the starting point for this study, where it had been, and how it arrived at this point in time, including past and present practices.

In conducting a focused institutional assessment, the audience research team had many questions and sought an extensive amount of information, in order to get as clear an understanding of the institution as possible. They requested the following information from the staff – information which would be used to inform the preliminary audience development assessment:

#### Audiences

- Information about visitors to the Museum (for the prior 2 years)  
Number of visitors, ages of visitors, where they come from (ZIP codes), ethnicity (if visitors voluntarily provided this information), group configurations (families with children, adult groups, etc.)
- Information about visitors/audiences at CCAIE overall (including the Concert Hall, Theater, studios, and Conference Center) (for the prior 2 years)  
Number of people, ages of audience members, where they come from (ZIP codes), ethnicity (if visitors voluntarily provided this information), group configurations (families with children, adult groups, etc.)
- Information about Museum members  
Membership categories, how many in each category, ZIP codes for each category, age and ethnicity of members (if members voluntarily provided this information)
- Information about current members at CCAIE (Concert Hall, Theater, studios, and Conference Center)  
Membership categories, how many in each category, ZIP codes for each category, age and ethnicity of members (if members voluntarily provided this information)
- Information about who participates in Museum programs  
Number of people who have attended programs in the prior 2 years (list by the different types of programs), ages of audience members, where they come from (ZIP codes),

ethnicity (if program participants voluntarily provided this information), whether the attendance at programs is increasing, staying the same, or decreasing

### Marketing

- Marketing budget
- Number of people on the marketing staff
- Skills, knowledge, and experiences with specific marketing techniques among the staff: There are many avenues for people to learn about events and programs in the community, and the more diverse skillsets the staff has, the more effective the organization will be in motivating people to engage with the organization. Knowing this information helps leadership and staff clarify the resources available to communicate with priority audiences.
- Brief description of marketing strategies
- Whether the museum sends electronic newsletters, and to whom
- Whether they collect names and email addresses at programs and events, and what they do with this information
- What they know about their website visitors, including how many people visit their website and how people use the website
- What social media they are active in and how they are collecting and using the data from their social media activities
- What marketing materials are printed, how are the printed materials distributed, and to whom are they sent
- A description of their relationships with journalists, bloggers, podcasters, and other people in the media
- Whether they have tracked where their visitors or program attendees hear about them, and what they have learned from this
- Whether they offer discount coupons, how they track redemption of these coupons, what the outcome of discount coupon programs has been, whether the effort has been sustained and how the discount coupons have been publicized

### Outreach/Specific Audiences

Description of any past efforts to engage with specific audiences

- When the specific outreach activities occurred
- Description of the specific priority audience
- Outcome of each outreach effort, whether it has been sustained, why it has or has not been sustained, and what museum staff and leadership have learned from the experience

Description of any community partnership projects

- Which organizations, and why the museum partnered with those specific organizations
- When the partnership projects were initiated, whether they have continued, and whether they are sustainable
- Assessment of how strong the relationships with the community organizations are, and whether museum staff and leadership continue to keep in touch with the organizations, even if the specific project ended

### Focus Geographic Area

Description of the priority geographic area for this project

- Whether the priority geographic area is residential, mixed business/residential
- Description of the demographics of the residents of this area (average age, household income, number of households with children under 18, race and ethnicity, etc.)
- Description of the community groups in this geographic area that serve the museum's priority audience

### Programs

Description of the programs offered by the museum currently

- Description of other programs offered in the past four years
- Description of the priority audience for each current program
  - Number of participants in programs for the priority audiences
  - Description of past programs for the priority audiences, including their current status, whether they were discontinued, and if so, why they were discontinued
  - Description of whether the museum worked with any community groups in planning/publicizing past program for priority audiences

### Additional information requested

- Any previous visitor studies and previous program evaluations for the Museum and for the Center
- Grant proposal narratives about the museum and its audiences
- Brochures about the museum and its programs
- Annual reports
- Visitor comments
- Information about the community

The information requested by the audience research team was extensive and may have looked overwhelming at first, but it provided an in-depth understanding of the organization at the beginning of the project. This illustrates how a focused institutional assessment can be a useful tool in planning for community involvement. In the case of CCAE, it provided a baseline picture of the organization and its practices to date, allowing the audience research team to understand much more about the CCAE Museum's internal and external work. The focused institutional assessment revealed key findings about the Museum's history and its interactions with its various constituencies, public awareness and public perception of the museum, its relationship with the City of Escondido, and the ways in which other arts organizations are serving CCAE's priority audiences. It also revealed key findings about the internal practices of the museum, including marketing goals and plans, an overview of the number of exhibitions and related attendance, an overview of the museum's audiences and programs, and a description of the museum's community partnerships. Taken together, these findings brought to light several primary issues and questions that would be explored further through a survey. These included questions about the primary aspects that are important in making decisions about activities and what barriers and constraints might stop young people from visiting the Museum. The focused preliminary assessment of the institution also provided suggestions in how to more precisely consider priority audiences, how to leverage current programs, and how to consider community partnerships.

Continual learning about one's organization can lead to profound changes, as is shown in the following examples from the Oakland Museum of California and the Arab American National Museum.

### Stories from the field: Oakland Museum of California (OMCA)

The Oakland Museum of California, a multidisciplinary museum highlighting the art, history, and natural science of California, is deeply engaged in community work and exemplifies best practice in significant ways. Chapter 5 shared the perspective of Jeremy Liu from PolicyLink, about OMCA. Kelly McKinley, OMCA Deputy Director, describes how the Museum is considering and engaging its community, and how OMCA is looking internally, as well as externally, focusing on its impact in the community. McKinley notes that this is not a straight path, and it takes time, commitment, and work:

Our work in community engagement really started in earnest just over ten years ago with the arrival of Lori Fogarty as the Museum's Director and CEO. We started by asking, "What does it mean to be a visitor-centered museum?" Guided by intense community consultation, evaluation and prototyping, we spent the next several years reimagining the visitor experience across all of our galleries and incorporating the stories, voices and input of Oakland residents and organizations. We then asked "What does it mean to be a great neighbor?"- a question that took us and our programming outside of our four walls, meeting and talking to neighbors at community events and festivals. Now our question is "What does it mean to be an institution *in service to the people of Oakland*?" We are exploring what constitutes the real and demonstrable impact we can have on the quality of life and wellbeing of residents in this city.

