**AMA Keynote Address: The Transformative Power of Community Engagement**

Community engagement is now a major transformative force in the museum field. The power of this movement comes from its ability to focus on the heart of what our organizations are all about—meaningful public service. Museums today are challenged to become more active citizens, involved in addressing the social issues faced by our communities. No longer are museums measured and judged by their internal resources—collections, endowments, facilities, and staff—but rather by the external benefits and value they create for the individuals and communities they serve. Growing numbers of museums are learning to make their organizations more relevant by involving their communities in ongoing planning and decision-making. They are reframing museum activities to focus on what matters to their communities. By getting involved in community challenges and developing new partnerships, they are identifying underserved audiences and creating memorable visitor experiences. This presentation will cover the changing paradigms in the field, what community engagement is and is not, and how it differs from audience development. We will also explore what we can learn from the engagement journeys of others. The presentation will end with a quick preview of the steps to begin an engagement journey (the focus of the AMA workshop later in the Fall).

Part A: Paradigm Shifts, New Thinking about Organizational Life, and Forces for Change

Paradigms and metanoia (shift of mind): changing our way of thinking about our organizations

Paradigm exercises:
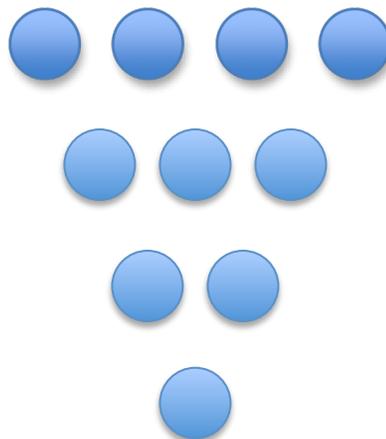
Three Critical Underlying Premises for Our Work

Premise One: **PUBLIC SERVICE MANDATE—REFRAMING TO FOCUS ON EFFECTIVENESS RATHER THAN EFFICIENCY**

The central purpose and mandate of museums and heritage organizations is to serve our many publics, at the level of making a meaningful difference in the lives of individuals and of making a significant contribution to the communities we serve. This public service mandate means that we must reframe our organizational models to focus on effectiveness rather than efficiency.

• *Focus less on doing everything right, more on doing the right things.*
• *Focus on what people care about, make a real difference in your community.*
• *Build the foundation for professional practices—make your organization matter.*

Premise Two: **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PROGRAMS ARE EVERYONE'S BUSINESS—TRANSFORMING VALUES AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE**

If our museums, historic sites, and heritage organizations are to fulfill their public service mandate, then community engagement, interpretation, public programs, and visitor experiences must be organizational priorities, embraced by all, rather than conceived as departmental functions. This new shared vision is transforming our values and organizational culture, including leadership and empowerment at all levels, teamwork with community involvement, and ongoing visitor studies.

• *Engaging community provides a shared vision (survival depends on it).*
• *Become a dialogic place—facilitate timely dialogue and deep reflection about important issues.*
• *Change your internal organizational culture—empower staff, volunteers, and the community.*

Premise Three: **BECOMING LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS—SHAPING NEW SHARED ROLES WITH HEART AND SOUL**

Our focus on meaningful public service is shaping new shared roles and responsibilities for staff, volunteers and community members, as we collectively and strategically plan, develop, implement, support, and evaluate a full spectrum of programmatic and service opportunities. To become learning organizations, we must focus on organizational development. Our organizations are rejuvenated as we embrace and value learning, creativity, multiple perspectives, joy, individual talents and growth, and systems thinking. This is our journey towards discovering the heart and soul in museums and heritage organizations.

• Walk the talk—if we value learning for visitors, we must value it for stakeholders.
• Focus on organizational development—build capacity: people, innovation, systems thinking.
•Embrace leadership at all levels, with teams, shared responsibilities, and community partnerships—value learning as a key outcome.

Where are these paradigm shifts leading museums, historic sites and cultural organizations?

The focus on organizational effectiveness rather than efficiency will mandate (I predict) a reexamination of organizational goals, values, visions, and processes, so that things like learning, creativity, cultural sensitivity, group dynamics, openness, and flexibility will increase in saliency. Things like organizational structures, restrictive rules and regulations, "status-quo" rationalizations for decisions and actions, and authoritarian styles and dictates will diminish in importance. Research in areas such as organizational learning and transformational leadership, both in the academy and by practitioners, has demonstrated generally positive results for both individuals and organizations from embracing a more learning-focused, consumer-driven, systematic approach to decisions, actions, planning, and evaluation processes. However, these shifts mandate very different assumptions, attitudes, and behavior towards human resources, outcomes, and work processes.

