NEW ROLES FOR SMALL MUSEUMS
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How can your small museum determine if it is making a meaningful difference in its community? This chapter focuses on why and how small museums are transforming to address what matters in their communities and, in doing so, how they are becoming more relevant and sustainable organizations. For many organizations, this has become a matter of survival. New roles for small museums emerge through honestly engaging the community, discovering what the community cares about, working with other organizations to address community needs, and rediscovering the spirit or passions that uniquely define each individual small museum.

Why Should Small Museums Change?

For decades the museum field has pushed and helped small museums to "do everything right," or to operate according to accepted professional standards. The to-do list has been long, and at times overwhelming, as it has included proper care of collections, preservation of historic buildings, reliance on up-to-date scholarship, development of exciting exhibits and interesting interpretive programs, strong management and fiscal policies, responsible governance, and active fund and friend raising. Now the field has entered an era in which it is more important to "do the right things" by demonstrating that museums, historic sites, and cultural organizations matter to their communities. The traditional activities of collecting, preserving, researching, exhibiting, and interpreting are simply no longer adequate.

Three significant paradigm shifts, or transformations in our thinking, in the museum field now guide the measurement of the public value of our organizations:

Mandating public service: As Stephen Weil, Harold Skramstad, and many other luminaries in our field have advocated, this is the most recent significant shift in focus and priority for museums, historic sites, and cultural organizations. The central purpose of museums is to serve their many publics at the level

of making a meaningful difference in the lives of individuals and contributing significantly to the communities they serve. This mandate means that these organizations must demonstrate their public value and positive social outcome and declare these in mission statements and program descriptions for all activities. Weil powerfully expressed this mandate in 2002 in an article titled "Transformed from a Cemetery of Bric-a-Brac":

> Common virtually everywhere today is the conviction that public service is central to what a museum is all about. How that is expressed may differ from one country to another, but almost nowhere is there anybody now left who still believes that the museum is its own excuse for being.

For most museums, this mandate is about reframing their organizational models to focus on long-term effectiveness rather than short-term efficiency. It is a new way of thinking, a new perspective for planning, budgeting, and organizational assessment. Often, the most difficult transition is toward understanding that the inherent worth of collections and sites is necessary but not sufficient to demonstrate public value. These things matter only if the organization matters.

Making interpretation, programs, and community engagement everyone's business: A second paradigm shift is the understanding that everyone in the organization, from the board to curatorial staff to the frontline staff and volunteers, is responsible for the public dimension of the museum, or for interpretation, public programs, outreach, and community engagement. These components of a museum's operation must be organizational priorities rather than delegated to whoever is responsible for programs. A useful interpretive framework—one that puts stories into the context of universal concepts and ideas—provides guidance for research, collections, marketing, and fundraising, as well as public programs, exhibits, publications, events, and other methods of communicating to audiences. Museums of all sizes and focuses can utilize interpretation as a powerful way to engage people and facilitate timely dialogue and deep reflection about important issues because people come to museums to learn about people—their lives, values, trials and tribulations, joys, and contributions. They come to reflect on their own lives, and the lives of their families, friends, neighbors, and business associates. They come to get a new perspective, a new understanding of other people, places, and times, and to be renewed, reinvigorated, and even inspired. By making interpretation, programs, and community engagement everyone's responsibility, museums can become "dialogic places," as described by Stan Carbone, director of the Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada. To embrace this shift, many museums must transform their internal values and organizational cultures to embrace leadership at all levels; redefine the roles of professional staff; empower all staff, volunteers, and the community to participate in

planning and decision-making; utilize teamwork with community involvement; and integrate ongoing visitor studies into their operations.

Becoming learning organizations: This third shift is about "walking the talk," or valuing learning for stakeholders, including those people who have an existing relationship with the museum, such as staff, board members, and volunteers, as well as visitors. It is about understanding the inherent difficulty and complexity of organizational change and touching hearts and minds before expecting any transformation to occur. Learning organizations use their knowledge and experience to become more effective by going beyond the status quo to grow and evolve. If an organization has embraced this concept, then the criteria for making organizational decisions and setting priorities include learning outcomes as well as short-term performance and the bottom line. The organization values innovation, experimentation, flexibility, and initiative. Knowledge is openly shared, and everyone is encouraged to apply it to problem solving. Leaders at all levels use systems thinking to improve the organization as an integrated ensemble, establish relationships with external groups and organizations, and build long-term sustainability. For museums, historic sites, and cultural organizations to move toward becoming learning organizations, they must learn to value people as their most critical resource and help them develop their knowledge and skills. They must also understand that organizational development means much more than building new facilities and getting more money. It entails learning about effective teamwork and designing new operational structures that focus on long-term effectiveness as well as short-term efficiency. Organizational development includes deepening relationships and collaboration with other community organizations through meaningful work and envisioning the museum's future as a highly valued community player.