In the last two years we have come to terms with the fact that to be a great museum that serves the whole state, we need to be a great Oakland museum first. So we have been focusing on community engagement and audience development in a hyper local way. We focus on lifting up the stories of the people but in a way that connects to issues and ideas that affect people across the state and even the nation. We need to be a beloved Oakland institution before we can even begin being connected and relevant to the rest of the state. We have focused our "playing field" to precisely 44 ZIP codes – the ZIP codes of people who live in the East Bay and under an hour's drive to the museum. Imagine concentric circles: There are 44 ZIP codes in the biggest circle, 22 ZIP codes in the next one in, and 4 ZIP codes in the circle immediately around the museum. These are the most economically disadvantaged and under-resourced communities in Oakland – Fruitvale, West Oakland, Chinatown, and Downtown. We are focusing on each of these circles in very particular ways.

As we think more about the ways we serve our community, we are also thinking more about the ways we operate as part of an ecosystem of organizations that serve the wellbeing of Oakland residents. What does it mean for us, in conjunction with all the other civic and non-profit organizations, to work together to make living in Oakland better for all people?" What is, ultimately, our desired social impact? What precisely is the difference we make in the lives of citizens? What is our unique contribution to the social wellbeing? How might

we think about our unique contribution amplified and complemented by the contributions of other organizations that occupy our civic ecosystem? We are working with a consultant from PolicyLink here in Oakland who is helping us to hone in on what we can uniquely claim as our contribution, our impact.

Starting about a year ago, we began to work out our Theory of Change, working with a basic logic model: We do these kinds of activities, which generate these kinds of outputs or programs, which have these kinds of outcomes for people, with this kind of ultimate impact in the community. We are trying to chart a pathway to change. That was our first step to being much more intentional about a change agenda and achieving demonstrable social impact.

In addition to creating a road map, we have been growing our internal capacity to engage with community in new ways through cultural competency training with multiple cohorts of staff, across all levels of the organization. We have worked with an Oakland-based group called Leaderspring to build the techniques, skills and understanding to connect with the diversity of people living in Oakland to build a more relevant, equitable and inclusive organization. For example, this training has required us to examine our privilege as individuals and as an organization – more precisely, to examine the privilege of occupying seven acres of land in the heart of the city, with beautiful gardens, extensive real estate and vast collections of our cultural, natural and artistic heritage. All of those assets are things we can bring to the table in new ways to serve our community needs and interests. We are about to embark on a major fundraising campaign, and one of the cornerstones of that campaign is reimagining our gardens and campus – how we might “break the box” of the walled museum and create a public square - a place for gathering and connecting with our neighbors, the City and Lake Merritt.

We are also engaged in a series of conversations grappling with what relevance means. For us, it’s about convening people in conversation about ideas that matter. Doing that requires us to adopt a different stance as an organization – to take a stand and not shy away from difficult, messy topics. Through our cultural competency work, we understand that there’s a role for us to play in addressing issues of exclusion and race, and creating opportunities for people to have a greater sense of connection, not just to their community, but to people in their city, their neighbors. What that means is a different kind of exhibition program and a different kind of public program – programs that connect the stories of our past to our present, to equip and inspire people to more actively imagine a different kind of future for themselves, their families and their communities. Case in point are two exhibitions from our 2016/17 exhibition calendar: *Altered State: Marijuana in California* and *All Power to the People: Black Panthers at 50*. These were two very different kinds of exhibitions and experiences for our visitors but they both were conceived and designed to serve as a platform for people to come together to explore issues that have shaped and are shaping who we are as a community, to explore perspectives different from their own. All these things are connected. It hasn’t been a straight path.

One example is how we develop exhibitions. Even though the museum has worked in a highly collaborative way for a very long time, it was still understood as a curatorial-led

project. Now we are looking at how we make room for different kinds of leadership and conversations. How can we harness dissonance or disagreement productively toward achieving our goals? How can we give the staff language to voice concerns or critiques in a way that doesn't feel personal? These are skills and situations that will support the important and difficult work we need to do to change as an organization. We are also making community engagement part of everybody's job. Much of the work I'm describing here has been supported through the Irvine Foundation's New California Arts Fund.

We are looking deeply at impact in the community and in the museum. A great example is the story of the development of our exhibition *Altered State: Marijuana in California*. We were working with Kathy McLean who is an expert in prototyping exhibition ideas. On one of our Friday Night events we covered all the walls of the café with butcher paper, and wrote and drew our ideas for the exhibition. We invited our Friday Night attendees to join us and let us know what they thought. We were happily surprised at the length of time people spent with our roughly collaged and Sharpie diagrammed content ideas, many in excess of an hour! We found people eager to share their ideas and perspectives on the direction of the show both in writing, drawings and, most significantly, in conversation with staff. Kathy McLean said, in all of her decades of prototyping, that she had never seen engagement and conversation at such a high level. What is causing this engagement? How can we describe what's happening for visitors, and how might we measure it? Figuring this out will be key to achieving our social impact goals and sustaining our organization.

At OMCA, community engagement means all the ways that people come to be in contact and conversation with us. We often talk about the Three Cs – our framework for understanding the spectrum of ways that we engage community in creating experiences at the Museum. The Three Cs are contributing ideas and voice, collaborating with us in a focused way, such as in a task force or an advisory committee, and co-creation where we make things together with community.