New Thinking about Organizational Life: Chaos, Complexity and Systems Thinking

Shift in predominant organizational models/metaphors: from mechanistic, focused on control, function, and tasks to organic systems, focused on relationships, interdependence

New model: organizations as open systems, with inputs, outputs, process: helped to explain relationships with external environment

Opportunities from understanding chaos:

Introducing Eight Forces for Change (more details during the AMA Workshop):

- The Challenging Global Economy

- Embracing Diversity and a Multicultural Society

- Deeper Understanding of Visitors' Needs, Interests, and Learning

- Movement Towards Visitor Participation and Ownership

- Changing Roles of Directors, Curators, and Educators

- Operating Museums as Effective Organizations

- Technology, Technology, Technology!

- Social Responsibility, Enterprise, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship

Part Two: What Community Engagement Is and Is Not

How do we define community?

What Community Engagement Is and Is Not

EXERCISE: For each pair of statements below, identify which statement IS and IS NOT community engagement:

Statements:	IS	IS NOT
A. Identifying and addressing what the community cares about.		
B. Identifying what the community can do for your organization.		
C. Token exhibits and programs about or with community groups.		
D. Doing things that really matter, e.g., activities focused on building better communities.		
E. Occasional stakeholder input meetings or an annual visitor survey.		
F. Establishing long-term relationships and partnerships with other community groups.		
G. Working with community groups to plan and offer your programs and activities, and sharing the control, acknowledgement and proceeds.		
H. Continuing to control and run your programs and activities, yet expecting other community organizations to participate and donate.		
I. Expecting reciprocity for contributions to the community outside of your organization.		
J. Getting involved in community activities outside of your organization.		

Community Engagement IS:	Community Engagement IS NOT:
Identifying and addressing what the community cares about.	Identifying what the community can do for your organization.
Doing things that really matter, e.g., activities focused on building better communities.	Token exhibits and programs about or with community groups.
Establishing long-term relationships and partnerships with other community groups.	Occasional stakeholder input meetings or an annual visitor survey.
Working with community groups to plan and offer your programs and activities, and sharing the control, acknowledgement and proceeds.	Continuing to control and run your programs and activities, yet expecting other community organizations to participate and donate.
Getting involved in community activities outside of your organization.	Expecting reciprocity for contributions to the community outside of your organization.

Thoughts and Reflections:

How does community engagement differ from audience development?

Audience Development	Community Engagement
Short term marketing strategy to increase the number of people who visit your organization: builds and broadens your audience, which can turn into support for your organization.	Long term strategy organizational development to build community ownership, participation, relationships, and support for your organization: builds a better community, which in turn, builds your audience and position of importance in the community.
Looks at who is and who is not coming and why or why not; identifies potential audiences for marketing existing museum services.	Looks at what matters to the community and how your organization is or is not responding; identifies how existing museum services are relevant or could become more relevant.
Focus on increasing visitation numbers from existing and new groups, and building membership numbers, the relationship with community remains the same as it is currently.	Focus on developing relationships and increasing partnerships and collaborations with a variety of community groups, benefiting all participating partners.
Internally focused approach: how can the community serve us and our needs (this approach potentially closes doors as it does not address what other organizations need—it is all about your organization).	Externally focused approach: how can we serve the community's needs, working with others (this approach opens doors as it is a shared goal with other community organizations—it is about what we all need).
Involves education, marketing and development staff members.	Involves all stakeholders, including staff, trustees and volunteers.
A consultant can complete the bulk of the work, working on your behalf, conducting interviews in the community and facilitating focus groups and then summarizing salient points (a consultant goes to the community and reports back to you).	A consultant can facilitate and guide the initial conversations and summarize the collective input from community participants, but your staff needs to be actively involved to make it work (a consultant helps to bring the community to you for collective dialogue).
Organizational identity, goals and priorities remain essentially the same, as does the organization's current reputation, public service, value and standing in the community.	Organizational identity, goals and priorities could be fundamentally transformed in response to community input and ideas, substantially increasing reputation, public service, value, and standing in the community.
A more conservative approach, with more predictable and focused outcomes, and if completed thoughtfully, impacting a limited portion of the organization.	A more risky approach, but if completed with sincerity and honesty, outcomes can far exceed initial expectations, impact all aspects of the operation and last longer.

Part Three: The Transformative Power of Community Engagement

Eight Reasons for Community Engagement:

- To learn more about our community's needs, issues, and what really matters to people.

- To discover what resources are available, and how they might assist our efforts to make a difference.