These new directions represent enormous shifts in thinking about museums, sites, and cultural organizations, with different underlying values, and for some colleagues and stakeholders, they are downright scary, in part because they challenge traditional professional standards, roles, and practices. Also, it is difficult to predict exactly where an organization will end up once this transformation process is under way. For some people and risk-aversive organizations, this uncertainty is very disconcerting. It requires a leap of faith. However, once it is embraced, and the journey begun with openness and sincerity, these new directions and roles can be exciting, rewarding, and even liberating because they move our organizations closer to a path of broad community support.

So, how do small museums, historic sites, and cultural organizations begin this journey of discovery and transformation? The easiest way to start is to undertake a process of community engagement. It may require some organizational development to get stakeholders on board, or at least willing to go along to see what happens. The following discussion provides some practical steps for

engaging community, along with a deeper exploration of who constitutes community, what engagement is and is not, and why engagement can change how the museum sets goals and operates.

How Do We Define Community?

There are many ways to define what forms a community, including shared interests and experiences, common affiliations, demographics, and geographic location. While it is fine to build networks of stakeholders, including members, volunteers, reenactors, and past participants in your organization's programs, I am defining community as the people who live in the geographic area of your museum. Depending on the scope of your organization's mission, this geographic community could be local, regional, state, provincial, or national. For our purposes, it is more useful to think in terms of geography than in terms of stakeholders and affiliations. This geographic definition of community is important because the place where your organization does business is your foundation—your organization is a member of this community, regardless of how active it has been in civic affairs, and the people who live in your community are your organization's constituents. Your geographic community provides resources for your organization, such as supplies, equipment, marketing, knowledge, and expertise. As your organization becomes a more active contributor to community life, these resources grow. Also, every geographic community has a distinguishing character and spirit that emerges over time from its people and history. This means that community engagement and service are different in every community. Each cultural organization must forge its own way. Yet another way to think about community engagement is pushing beyond your organization's existing stakeholders and friends.

Table 6.1.   What Community Engagement IS and IS NOT

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.

What Is Community Engagement?

Community engagement involves identifying and addressing what people care about and doing things that really matter—for example, conducting activities focused on building better communities. It entails identifying and establishing long-term relationships and partnerships with other community groups and going beyond the traditional alliances with other cultural or educational organizations. The engagement must first focus on the whole community. This is part of the process of building trust, learning about enduring needs and issues, and seeking new connections by discovering shared visions, often with the most unlikely groups and community organizations. The focus can and will come back to your organization, and it will be much more productive if you begin with the larger focus of building a better community.

It is also important to understand what community engagement is not. It is not simply occasional stakeholder-input meetings, an annual visitor survey, or token exhibits and programs about or with community groups. In fact, sometimes this approach is worse than doing nothing as it raises expectations of meaningful involvement without the follow-through. Community engagement is also not simply about identifying what the community can do for your organization. This second point may sound counterintuitive, but if the community perceives that the engagement process is solely about your organization, some people will decline to participate because they do not feel that they have any connection with or expertise about your organization. Also, they may tell you what they think you want to hear instead of offering creative ideas and solutions that address broader, shared challenges.

Inspiring Examples with Different Starting Points

Before considering my guidelines and steps in the engagement process, let us explore how five very diverse history organizations, at varying points in their existence and development, used community engagement as a catalyst to start changing their organizations. They used the input of community to move toward fundamentally different ways of doing business. These examples demonstrate how each museum's community helped it articulate a new organizational identity and shape a new, more fulfilling future. I hope that you and your organization will have the courage to begin the engagement process after reading about how other organizations have made this journey.

Amherst Historical Society, Amherst, Massachusetts

A highly educated and culturally aware populace distinguishes the charming New England community of Amherst, which has five colleges nearby, a

Photo 6.1. As the kickoff for a strategic planning process, the Amherst Historical Society worked with their community to envision a new future for their organization. They started by articulating what Amherst most deeply cared about. (Courtesy of the Amherst Historical Society)

rich agricultural and literary past, and a strong spirit of independence and social justice. Like so many small historical societies across North America, the Amherst Historical Society (AHS) is headquartered in one of the oldest houses in town, located on a central downtown street, adjacent to the library. The building requires ongoing restoration and upkeep, yet offers small exhibit and program spaces that are only available during the seasons when heat is not required, since the house is not modernized except for a few areas. The organization offered a number of annual programs and had a few successful publications, such as the popular history book *Amherst A to Z: Amherst, Mass., 1759–2009.* However, with a part-time director, volunteers, and dwindling financial resources, the society's board faced the challenge of transforming itself so that it could survive. The organization realized that its future depended on a better relationship with the community.