Community engagement is part of everybody's job. It is one of our four institutional values, and it's at the top of every job description. Community engagement is a priority in our strategic plan, and annual departmental and individual goals are designed to support those priorities. We also offer staff opportunities to volunteer in the community on paid time, so there is a whole spectrum for ways that people can be involved. We have been surveying the whole staff on an annual basis to track their understanding of and commitment to community engagement over the years. Much of our staff training is designed around community engagement, and every staff meeting includes a segment on community engagement.

We need to be able to articulate our value and our impact in a way that people in other sectors can understand. Doing so will enable us to partner with greater clarity and efficiency to achieve and amplify our goals and impact. Doing so will enable us to bring new kinds of partners and investors to the table and the cause. (K. McKinley, personal communication, April 8, 2016).

OMCA is an excellent example of an organization that is committed to learning and adapting as it strives to involve its community more extensively. Among the most significant questions that McKinley asks are, *“What does it mean for us, in conjunction with all the other civic and non-profit organizations, to work together to make living in Oakland better for all people? What is, ultimately, our desired social impact? What precisely is the difference we make in the lives of citizens? What is our unique contribution to the social wellbeing? How might we think about our unique contribution amplified and complemented by the contributions of other organizations that occupy our civic ecosystem?”* McKinley acknowledges the deep internal questioning about OMCA’s role in the ecosystem of Oakland’s civic and non-profit organizations, and the value of using a theory of change model to frame these questions and articulate the museum’s social impact. For OMCA, this focus has intensified in the last two to three years, and it is enabling the museum to make significant changes in its internal operations.

A noteworthy change that OMCA is making in its internal operations is through cultural competency training. This is enabling the staff to embrace a culturally competent stance in all their work. The University of Kansas’s Work Group for Community Health and Development Community Tool Box notes, “A culturally competent organization brings together knowledge about different groups of people -- and transforms it into standards, policies, and practices that make everything work.” It further notes that the five principles of cultural competency are valuing diversity, conducting cultural self-assessment, understanding the dynamics of difference, institutionalizing cultural knowledge, and adapting to diversity. (University of Kansas Work Group for Community Health and Development Community Tool Box. Section 7. Building Culturally Competent Organizations.) With this training and support, OMCA staff are increasingly able to learn and incorporate the attributes of cultural competency noted above, acknowledge the complexity of cultural identity, examine their privilege, and become more able to recognize the dynamics of power.

It is important to note that community involvement is not a brand new area of interest for OMCA, but a continuation and intensification of the museum’s focus on community. Working with organizations such as PolicyLink and Leaderspring is providing OMCA with the tools and skills to embed community involvement deeply in the organization. It will be very interesting to hear more from the other civic and non-profit organizations that are part of OMCA’s civic ecosystem as time goes on, to more clearly see how this vision and theory of change materializes over a number of years.

The Arab American National Museum, like the Oakland Museum of California, is committed to learning and adapting as it strives to serve its community more extensively and courageously address its challenges.

#### Stories from the Field: Arab American National Museum

The Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, Michigan brings the voices and faces of Arab Americans to many audiences. The Museum is committed to dispelling misconceptions about Arab Americans, and it is deeply involved in community work. According to Devon Akmon, director of the museum, leaders can sustain a strong community-focused culture at their museums through commitment to working with the community and building trust. Akmon notes

that this deep commitment changes the entire approach of an institution, and it must be a shared vision, done collaboratively.

The museum's focus on community started from its inception. The museum opened in May 2005, and while it was being developed, the founding director, Dr. Anan Ameri, traveled the country, engaging with Arab American communities, asking them, "What would you like to see in a museum? What would our nation's first and only museum dedicated to our culture look like?" As Akmon notes, "That was the true formation of our DNA, and I think that the most important aspect of that is ongoing engagement at all levels and at all times with our community, trying to be truly responsive to the needs of our community." (D. Akmon, personal communication, August 31, 2016).

These stories illustrate how museums are deeply engaged in reflecting on themselves as organizations. They illustrate how leaders recognize the attributes that are components of success. These attributes will be explored more thoroughly below, but it is appropriate to provide a short description of the leadership attributes that support community work here: flexibility, being open to and supportive of a creative, iterative process, supportive of experimentation and knowing that sometimes things won't work the way one thought they would, patience, and commitment for the long term – in short, creating a supportive environment for one's community focus to grow and evolve.

### **Learning About Oneself: Key Attributes and Skills that Support Community Involvement**

As the leadership and staff are learning about their museum and the attributes that support organizational community involvement, they will learn about the people who make up the museum—the staff, board, volunteers, members, visitors, and other stakeholders. They will also learn about their own individual characteristics, and that is a crucial part of this process. Leadership and staff will learn about their own attributes, and identify the skills and attributes that are critical to effective community involvement. They will consider and connect with their own core competencies, knowing themselves and what they each do well. As they do this, they will be able to identify additional competencies, attributes, and skills that they need to add personally and to their staff, and they will be able to play to their strengths. The attributes and skills explored here will help to connect in vital ways with one's communities, external and internal.

#### Examining and Paying Attention to One's Assumptions

As noted in Chapter Three, Peter Block's *Community: The Structure of Belonging* examines notions of "the other." When someone perceives another person as fundamentally different from oneself, they do not see the connections that bind, and they don't have empathy. The attribute that helps one understand oneself is the ability to look at one's own pre-conceived ideas, and pay attention to one's own assumptions and unconscious biases. Self-reflection is the key – when a person is able to articulate their own assumptions, they are able to understand how those assumptions influence what they think and how they approach their work. For example, do they assume that the people who live in a particular neighborhood are low-income? Is there an assumption that a particular community is primarily interested in exhibitions that relate to their

cultures or backgrounds and not to anything else that the museum has to offer? How do those assumptions affect the actions before, during, and after an exhibition that may have particular interest for a specific community? Do the staff and leadership make connections with members of this community before and during the run of this exhibition, then stop connecting with them after the exhibition closes, assuming that they aren't interested in other things that the museum does? When someone assumes something, they reduce the opportunity to connect deeply and learn whole-heartedly.