- To identify the potential target audiences that we might serve more effectively.

- To build understanding of our potential service and excitement about our mission/vision.

- To build good will in the community through meaningful public service.

- To articulate interpretive concepts, themes, and program ideas that are meaningful to both our internal stakeholders and to potential community groups and audiences.

- To develop meaningful partnerships with community groups and individuals to provide programs and mission-related sustainable enterprise that makes a difference in the community.

- To build museums, historic sites, and cultural/heritage organizations that people care about and support.

Engagement means more than gathering input from visitors (as by traditional audience research methods) and providing public programs! It means the community has ongoing involvement in planning, governance, decision making, resource acquisition/allocation, and program delivery. It is a long-term strategy, not a short-term fix.

Community engagement, if done correctly, will fundamentally transform the business we are in as well as the way that our organizations do business.

Articulating a Shared Vision with Your Community

If it is inspirational, visioning creates energy, excitement, and organizational commitment. It attracts resources like a powerful magnet.

Key questions for developing a shared vision:

How does your organization want to change the world?

Who else shares this vision?

How can your organization, working with others in the community, address what people care about?

How can your organization, working with others in the community, make a meaningful difference in people's lives?

How can the envisioned strategic relationships, collaborations, and partnerships build a better community?

Community Engagement Changes Everything:

THINK

It is not just about us and our agenda—it is about building better communities.

How can we find and use the spirit of our organization to envision our future?

How can we work collaboratively, with partners, for everything we do?

How can we help to address community needs and give back?

ACT

Encourage staff to get involved in community activities, on company time. Make this an organizational priority and recognize it.

Develop innovative collaborative programs that focus on what people care about (enduring issues, community strengths).

Become a community player—develop long-term relationships and partnerships with many community groups.

Critical Factors for Success in Working with Communities (based on field research and practitioners' feedback):

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

HEALTH BREAK

Part Four: Learning from the Engagement Journeys of Others

There are many starting points to begin engaging community…

- Interpretation/program planning (audiences, partners)

- Feasibility study, e.g., preservation, expansion, funding

- Exploratory, e.g., new organization, new idea/concept

- Organizational development/revitalization (more active in civic affairs)

- Organizational master planning/strategic planning

Multiple Purposes for Community Engagement, Five Examples, and Outcomes

Purpose	Example	Some Outcomes
Feasibility study—preservation, expansion, funding Strategic/master planning	Strong Museum of Play Amherst Historical Society Historic Germantown Preserved	Articulated a new community identity and role Helped stakeholders articulate compelling visions and useful strategic directions Identified potential partners/collaborators, new board members, and funding

Notes:

Purpose	Example	Some Outcomes
Exploratory—new organization, testing a new idea or concept	**Cashiers (NC) Historical Society**	**Built new awareness and excitement about the organization in the community** **Produced many exciting program ideas** **Helped stakeholders understand role of organization and potential public service**

Notes:

Purpose	Example	Some Outcomes
Interpretation and program planning, including seeking new audiences and partners	The Mill at Anselma (Chester Springs, PA) Oppenheimer House, Los Alamos Historical Society	Began an effective process of strategic interpretation and program planning Created buy in for the organization, interpretation, programs, and partnerships Helped to build long-term relationships with target audiences and community groups Identified new resources (people, money, collections, supplies, etc.)

Notes:

Purpose	Example	Some Outcomes
Organizational survival	Santa Fe Children's Museum	Community education and support, board members

Notes:

Other Engagement Journeys

There is a growing body of case studies from museums and cultural organizations all over the world, as more and more places realize the transformative power of community engagement.

Here are just a few examples:

- **Lower East Side Tenement Museum, New York City**

- **Galt Museum and Archives, Lethbridge, Alberta**

- **Oakland Museum, Oakland, CA**

- **District Six Museum, Cape Town, South Africa**

- **Providence Children's Museum, Providence, Rhode Island**

- **Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, Northern Ireland**

- **Scottish Museums Council: Social Justice Agenda**

- **Australian Museum, Sydney, Australia**

Preview of AMA Fall Workshop on Community Engagement

This workshop will cover:

- The forces for change and transformation (in more depth)
- Who are we engaging?
- Guidelines for planning and facilitating a successful community gathering
- Tools for encouraging dialogue
- Building productive collaborations and partnerships
- How do we know our community engagement is effective?
- How will community engagement transform your organization?
- The overall system for beginning your engagement journey, including:

