

Consequential Relevance

AMA Fall Gathering Keynote Presentation

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With a wide and long lens, this presentation probes the background to, and outlines a way forward from, an often news-making museum sector buffeted by changing priorities in response to an unstable world.

Effectiveness and efficiency — often regarded as interchangeable or overly bureaucratic — valuably refer to strategically ‘doing the right things’ and operationally ‘doing things right’, respectively. A tendency of the museum sector to tinker with value and mission statements suggests that tackling a primary generative question is overdue. Especially in financially constrained times, the optimal approach would be to inspire reflection on mission-critical matters with bold rethinking about collecting traditions. [Race: Are We So Different?](#) has been an instructive illustration: delving into a pressing topic with an evocative title, this multimedia exhibition with aligned programs attracted activist partners and engaged diverse audiences.

A top-rated [TED Talk by Simon Sinek](#) clarified that the success of an organization hinges on clarity about its why, how, and what in that order. Why specifies a value-driven purpose; how specifies its planned approaches; and what specifies its intended outcomes. Evidently, most people are drawn to enterprises with a tangibly beneficial why. Regardless of whether the authorizing context is government, a non-profit, or a for-profit organization, each museum is potentially a uniquely valuable resource. Usefulness and popularity have different levers, but these are best viewed as complementary dynamics. Aspiring to be necessary, not just nice, institutions need to periodically reevaluate their ends and means.

Globally minded, Emlyn has British, Canadian, and American citizenships. A distinguished alumnus of the University of Ottawa, he was the 50th anniversary board president of the Geological Association of Canada. At the helm of the Royal Tyrrell Museum, Ontario Science Centre, Liberty Science Center, and the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences, his approach advanced their internal cohesion and external value. Across the New York region, assistance to at-risk school districts and therapeutic community partnerships in the aftermath of terrorism led to the American Conference on Diversity honouring him as a Humanitarian of the Year and the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience adding him to its Ambassador Circle. A transdisciplinary synthesist, he advocates for an Anthropocene renaissance to raise awareness of the interdependency of nature and culture and of humanity’s escalating disruption of the Earth System.