Paying attention to and articulating one's assumptions is a skill that is used in planning, as well. It is an integral part of theory of change and strategic planning processes. When staff members and leadership articulate their assumptions, they explain why they think the proposed actions will bring about the specific outcome. It also helps people plan effective research and evaluation strategies. When staff and leadership are in the process of learning about a community, acknowledging their assumptions helps them to develop evaluation strategies that diminish the biases these assumptions may bring to the study. As an example, perhaps the staff is interested in learning more about the people who are residents of senior communities in their town, so that they can work more closely with them to provide services. What assumptions are staff members making about the seniors? Are there nuances about cultural groups that they need to know?

Understanding one's unconscious biases is especially challenging – how can a person pay attention to something if they are not conscious of it? Unconscious biases are a much deeper level of assumption, and impact how someone feels, thinks, and behaves. It is relevant to bring it up in this context because unconscious biases may affect how museum staff and leadership do their work. See the Fear and Courage section below for additional perspective.

### Wholeheartedness

Among the most important attributes needed to support community involvement is wholeheartedness – being sincere, fully committed, and embracing all the emotions one has when one opens their heart to others. When one is wholehearted, one is also vulnerable. Wholeheartedness means caring deeply about what one is doing, being willing to be vulnerable as well as to do things differently. When one is wholehearted in community, one feels that the connections they make with others are necessary and core aspects of their life and work.

Wholeheartedness requires fully believing that one's connections and relationships are vital to their health, not only as an individual, but also as a community and organization. Dr. Parker Palmer, founder of the Center for Courage & Renewal, identifies pillars for living fully and wholeheartedly:

Be passionate about some part of the natural and/or human worlds and take risks on its behalf, no matter how vulnerable they make you. Offer yourself to the world — your energies, your gifts, your visions, your heart — with open-hearted generosity. But understand that when you live that way you will soon learn how little you know and how easy it is to fail.

As you integrate ignorance and failure into your knowledge and success, do the same with all the alien parts of yourself. Take everything that's bright and beautiful in you and

introduce it to the shadow side of yourself. Let your altruism meet your egotism, let your generosity meet your greed, let your joy meet your grief. Everyone has a shadow... But when you are able to say, "I am all of the above, my shadow as well as my light," the shadow's power is put in service of the good. Wholeness is the goal, but wholeness does not mean perfection, it means embracing brokenness as an integral part of your life.

As you welcome whatever you find alien within yourself, extend that same welcome to whatever you find alien in the outer world. I don't know any virtue more important these days than hospitality to the stranger, to those we perceive as "other" than us. (Palmer, May 20, 2015).

Palmer's description captures the essence of wholeheartedness, a core attribute of authentic and meaningful connection.

### Humility

"It is unwise to be too sure of one's own wisdom. It is healthy to be reminded that the strongest might weaken and the wisest might err."

— Mahatma Gandhi

Humility acknowledges that everyone has a distinct and valued point of view, and the collective points of views are empowering. In many cases others are more authentic and appropriate to speak to an issue. Humility means believing and acknowledging that "I am not the most important person." When someone embraces humility, they let go of ego and focus on others.

Humility plays out in a variety of ways, and relationships with community members can be significantly affected by others' perceptions of one's humility. When someone thinks about themselves, do they consider themselves knowledgeable, experienced, and with important perspectives to bring to their relationships and community partnerships? Does this concept affect how they present themselves? Might they come across as being the expert? If so, then they are not exhibiting humility, and those with whom they are interested in working may not want to work with them. If it seems that someone thinks of themselves as knowledgeable, it could well also seem as though they do not truly acknowledge and value the knowledge, perspectives, wisdom, experiences, and expertise of those with whom they want to connect.

We learn humility from world leaders such as Nelson Mandela, "There is a universal respect and even admiration for those who are humble and simple by nature, and who have absolute confidence in all human beings irrespective of their social status."

Humility does not mean that someone does not have self-confidence. They may well be knowledgeable, experienced, and have important perspectives to bring to their relationships and community partnerships. It is the way one communicates that is important. Humility is expressed when the people with whom one is connecting feel that they are being honored and valued for their knowledge, perspectives, wisdom, experiences, and expertise.

### Fear and Courage

Museum leadership and staff may be apprehensive about reaching out, getting to know people, and developing relationships with people who they perceive as different from themselves. When someone embraces humility and vulnerability, they enter into discomfort. People are often afraid – afraid of getting their feelings hurt, afraid of saying the wrong thing, afraid of saying something insensitive – or worse, saying something offensive. How can people be sensitive to others, but not be overly sensitive and afraid of having their feelings hurt? This requires courage: to be afraid of something, and doing it anyway.

Museum leaders and staff may be fearful of meeting with resistance from community members, of having their intentions questioned by community members. They may fear that their efforts will be met with skepticism, especially if they are not already part of a particular community. In actuality, museum practitioners who are deeply engaged in museum-community involvement indicate that there may have been a few relationships that were initially met with skepticism, but *their commitment to the relationship* meant that over time, this skepticism disappeared and the relationships developed and flourished. Their wholehearted commitment meant that their connection didn't come across as arrogance, insensitivity, or tokenism.