Steps to Begin Your Community Engagement Journey	
Take a Leap of Faith	Work through your fears. Begin it, even though you may not accurately predict the outcomes.
Examine Your Agenda	Your reasons for engaging community must go beyond your organization's purpose. Rather, focus on building a better community.
Make New Friends	Push beyond existing friends and stakeholders to establish new relationships with community groups and individuals. Put energy into a thoughtful selection process.
Plan Memorable Community Events	Even with very important work to do, community gatherings can be informal, thematic, and fun. Plan them as social events.
Ask What Your Community Really Cares About	Develop synergy by focusing on the distinctiveness of place and people. Help participants identify community assets, needs, and issues, and then envision collaborative solutions.
Work with Others to Implement New Ideas	Shift your organization from controlling and doing everything independently to working collaboratively for all activities and programs.
Articulate an Inspiring Vision	An inspiring vision can attract new board members, funding, partners, and community attention for activities. Articulate how your organization wants to change the world.
Develop Strategic Programs That Matter	Solicit ideas for collaborative programs that can help to address important community issues. Plan innovative program approaches with partner organizations.
Keep the Momentum Going	Share results of gatherings. Integrate community engagement into all activities. Form a community working group to participate in all planning.
Transform Organizational Operations and Practice	Work toward social entrepreneurship by paying it forward, giving back to those in need, and addressing social issues in your community, guided by the spirit and passions of your organization.

Closing Reflection: How will community engagement transform your organization?

Resources for Community Engagement

Born, Paul (2006). "Community Collaboration: A New Conversation," *Journal of Museum Education*, 31, 1, Spring, pp. 7-14.

Carbone, Stan (2003). The Dialogic Museum, *MUSE.*

Davis, Peter (2007). " Place Exploration: museums, identity, and community," in *Museums and Their Communities*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 53-75.

Dees, J. Gregory (2001). "The Meaning of Social Entrepreneurship," https://www.caseatduke.org/documents/dees_sedef.pdf.

Gurian, Elaine Heumann (2006). "The Museum as a Socially Responsible Institution" (1988), pp. 69-75, "The Opportunity for Social Service" (1991), pp. 82-87, and "A Savings Bank for the Soul: About institutions of memory and congregant spaces" (1996) pp. 88-96, in *Civilizing the Museum: the collected writings of Elaine Heumann Gurian*, Routledge.

Hirzy, Ellen (2002). "Mastering Civic Engagement: A Report from the American Association of Museums, " *Mastering Civic Engagement: A Challenge to Museums*. Washington DC: American Association of Museums, pp. 9-20.

Kadoyama, Margaret (2007). " The Hard Work of True Listening," in *Civic Discourse: Let's Talk*, *Museums and Social Issues*, edited by Judy Koke and Marjorie Schwarzer. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2, 2, Fall, pp. 201-206.

Kretzmann, John P., McKnight, John L., Dobrowolski, Sarah, and Puntenney, Deborah (2005). "Discovering Community Power: A Guide to Mobilizing Local Assets and Your Organization's Capacity," Asset-Based Community Development Institute, School of Education and Social Policy, Northwestern University. The Guide is available to download freely on the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's website: www.wkkf.org and the ABCD Institute's website: www.northwestern.edu/ipr/abcd.html.

Matelic, Candace Tangorra (2011). "New Roles for Small Museums," chapter 6, audience book, Toolkit for Small Museums. Nashville, TN: AASLH.

Matelic, Candace Tangorra, Sack, Donna, and Richards, Beth (2008). Giving Community a Meaningful Voice, *ALHFAM 2007 Proceedings.*

Skramstad, Harold K (1999). "An Agenda for American Museums in the Twenty-First Century," *Daedalus*, Cambridge, MA: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Summer, pp. 109-128.

Silverman, Lois H. (2010). Chapter 1, "In the service of society," *The Social Work of Museums*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 1-21.

Tamarack: An Institute for Community Engagement, http://tamarackcommunity.ca.

Watson, Sheila (2007). "Museums and Their Communities," in *Museums and Their Communities*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 1-23.

Weil, Stephen E. (1999). From Being About Something to Being for Somebody: The Ongoing Transformation of the American Museum, *Daedalus*, MIT Press.

_____ (2002). "New Words, Familiar Music: The Museum as Social Enterprise," *Making Museums Matter*. Smithsonian Institution Press, pp.75-80.

_____ (2002), "Transformed from a Cemetery of Bric-a-brac," *Making Museums Matter*. Smithsonian Institution Press, pp. 81-90.

Worts (2008). "Measuring Museum Meaning." *Journal of Museum Education* 31:1 (Spring 2006) pp.41–48. http://www.csin-rcid.ca/downloads/worts_jme_article.pdf.