The Amherst Historical Society began its community engagement process with a training session for the board to help its members understand the ways they might transform their operations in response to changing paradigms in the field. Out of the first gathering came the strong sense that AHS should set up a community working group to work with stakeholders throughout the planning process. Everyone agreed that the next steps should include articulating a new organizational vision and a set of strategic directions.

The strategy that emerged from the community engagement process included building and diversifying the board, working with community partners for all future programs, using the entire community for events and activities, reaching out to all residents, including people who were not active in civic affairs, and conceptually developing the historic house as a headquarters and community center rather than a historic house museum. The AHS board acted quickly to build its membership, and this transformative step alone brought new energy, ideas, and resources to the organization. During a second gathering, community representatives worked with AHS stakeholders to continue the planning process. They outlined the necessary steps to move toward implementing the strategic directions and explored a number of possible scenarios for the historic house. Following the second gathering, the society formed a long-range planning committee that continues to explore options for transforming the headquarters into a more useable facility, working with the neighboring library and other community organizations.

This example demonstrates how a small historical society can use community engagement to reconnect with its community and gather valuable ideas and support about its future, reinvigorate its board, and reinvent itself after nearly a century of operation.

Galt Museum and Archives, Lethbridge, Alberta

This museum in southwestern Alberta, Canada, took a new approach to engaging its community through its exhibits. In the fall of 2009, in preparation for a "Treasures and Curiosities" exhibit on display from February through May 2010, the museum invited one hundred community members (including business leaders, government representatives, and the mayor), along with staff and board members, to choose their two favorite artifacts from the collection to be included in the exhibit. Intentionally eclectic, the exhibit drew on the broad content scope of the museum's collections, covering (as described in the press release for exhibit participation) "commerce, immigration, education, community services, religion, transportation, military service, diversity, and the personal lives of individuals who chose to live here." The Galt advertised the wide variety of objects in the collection as well as the "curiosities" it held.

The process went like this: The Galt Museum staff trained a group of twelve volunteers to help the community members choose a subject area and period and then to pick objects by looking together through the collections database and storage areas. If an object sounded interesting, they would go and look at it. The community participants were often very moved by the memories related to the objects they saw, and some people took a number of hours to decide on their

objects. The preparation process created a buzz of anticipation in the community about the museum and the exhibit.

The "Treasures and Curiosities" exhibit included the participants' personal stories about why they chose the particular object, and as one visitor noted, this approach "added interest and depth" to the exhibit. Another visitor commented, "The stories and histories provided by the community members made the pieces relevant and interesting, beyond the mere value of the object." The exhibit was designed to look like crates and storage, with labels looking like tags.

This example demonstrates that small museums have many tools to utilize in engaging their communities, not the least of which is their collections. Director Susan Burrows-Johnson commented, "The successful engagement of the community in 'what is in the collection' was a reminder about the use of objects and about community participation. The time, commitment, and emotional response from our community members to the objects was the most extraordinary part of the process." Following the well-attended exhibit, the community viewed the museum in a new light and, of course, has asked for another exhibit of this kind in the future.

Historic Germantown Preserved, Germantown, Pennsylvania

In the Northwest Philadelphia neighborhood of Germantown, a group of fifteen (originally thirteen) historic sites formed a consortium, Historic Germantown Preserved (HGP), to work together rather than compete with one another. The HGP undertook a community engagement process in 2007 and 2008, supported by the Heritage Philadelphia Program of the Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, to streamline and share strategies for organizational development, marketing, and interpretive planning. The yearlong process included initial conversations with groups of community representatives, including many people from the neighborhood who had not had meaningful interaction with the sites and the HGP, to get acquainted and identify a series of community issues. One memorable session gathered fifty people who worked in small groups brainstorming collaborative programs; the event was capped with an ice cream social. Throughout the project, stakeholders from all the sites met on a regular basis to stay up to date on the activities. A team of consultants, with expertise in interpretive planning, organizational development, and marketing, and a team of scholars advised HGP stakeholders. An important outcome of the community engagement process was that the HGP sites agreed on four key concepts as a common content framework for daily interpretation at the individual sites, as well as collaborative programs and events. This is quite an accomplishment. The framework helped to shape a new marketing plan and brand: "Freedom's Backyard." The process was the catalyst for several major steps forward in the HGP's organizational development: HGP orga-

nizations jointly supported a program coordinator who worked out of a centralized office in the Germantown Historical Society.