### Patience and Tenacity

Patience is an attribute that is particularly effective in museum-community work. Change takes time, and patience supports an individual's ability to sustain that change. According to Earl Lewis, President of the Andrew Mellon Foundation, speaking during the *Diversity: From Talk to Action* session at the American Alliance of Museums Annual Meeting in May 2016, staying the course over an extended period of time yields results that would not be possible if the program were to end earlier. The Andrew Mellon Foundation's Fellowship program, the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Program, has existed for over twenty five years. Lewis notes that if the Fellowship program had ended after ten or fifteen years, its impact would have been very different; the Fellowship has had a compounding effect over those twenty five years, building a pipeline which would not exist if the program had ended earlier. (Lewis, May 2016).

It is sometimes a struggle to be patient, to let things play out over the long term and in their own time. A person may want to take specific action steps to get something done, but developing relationships and involving community are ongoing. There is no ending date on these processes, and to approach work with an end in mind makes it harder to be patient. Patience means letting go of the urgency to adhere to a specific timeline and letting go of the sense that a specific action has to take place by a specific date.

Practicing patience means letting things unfold in ways that may not be clear at the outset. For example, staff members from a museum may be working on a collaborative project with community members. Perhaps this team meets once a week over a number of months; many of the conversations are about what the team might want to do, or what they could do. The focus over these months is on talking, listening, and exploring possible ideas. It is not focused on reaching a decision and creating an action plan to implement that decision. For someone who is focused more on action, practicing patience in this scenario may be looking at what they can do to assist this group process. Perhaps they can take notes during each meeting and share these with all the participants. Practicing patience means stepping back and finding what one can do to assist the group without being the driving force.

One aspect of patience bears special note: recognizing when it is more appropriate to work from the background, and to foreground other voices and other perspectives. This is when acknowledgement of privilege means consciously staying in the background, opening the space for other voices and perspectives to be more visible and foregrounded. Privilege, and how it impacts museum-community work, is explored more thoroughly later in this chapter and in Chapters 2 and 3.

### Empathy

In Chapter 1, empathy – the ability to understand and share the feelings of another – was described as a core value embedded in the life and work of museums deeply involved in their communities, and it is an attribute of community-centered museums. Museum staff members who practice empathy focus not only on their own thoughts and feelings, but on understanding the thoughts and feelings of others. This approach is described by The Empathic Museum:

The qualities of 21st century museums are impossible without an inner core of institutional empathy: the intention of the museum to be, and be perceived as, deeply connected with its community.

[J]ust as empathetic individuals must have a clear sense of their own identities in order to perceive and respond effectively to the experience of others, the empathetic museum must have a clear vision of its role as a public institution within its community. From this vision flow process and policy decisions about every aspect of the museum - audience, staffing, collections, exhibitions and programming, social media, emergency responses - all the ways in which a museum engages with its community(ies). (The Empathetic Museum, n.d.).

In practice, empathy may be expressed in a number of ways. When museum staff members are interested in connecting with community members, they research possible ways to connect and find that there are neighborhood groups and associations that meet on a regular basis. Museum staff members contact the neighborhood association organizers and are told that they are more than welcome to attend the next meeting, and a couple of staff members do so. While they are there, they listen to the concerns of the neighbors, and gain a greater understanding of some of the neighbors' concerns and interests. Empathy in this instance helps the staff better understand the interests, concerns, and perspectives of others. It means that the staff members listen to the neighbors' concerns with openness, leading to their greater understanding of those concerns.

### The Ability to Truly Listen

Truly listening is at the core of one's work with internal and external communities. How does one know when they are truly listening, and how do they develop and practice this skill?

Specialists in this area include Sondra Thiederman, Ph.D. (Engaged Listening), Transforming Violence (Eloquent Listening), and Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche (True Listening: Dharma Teaching). These specialists focus on respecting and valuing others – important aspects of all one's relationships. They note that when one truly listens, they:

- Attend – They focus on what the person is saying, not on what they will say in response. They turn their phones to silent, and put them away. They don't pick them up, even to check messages, until the conversation is finished.
- Acknowledge their own assumptions. Assumptions create a filter, making it more difficult to hear the intentions of the speaker.
- Value and enjoy a diversity of perspectives
- Have a genuine desire to learn about someone
- Seek to understand the content and the feeling of the message
- Are patient – they let the speaker develop their ideas. Even if they think they know where the speaker is going, true listening means that one is not in the driver's seat – the speaker is.
- Empathize
- Assume the other person has valuable things to offer
- Ask clarifying questions – “Tell me more.” When one asks someone to tell them more, it lets the person know that they are paying attention and want to understand more fully.
- Ask the person one is with, “What questions do you want to be asked?” This provides a welcoming, open-hearted invitation for the person to say what's important to them, and to let them know that one truly want to know.

(Thiederman, 2014; Transforming Violence, n.d.; Rinpoche, March 16, 2015).

Examining these concepts reveals why they are important aspects of true listening. *Attending* also means paying attention and removing distractions. *Acknowledging one's own assumptions* helps the listener to recognize their assumptions, and intentionally set them aside. For example, a listener might assume that the speaker will be very interested in collaborating with them. This assumption might lead to misunderstandings, which in turn would hamper the process of building a trusting relationship. Setting aside expectations and assumptions helps a listener to hear and understand more clearly. *Valuing a diversity of perspectives* also includes appreciating what each speaker brings to the table. When a listener values the diverse perspectives of a speaker, they listen more openly. This does not necessarily mean that they agree with everything the speaker says, but it does mean that they value the speaker's perspective. *Having a genuine desire to learn about someone* is an aspect of wholeheartedness.

One way to embrace this is to remember a time when someone truly listened to you and remember how it felt that the listener was really paying attention. They were engaged with what you were trying to communicate. That sense of value is what museum leadership and staff strive to bring to their relationships. True listening is a skill that facilitates relationships internally – with one's staff, board, and volunteers – and externally, with one's communities. When someone truly listens, they let the other person know that they value their perspective and their time together, and that what they say matters.

True listening means preparing the way to be fully engaged in a conversation. Distractions abound, for the listener and their conversation partner. A listener can set the scene for effective communication by asking, “Is now a good time to talk?” This signals the other person that one

would like to engage in a meaningful conversation, one where both people are focused and paying attention.

The tenets of dialogue provide a framework through which to understand and practice true listening. A dialogue is a focused and intentional conversation, not a discussion or a debate, and it is guided by a set of principles:

- Seek to learn
- Suspend assumptions
- Speak from your own individual perspective and experience
- Suspend judgement – listen without judging
- Honor confidentiality
- Listen for understanding
- Ask clarifying and open-ended questions
- Honor silence and time for reflection
- One person speaks at a time

(Lindah, n.d., adapted from United Religions Initiative).

True listening takes practice. When it is done wholeheartedly, the listener will see their relationships deepen and grow over the long term. And that is at the core of museums creating strong connections with their communities.

### Paying attention

Paying attention is related to true listening in that it means focusing – reducing or eliminating distractions, so that one is present and focused. When a person is paying attention, they are *attending to* someone or something, and they are more fully aware. They are able to perceive and understand the nuances of the experience. When one is with other people and paying attention, they notice more. What are their companions' voices like? What is their body language saying? When one is paying attention to their surroundings, they will notice more. What is it like walking through different neighborhoods? Are there any parks? Where are they? What do the schools look like? Does it look like this neighborhood has many or few resources? The more one pays attention, the less they will operate on auto-pilot, and the more they will learn.

### Being an ally/accomplice

The core of this work is developing and nurturing trusting relationships person-to-person, and expanding those relationships so that one's organization is infused with many trusting relationships with community members, stakeholders, and organizations. How do museum staff and leadership build that trust? By having all of the attributes listed above, and by being an ally/accomplice. Much has been written in recent years about what being an ally or accomplice entails, including posts and articles published by Everyday Democracy, Racial Equity Tools, Colorlines, and others.

In 2014, video blogger Franchesca Ramsey outlined five tips for how to be an ally: understand your privilege; listen and do your homework; speak up, not over; apologize when you make mistakes, and do the work. (Ramsey, November 22, 2014). A number of these tips relate to attributes already described above, and provide succinct ways to practice them in daily life. In

other words, an ally works with people, with humility. An ally asks, “How can I be helpful to you?”

### Considerations for Staffing

In addition to learning about oneself and the skills and attributes that facilitate community involvement, museum leadership will also want to consider the skills and attributes that are critical to effective community involvement *within the organization*, among the staff and volunteers. Some of these skills and attributes were discussed in Chapter 1’s focus on core values. These include respect, empathy, and true listening. Others were discussed earlier in this chapter – wholeheartedness, humility, and courage. Additional skills and attributes that are important for overall community involvement include:

- Following through

When staff and volunteers at one’s organization connect with community members, perhaps to learn more about the community, perhaps to begin talking about the possibility of partnering on a project, following through is an aspect that can make or break a project. It is related to the attributes patience and tenacity already discussed, but there are some differences. It means being thorough – paying attention to the details and acting on them. Who needs to be contacted, and what does one need to do to make sure that everyone is notified/invited/welcomed? What questions are asked, how does one find out the answers, and how does one communicate those answers to the appropriate people? How does one think through the details of their time together, and create an atmosphere of trust? What can one do to let people know that they have been heard, that one is paying attention and following through?

- Being present

This attribute is about the courage to go into the community and listen, many times – to be present. It is like true listening and paying attention, but it also includes the act of being physically present in the community. An example from the Grace Hudson Museum & Sun House in Ukiah, California illustrates this: In March 2008, the Grace Hudson Museum & Sun House was hosting the exhibition *Sing Me Your Story, Dance Me Home: Art and Poetry from Native California*. The exhibition, organized by the California Exhibition Resources Alliance (now known as Exhibit Envoy), included works by more than thirty California Indian artists and poets exploring themes of family history, cultural heritage, and contemporary life. The Museum’s Executive Director Sherri Smith-Ferri and her staff planned a series of programs to accompany the exhibition. One program was a panel discussion on Life, Learning and Education, moderated by Malcolm Margolin and including Frank LaPena, Julia Parker, Sylvia Ross, L. Frank Manriquez, and Dugan Aguilar as participants. Part of the conversation focused on talking about how Margolin, the publisher of Heyday Books, was always present at local Native events. The trust that was built over time was palpable. As Theresa Harlan, who curated the exhibition, notes,

As a former exhibitions director at the San Francisco-based American Indian Contemporary Arts (AICA) gallery, I still remember the way Malcolm Margolin established a relationship with AICA. He became a constant attendee at our events and eventually became a long-time friend. Malcolm approached us and told us he thought our work was wonderful and wanted to know more about us as an organization. As he became a familiar face, our exchange of information increased and we discovered we shared a

wide California Native network. He didn't approach us with an agenda or immediate need. (Smith Kliebe, ed., 2010, p. 3).

This commitment to being present, to showing up, is illustrated in many of the stories in this book and in the day-to-day lives of exemplary museum leadership and staff.

- Implementing these skills and attributes in work situations

The skills and attributes described above have immediate application in work situations. When one is meeting with community members, welcome and invite ideas, thoughts, and perspectives from all. Turn to each person and ask what they think. Sum up the discussion, making sure that everyone understands what each person will do and when. Be willing and committed to spend the time and resources needed over the long term. Be intentional – choose to connect, choose to be authentic. Be open and ready to engage, and be accountable.

How does one sustain a community focus throughout? Much depends on who someone is at their core, and what values their organization collectively holds. Staffing with a community focus is especially effective when done with community organizers – people who understand and have experience with grassroots organizations and organizing community members. Community organizers have on-the-ground expertise in bringing people together for a purpose. That purpose might be to develop and build a neighborhood playground, or to organize people to protest, with the intention of influencing policy and practice. For the museums that embrace and do this, the impacts – internally and externally – are far-reaching.