This transformative initiative continued to bear fruit following the initial community-engagement process. For example, the HGP received subsequent Pew funding for "Germantown Works," a series of programs about twentieth-century Germantown history, building on one of the four interpretive concepts in the interpretive framework: "Hard Work: An Industrious People Creating Commerce and Culture." As described by HGP program coordinator Anne Burnett, these programs had input from leading scholar and neighborhood stakeholders:

> Offered in partnership with Germantown Speaks, a related grant initiative by the local Neighborhood Interfaith Movement, the public forums and programs served the dual purposes of training local high school students in oral history interviewing, recording, and photography, while engaging area seniors, church members and elected officials in sharing their stories through lively, moving intergenerational dialogue. Video and audio capture of these personal histories of 20th century Germantown allowed for continued sharing and discussion via HGP's Freedom's Backyard website. This project enriched the delivery of interpretive content and extended the reach of HGP sites, and built sustainable relationships with new community partners.

Organizationally, the 2007–2008 interpretive plan and subsequent Germantown Works project laid important groundwork for capacity building, attracting the support of a local foundation for development of a business plan to hire an executive director and support staff, which furthered the HGP's ability to promote and serve its fifteen historic sites and the Northwest Philadelphia community as a whole.

South Dakota Agricultural Heritage Museum, Brookings, South Dakota

This small museum is located on the campus of South Dakota State University (SDSU) in a building that once served as an agricultural stockyard, establishing its historic connection to SDSU as a land grant university in a state where agriculture is a leading enterprise. As a museum facility, the space is woefully substandard. It has one large room for exhibits plus a smaller adjacent space that supports changing exhibits and programs, as well as a tiny shop. The basement houses staff offices and collection storage for smaller items, while larger objects are stored in a separate building. Director Mac Harris was hired with a mandate for change, and finding a new home for the museum was a big part of his charge. He established a new board with representatives from across the state and began to use community engagement to define a new vision and future for

the museum. It was clear that the museum should play a more central role in the life of SDSU and do more to fulfill its mandate as the state agricultural museum.

The museum began its strategic planning process in the fall of 2008 with an audience and community study, to learn more about current visitors, museum members, and the community at large, including the university community. The museum initiated a series of conversations with faculty, students, local teachers, and community leaders about the distinctiveness of South Dakota as a place, the state's important agricultural past and future, the special characteristics of South Dakotans, and how the museum could better serve its various audiences. The museum discovered that its primary audience should be the university community, followed by a statewide audience and traditional museum audiences, such as school groups. Wanting the museum to be more integrated into academic life, faculty and students suggested that interdisciplinary teams comprising individuals from each group work with the museum to develop exhibits for display all over campus—in effect, considering the entire campus a museum. They also discussed the development of an interdisciplinary curriculum titled "Agriculture in American Life." Their input shaped the vision for an innovative new facility that would include learning laboratories, classrooms, indoor and outdoor exhibits, space for large events and conferences with alumni and leading agricultural thinkers, open storage for collections (including collections from a number of other academic departments), and a green facility that could be utilized as a teaching tool.

Since the initial dialogues with the university community, the museum has continued the engagement process and broadened the scope to include additional departments, representatives of agricultural commodity groups, and agricultural extension across the state. As of this writing, a feasibility study for a new facility is under way, and the museum is seeking funding to engage citizens across the state about how to better serve them and address current and future agricultural issues. In sum, the South Dakota Agricultural Heritage Museum is in a very different place from where it would be if it had conducted a more traditional, internally focused strategic planning process. The community engagement led the organization to deepen relationships with other university departments, envision a learning center rather than a traditional museum for its new headquarters, and reframe its future purpose and operations.