The Queens Museum in New York has been hiring community organizers for many years. Prerana Reddy, Director of Public Programs & Community Engagement, shares more about this:

We have been trying to focus on things that are meaningful for our neighborhood. We have a process of dialogue and a process of listening, talking with community members and asking questions – “What is a museum? What kinds of things do community members want?” We’re looking not just at the museum itself, but how the museum can be in community spaces, such as libraries, community-based organizations, and other places where people already go. We asked, “What are the changes the community would like to see? What assets and networks could the museum bring to bear on this?” We wanted to hire a community organizer, someone familiar with the neighborhood, who could find out what community members are already doing or wanted to be doing.

When Tom Finkelparl came on as director in 2002, he was very interested in how to create this bridge with the community. He created a new department whose goal would be to generate collaborative programming, and hired community activists as museum staff. Sometimes, community activists didn't already have knowledge about contemporary art, so we provided this training. The Museum has continued to hire people with various experiences and backgrounds beyond art history or arts administration. At the Queens Museum, community work is everybody's job, not just those with “community” in their title. Experimentation is supported, with the idea that we'll figure it out together. We have a sense of safety here. (P. Reddy, personal communication, October 1, 2015).

In seeking to hire staff experienced in community organizing, the Queens Museum demonstrates that they value the expertise that community organizers bring to the table. This expertise, and the perspectives that community organizers nurture within the institution, have had an impact over many years. As Reddy notes, embedding community throughout the institution is demonstrated by (and accompanied by) a sense of experimentation and safety. All these elements – valuing community organizing expertise, a sense of experimentation, and a sense of safety – are attributes of a flexible and community-engaged organization. In Chapter 10, the reader will see a specific example of how embracing community organizing expertise has changed the Queens Museum over the long term.

The Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience (The Wing) in Seattle highlights the stories of the Asian Pacific American experience. The Wing is recognized for its community-based and community-driven exhibitions and programs. This value of community is at the heart of The Wing, infusing the culture of the organization. The Wing hires people skilled in community organizing, a practice they have been implementing since 1991 when community organizer and journalist Ron Chew was hired as executive director. As a community organizer, Chew had built and nurtured trusting relationships with many community members. People already knew and trusted him, paving the way for the museum's success in engaging the community. Fulfilling The Wing's mission required the museum to broaden the skill sets of its staff and turn away from more traditional methods of recruitment. Position descriptions and recruitment methods were redefined to include community organizing and negotiation. New staff members have come from the community, with skills nurtured in the American ethnic studies and social justice movements. At the time, Chew noted, "Museums of the future need to look for staff . . . who are bridge-builders, have strong negotiation skills, and who can work collaboratively."

This focus on hiring from the community has had a tremendous impact on The Wing's ability to delve deeper into community concerns. Cassie Chinn, Deputy Executive Director at The Wing, notes that there has been an impact on the organization and in the community on a number of different levels. Hiring individuals directly from the community provides the opportunity for staff members to develop their own skills and grow professionally. Over many years, the museum has seen that this investment in the community leads to increased community trust in the museum. Community members see the museum in a different light – as a place where they could work and have a career. Museum work is not among the traditional professions that immigrants and refugees generally consider, and The Wing's long commitment to hiring from the community changes this perspective. One outcome is a museum-community relationship that has grown and is thriving over the long term. Relationships are based on trust and understanding; community members know the families and the background of the staff members, so trust is built in from the beginning.

Accountability is also a critical component of the connection. Community members know that they have an avenue and a voice in the museum. When community members are hired as staff, the staff knows they have an additional level of accountability to community members. As one staff member noted, "I know I'm not on the right path [when I do something at the museum] if I get a call from my grandmother!" There is an increased sense of responsibility to the community. With staff rooted in the community, the museum focuses on community concerns and

perspectives and on how they can work alongside these. The Wing sees its role as a facilitator of community empowerment, growth, and capacity. As Chinn notes, “We want to make sure that we never take for granted the amount of trust it takes for community members to share their time, voice, and perspective with the museum – and their willingness to have the courage, generosity and strength to join with us.” (C. Chinn, personal communication, April 11, 2017).

When the internal cultures of museums embrace and support the work of community organizers, these cultures are changed, and community is embedded in the internal culture. The voices of community organizers who understand the mechanisms of change are pushing the field to do so. As a result, activism has made its presence much more visible in the field in recent years. From #museumsrespondtoferguson to Museum Workers Speak to Museum Hue, voices in the field are saying loud and clear, “We must be heard!”

Specific skills that community organizers bring to the table include the ability to motivate people to participate, mobilize volunteers, analyze data to inform action, and build strong connections and relationships with community members. Jeremy Liu, Senior Fellow for Arts, Culture, and Equitable Development at PolicyLink in Oakland, California, notes that community organizers have an understanding of power dynamics – of institutional and community power, how it is generated, and how it can be used. It is an understanding of how relationships that respect those dimensions are created. Liu explains that the role of an organizer can help museums have a relationship with their community in a way that is hard for them to do otherwise. This is different from the role of doing community outreach and engagement, because the role of an organizer is supporting and empowering the community to help them shape their own lives and communities. And that is related to the power dynamic in a museum context.

How does one find people who have community organizing skills? Liu notes that peers, such as the staff and leadership at the Queens Museum and the Wing Luke Museum are often very helpful. It is also helpful to connect with organizers who understand the arts and culture world generally, such as the Art x Culture x Social Justice Network (<http://artculturejustice.com/>), Alternate Roots (<https://alternateroots.org/>), Appalshop (<https://www.appalshop.org/> in Appalachia and rural America), and Springboard for the Arts (<http://springboardforthearts.org/>) (J. Liu, personal communication, December 21, 2016).

Community organizers understand how people in community organizations work, and the types of conversations that will lead to developing trusting relationships and partnerships with cultural organizations. They also understand how to help create a culture of valuing community within an organization.

### Creating an Inclusive Work Environment

How can museum leadership and staff support people with valued skillsets after they are hired and are working at a museum? As Jessica Turtle writes in *Valuing Diversity: The Case for Inclusive Museums*, for people who may identify as

...being of a diverse background, the day-to-day experience of working in museums can be exhausting and can present regular emotional and psychological challenges. This may lead to people leaving once they approach mid-career level, rather than continuing in a challenging landscape. In order to navigate organisational cultures, people report needing

to: constantly articulate and demonstrate how they have achieved their position on merit; explain issues of identity and cultural heritage to colleagues and deal with micro-inequities on a daily basis. Micro-inequities occur as an effect of unconscious bias and can be defined as micro-messages that communicate who is ‘within’ and who is ‘without’. They are social and professional slights that can become collectively acted out without people realising. They have the effect of damaging morale and devaluing individuals. Although there have been some excellent entry route programmes to diversify the sector in recent years, there is anecdotal evidence that retention at mid-career level is an issue, due to the factors explored above. (Museums Association, 2016, p. 14).

Turtle notes that

...research from the Equalities Challenge Unit demonstrates that unconscious bias not only impacts decisions related to recruitment and salary of individuals but also impacts investment in their ongoing development once inside an organisation. (Museums Association, 2016, p. 13).

What’s especially important is the “effect this has on day-to-day experience for those self-identifying as – or who are identified as – diverse.” (Museums Association, 2016, p. 13).

Gretchen Jennings, who writes the Museum Commons blog, has highlighted “The Rule of Three” – the idea that when there are three or more people of diverse backgrounds in a group, the group culture begins to change – as a way to support staff of diverse backgrounds. She notes,

Just imagine what might happen if professional associations like AAM (including its Professional Networks), ASTC, ACM, AASLH, and various regional associations, our museums and other cultural organizations, our museum studies programs, etc. adopted The Rule of Three as an operative ideal for achieving institutional diversity and inclusion. Just think about the impact that three (or more) senior managers from underrepresented groups in our field might have on the organizational culture of our various institutions. It’s not that three such people will think alike—far from it—but it’s likely that business as usual (some might call it white privilege\*) will be disrupted. This may be why the idea is a bit discomfiting—but worth considering. (Jennings, May 25, 2016).

Supporting staff that have come through nontraditional pathways and/or are of a diverse background is a key aspect of creating a culture of valuing community, so that staff feel supported and do not feel as though they are doing the heavy lifting in creating an inclusive, community-centered organization. What does this support look like in a museum or cultural organization? There are a number of ways this is demonstrated.

Those who come through traditional pathways and/or are not of diverse backgrounds can support their colleagues by educating themselves on the issues of diverse communities, not relying on colleagues from diverse backgrounds to raise their awareness and educate them, which is a burden. There are many sources of information, including blogs and websites, that provide valuable perspectives about diverse communities and the role that museums and cultural

organizations play, from Museum Hue to Visitors of Color to The Inclusion, just to name a few. More sites are included in the reference list at the end of this chapter.

Canada's HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector provides guidance for creating an inclusive and supportive work environment: "**Open, effective communication, as well as clear channels for feedback** optimizes the opportunity for discussion of issues related to inclusion and discrimination...Diversity and inclusion is best nurtured in an open workplace where mistakes can be used for learning – not for embarrassing or shaming individuals." (Canada's HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector, n.d., The Workplace Culture section). Other tools available to guide museum leadership and staff include the publication *Diversity at Work: Creating an inclusive and supportive work environment*.

One of the primary challenges for effective community involvement currently is the dependence of this work on champions and specific people. When one of these champions leaves an organization, how do the museum leadership and staff continue to evolve and nurture their community relationships? This challenge will be addressed in Chapter 8, but this is a good place to acknowledge and recognize the importance of everyone embracing this work, so that organizations do not find themselves in this position.

Full community involvement does not happen because specific positions, individuals, or roles are focused on community. In a community-involved organization, the culture of involvement should infuse every staff and volunteer position, so that everyone in the organization supports the community-focused work of the museum. Infuse each staff and volunteer position description with language that supports this, including appropriate tasks and responsibilities, and staff will understand more clearly what is expected of them and how each position has an important role to play in involving the community. There are guidelines available to assist in creating inclusive position descriptions, including those from CompassPoint and the University of Wisconsin Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. See References at the end of this chapter for more information.

### Pathways to Entry

What are the pathways for entry to become a museum professional, and how do these pathways limit access to people with valued community-based skillsets? There has been a great deal written about the traditional pathways leading to museum work, and the challenges that are built into these traditional pathways – expecting/requiring advanced degrees, low pay scale, high student debt, and unpaid/low paid internships. Focusing on these traditional pathways may limit access to people with other valued skillsets. There are a number of places where someone might find people with community-based skillsets, including people who have a background in Urban Studies, Planning, and Ethnic Studies. A web search on Urban Studies will reveal several resources, including local colleges and universities with programs and degrees in urban studies, as well as the organizations with which they work.

One can also find people who are skilled in community organizing by paying attention to the media. What organizations are working on local or regional community change in one's area? Who are the people who are coordinating those efforts? These may be the people with whom leadership and staff want to connect, who may be partners in community-focused projects. As

the museum staff get to know these community change coordinators and their colleagues, they will be connected with other people who are knowledgeable and skilled in community activism, and when the museum has position openings, they may be able connect with people they already know, who have community organizing skills, to help fill the openings or refer them to others whose skills would add to the organization's skillset. One example of an organization that blends community activism with culture is A Blade of Grass (ABOG), whose focus is nurturing socially engaged art. See Chapter 8 for more about A Blade of Grass and their resources about planning for community partnerships.

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