The Mill at Anselma, Chester Springs, Pennsylvania

This historic site utilized community engagement early in its organizational history as it transitioned from a preservation project to a historic site open to the public. Four years after the board was formed in 1998, it completed an initial master plan, hired its first professional director, Heather Reiffer, and opened to the public with regular hours. By 2004, it had restored the mill's equipment to operating condition. The following year, it started to restore the other five

Photo 6.2.   Results from the initial community gathering were promising enough to encourage the Mill at Anselma board to form a community working group. These community representatives participated in the mill's strategic interpretation and program planning process during the following year. (Courtesy of Candace T. Matelic)

structures on the site and opened a visitor center in a barn. The site was named a National Historic Landmark in April 2005 because it is a rare example of a small, custom, water-powered gristmill with surviving, completely intact equipment that predates Oliver Evans's mill technology—Evans revolutionized flour milling at the close of the eighteenth century with the development of continuous-process production.

The mill's community engagement process began in 2003 with a preliminary session for the board to learn about the current thinking in the field and the benefits of community involvement. Following this session, the board shifted to focus on site interpretation and visitor amenities and held an initial community workshop. The results were so promising that it formed a community working group to participate in subsequent planning. In 2004 the mill secured support from the Heritage Philadelphia Program of the Pew Center for Arts & Heritage for a comprehensive and strategic interpretative and program planning process that occurred in 2004 and 2005. Scholars, mill stakeholders, interpretive planning consultants (audience advocates and a coordinating team), and the community working group developed interpretive content, a community profile, interpretive methods and program approaches, strategy,

and implementation. Following each step, participants offered reflections and additional input. The board adopted the proposed strategic directions that shaped the final plan and implementation schedule that was completed by the fall of 2005. The inclusion of community representatives as equal partners to the scholars, stakeholders, and museum professionals was a transformative component of the mill's planning approach.

The early focus on community engagement allowed the mill to grow and professionalize at a fast rate. It opened doors to local resources, many new and dedicated volunteers, new avenues of financial support, and community partnerships. Following the interpretative planning process, the mill developed a plan for the production of flours and related products as an earned income stream. They hosted a Millers' Forum with other historical millers from around the country to discuss how professional standards for authenticity and millers' training could be established and maintained. The mill reached out to other regional museums, historic sites, and cultural organizations and worked with them to establish partnerships for marketing, joint promotion, and coordination of special events, such as hosting the regional farmer's market. The mill quickly established a reputation in the area as a community-friendly place, which helped to build attendance and attract new board members. This generated financial support, which helped the mill to add staff and complete the site's restoration.

Steps toward Community Engagement

Community engagement can begin as a part of a feasibility study, a strategic or master planning process, an interpretation and program planning process, a retooling for your organization, or an initial discovery process if your organization is new. In other words, there are many possible starting points. The goal is to incorporate community engagement into any and all planning that your organization undertakes, preferably at the beginning of the process, when public input can shape priorities and results.

1. Take a Leap of Faith

Community engagement requires a big leap of faith for some risk-aversive organizations. Especially at the beginning, the journey can be frightening as one cannot predict exactly where it will take the organization. However, after many years of working with cultural organizations on this transformative process, I can tell you with confidence that if your museum, historic site, or cultural organization commences a community engagement process with openness, honesty, and sincerity, the results will far exceed your expectations. Community engagement

opens doors, builds trust, connects your organization with new people and re-
sources, builds awareness about your organization, and creates good will.

2. Examine Your Agenda

Before jumping in, it is critical to examine your internal agenda, or your or-
ganization's reasons for engaging the community. Initially, the motivation must
be focused outward, beyond your organization's specific purpose or mission.
The goal must be about building better communities or improving the lives of
the people in your community in some meaningful way. Since everyone benefits
from a stronger, healthier, more caring community, this goal will engage those
people who do not currently have a direct affiliation with, or interest in, your

Table 6.2.   Steps toward Community Engagement

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.

organization. Many community organizations, groups, neighborhoods, and individuals will thoughtfully participate because they support the larger goal.

3. Make New Friends

One of the underlying purposes of community engagement is to push beyond existing friends and stakeholders to establish new relationships with community groups and individuals, particularly those who are connected to networks of potential users and future target audiences. Hold initial conversations with community leaders and groups to introduce your organization and explain your reasons for wanting to interact with them. Ask for the community's help to identify who should participate. You may need the intercession of respected community leaders to engage members of their organizations. For large community gatherings, rather than issuing an open invitation to the entire community, purposively bring together people who can represent potential user groups and community interests. Include, but look beyond, existing members—for example, friends groups and representatives of educational institutions, such as teachers who have participated in past or current programs. Invite business leaders, clergy, youth group leaders, activity directors from assisted-living facilities, and representatives of neighborhood associations, clubs and social organizations, governmental agencies, and social service organizations. Include colleagues from other cultural organizations, tourism agencies, and hospitality businesses. Consider the current and future "movers and shakers" in the community and include those people who are already involved in important initiatives to improve the community.

The lesson here is to put time and energy into developing and using a thoughtful selection process and a very personal invitation process. This means carefully considering how your organization contacts people, and the more individualized and personal the better! The last thing you should do is issue a general letter or e-mail about a community gathering because recipients will perceive it as a mass communication rather than a personal invitation sent to the people you really want to participate. The outreach to potential participants will be much more effective if it occurs through an in-person visit or a phone call and is followed up with reminders from friends, acquaintances, or colleagues. This step is well worth the time and trouble because the outcomes of community engagement are directly related to getting the right people to participate.

4. Plan Memorable Community Events

Community engagement events have a serious and important purpose. However, these gatherings need not be formal (and potentially boring) occasions. Rather than calling and planning these events as "meetings" or "workshops,"

think about them as social events or gatherings with a seasonal or otherwise appropriate theme, decorations, food and beverages (preferably nonalcoholic), and a small thank-you gift for participants. Choose a neutral location that is familiar to participants—for example, a church hall or community center—as well as functional for an interactive session, with good lighting, tables, seating, a working kitchen, and a large open space. Do not hold these events in historic houses or galleries or spaces where furnishings cannot be moved or the walls cannot be used for posting materials produced during the gathering. Allow some time for socializing and networking before and after the gathering's working sessions. Make sure that events are organized and well facilitated so that when participants are working, their time and energy are used efficiently and effectively. Vary the types of activities between small- and large-group discussions and use the numerous techniques for gathering and sharing ideas; mix people up and keep things moving. Intersperse individual reflection and group dialogue. And if at all possible, make the evening enjoyable. When community engagement events are fun and memorable, they create a positive buzz in the community and attract additional people to join in future gatherings.

5. Ask What Your Community Really Cares About

One goal of gathering with community representatives is to articulate collectively what the community cares about, now and always. This is accomplished through carefully planned activities in which participants identify community assets, needs, and issues, then envision collaborative solutions. It is easy to develop synergy by focusing initially on the distinctiveness of place and people. For this step the community is the expert, and participants readily contribute their ideas and reflections. Once synergy is established, people are open to exploring how your organization can work with others to address what matters to the community. This knowledge can shape a new organizational identity and vision, as well as strategic directions, interpretive content, meaningful programs, marketing, and partnerships. Finding out what your community cares about is critical to shaping a more relevant role for your museum, historic site, or cultural organization.

6. Work with Others to Implement New Ideas

It is similarly important to make the shift from doing everything by yourself to working with others in the community for everything that your organization does. If your stakeholders continue to work by themselves, the input and wonderful ideas from community will feel overwhelming, pushing your colleagues to retreat into their patterns of autonomy and control. If this happens, your organization will move backward toward marginalization rather than forward toward relevancy.

Some readers may question this statement. However, it is a key understanding about community engagement. Once your organization goes down this road, there is no turning back. Engaging the community is not a one-time event. It is not a quick fix. It is a fundamentally different way of doing business that changes how your organization thinks and works, where and when your stakeholders interact with others in the community, and how organizational effectiveness is determined.

7. Articulate an Inspiring Vision

How does your organization want to change the world, or at least your community? Once community members feel that they have some context and background and a sense of organizational purpose, they can be very insightful in response to this question. Not only does their input provide fresh and often inspirational ideas for a vision statement, but their support, encouragement, excitement, and offers of collaboration can help organizational stakeholders to find the courage necessary to make it happen. An inspiring new vision can serve as a recruitment tool for new board members and a magnet for attracting community attention, new funding, and potential partners. When a vision articulates the organization's value and societal outcomes, addressing issues and needs far beyond organizational survival, it serves as an energizing force to motivate stakeholders to undertake new community roles ranging from facilitating dialogue to providing (with others) needed services. Perhaps most importantly, museums, historic sites, and cultural organizations learn that they share the vision of building a better community with many other organizations and groups.

8. Develop Strategic Programs That Matter

A new inspirational vision, one that expresses a deeper purpose shared with numerous other community organizations, provides a framework for bold strategic directions and innovative, collaborative programs. Public programs that address what the community cares about naturally attract new audiences, partners, and support, often from unexpected places. Hence, design a community engagement process that solicits ideas for collaborative programs that can help to address important community issues, including social, physical, psychological, economic, and spiritual needs. Articulate potential issue-related topics, innovative program approaches, and partner organizations that share an interest in the program's topics. Invite the potential partners to design and implement programs with your organization, with the goal of sharing the planning, staffing, other required resources, and results. Use the program planning process as an opportunity to make friends, learn about partner organizations' contributions to the community, and share what your organization is all about. The process must be a shared endeavor among all partners to be

successful. Keep in mind that the emerging relationship is more important than the specific program outcomes because it represents the investment in building your organization's capacity. It lasts far longer than any exhibit, program, or event. Organizational research supports this collaborative approach because there is nothing more effective for building a productive relationship than working together toward a meaningful goal. This is also the quickest way to transform a group into an effective team.

9. Keep the Momentum Going

Once your organization has engaged a group of community representatives, it is essential to keep the momentum going by integrating this management approach into the ongoing operation of the museum. Here are a few examples of how to do this:

- Share the results of any community gatherings with all participants by preparing a summary of ideas, main points, and recommended actions. Ask for a follow-up reflection and continued input if community members have additional thoughts and recommendations.
- Publicize community engagement events in both internal venues, such as newsletters, annual reports, and social media, and external venues, such as newspaper articles and reports to community groups, funders, and governing agencies.
- Form a community working group comprising people who have participated in activities and demonstrated excitement and support for collaboration, new programs, new strategic directions, and working with your organization. The passion of potential working group members will emerge during community activities. Do not form this group based on credentials or positions of authority. Engage this group on a regular basis to provide input into organizational planning.
- Invite community participants to serve as new members of your organization's board and planning committees. This can be a particularly effective way to reenergize your stakeholders and quickly integrate community input into decision-making.
- Begin every planning process, be it for a strategic plan, a new program or event, a new facility, or an evaluation of existing programs and services, with a community engagement process. As this approach becomes an organizational norm, it facilitates the inclusion of a growing circle of community representatives and continually deepens your organization's relationship with community groups and organizations.

Do You Need to Hire a Consultant?

At this point, some readers may be wondering whether they can lead the community engagement process on their own or will need to enlist the help of a consultant to guide their journey. The answer depends on your organization's stage of development, stakeholders' skills (for example, facilitation experience), knowledge about your community, willingness to change, and level of courage. There is no question that strong leadership is a necessary ingredient for successful community engagement. For some organizations, the steps in this chapter will provide adequate guidance to begin the process and monitor its progress and to anchor the new approaches in organizational culture, strategic planning, and operational policies and procedures. Other organizations may find a consultant useful in getting the process started, with a pep talk that explains how the museum field is changing (refer back to the paradigm shifts at the beginning of the chapter), why community engagement is so important, why all stakeholders must be on board before beginning the process, and why it is beneficial to ask the community for help. Some museums need help in the planning and selection process in order to push beyond existing friends and stakeholders. A consultant or community representatives can provide this push, assuring that the right people participate in charting the museum's collaborative future role. Finally, some organizations benefit from a consultant's guidance throughout their journey because an experienced consultant can help stakeholders see the big picture and articulate the appropriate next steps. However, outside consultants, whether paid or volunteer, cannot ever lead this process by themselves. In all these scenarios, since we are talking about establishing and nurturing relationships with numerous community organizations, committed leadership from organizational stakeholders is necessary and critical for the long haul.

Boldly Changing Roles: Can Small Museums Become Social Entrepreneurs?

Social entrepreneurship, or social innovation, is a growing worldwide movement in which individuals, foundations, organizations from all sectors (business, public, and nonprofit), and the academy act as change agents. With bold social missions, social entrepreneurs are creating systemic sustainable improvements in society. When museums, historic sites, and cultural organizations engage their communities, discover what people care about (now and always), and transform their visions, programs, and services to address what matters, they move toward becoming social entrepreneurs. As new roles in the community emerge, ranging from facilitating dialogue about important civic issues to collaborating

with other organizations to provide needed services, our organizations become change agents for building better communities.

Professor J. Gregory Dees of Duke University, in a 2001 article titled "The Meaning of Social Entrepreneurship," articulates that social entrepreneurs act as change agents by

- adopting a mission to create and sustain social value (not just private value);
- recognizing and relentlessly pursuing new opportunities to serve that mission;
- engaging in a process of continuous innovation, adaptation, and learning;
- acting boldly without being limited by resources currently in hand;
- exhibiting heightened accountability to the constituencies served and for the outcomes created.

These actions echo the broad paradigm shifts that I described at the beginning of this chapter about our mandate for meaningful public service: embracing interpretation, programs, and community engagement as everyone's business, and becoming learning organizations. So, while many museums initially consider it a big leap to move toward social entrepreneurship, it is happening, with rewarding results, as enlightened leaders realize that they must be more proactive in response to increasing societal needs.

Embracing Organizational Change and Transformation

In engaging communities and moving toward social activist roles, most museums, sites, and cultural organizations will undergo major change and transformation. As such, it is important to learn about the requirements and benefits of transformational leadership. Organizational research has shown that these leaders appeal to followers' higher values to build commitment to an inspirational purpose. They empower others to share leadership roles, and they demonstrate "serving and supporting" rather than "commanding and controlling" actions. There is more support for the effectiveness of transformational leadership than for any other leadership approach. However, it takes integrity and courage to do what is right for an organization, regardless of a leader's personal ambition.

It may also be useful for small museum stakeholders to understand more about the process of organizational transformation. It is a difficult, chaotic, and complex process that does not follow a simple, linear sequence of steps. Rather, it is usually a multifaceted unfolding of decisions, events, role changes,

and redefinitions. Before change occurs, we must touch hearts and minds. Given this scenario, the importance of moving toward an inspiring vision of the future cannot be overstated—it is the lifeline that helps people come together and get through the chaos. William Bridges, a respected organizational change practitioner and author, notes that change leaders should focus on the transitions that people go through during the process of organizational change. Before embracing a new future, people must celebrate and then let go of past behavior patterns and organizational norms. They experience a chaotic "neutral zone" in which they try to understand why change is necessary and figure out how they will function in a new organizational reality. Transition is a wonderful time for organizational learning and collectively discovering how all in the enterprise can utilize their talents and skills to move the organization toward its envisioned future.

My research on organizational change in museums confirmed that meaningful participation helped stakeholders understand the reasons for change, built buy-in, and changed attitudes and behaviors. When meaningful participation did not occur, stakeholders resisted change, even if they thought it was a good thing. They also resisted change when they feared that they would lose control, power, competency, resources, or status. With this understanding in mind, it is important that leaders of museums, historic sites, and cultural organizations help people understand the process of change and how it will be implemented—particularly how it will affect existing roles, relationships, and responsibilities.

Especially in small museums where board members and staff often wear many hats and handle multiple functional responsibilities, it is helpful to remember during times of transformation that some activities may need to be postponed or discontinued. In light of moving the organization toward its future vision, it will be necessary to reevaluate and reprioritize existing programs, projects, and initiatives. If, for example, a community engagement process results in recommendations for existing museum programs or events to be collectively offered by a number of community partners, then it is necessary to transform how the new programs and events are conceptualized, planned, and implemented. The old way of working on these activities will no longer be effective. Similarly, if a small museum decides to undertake a capital campaign to improve facilities, staff and board must transform existing roles and responsibilities to accommodate this high-priority activity. It will be impossible to take on this enormous new task and maintain all other programs and activities.

Small museum boards need to model the transformation that they desire by becoming change agents, building support for change and organizational capacity, and becoming more effective governing bodies. Particularly in situations where the organization is transforming to focus outward and serve the community in more meaningful ways, board members need to partner with the director

and staff to drive the transformation forward. They may need to take an active role in championing the transformation through securing new support and resources, reaching out to other community leaders, using their influence to open doors, and advocating for the organization in political arenas. Board members can help staff and outsiders to strategically understand the museum as a part of a larger community system. They can help the museum to shift its thinking and perspective away from short-term efficiency models and toward long-term effectiveness. If, however, the current board is not up to the task of transformation, then the first step is very clear: The board must change its membership and find people who are exited about the new vision and willing to work to make it happen. For some museums, historic sites, and cultural organizations, transforming the board may be the most important accomplishment in the journey toward becoming more relevant community organizations.

Summary

This chapter discussed why and how small museums, historic sites, and cultural organizations are transforming to address what matters in their communities and becoming more relevant and sustainable organizations. Within the context of some broad paradigm shifts that are occurring in the field, the challenge remains for museums to address what communities deeply care about. One could argue that small museums have a unique opportunity to undergo this type of transformation because they can draw on their existing community connections to deepen their relationships, find new friends, and use the input from the community to articulate an inspiring vision and shape a more meaningful future of public service. However, this will only occur if small museum leadership is willing to let go of old-school museum models, honestly listen to community ideas, discover what really matters to people, and realign their programs and services in response. The most enterprising small museums, historic sites, and cultural organizations will transform their organizational identities, priorities, and community roles toward becoming social entrepreneurs.

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