

MUSEUMS MOVING FORWARD

MMF Convening: DEAI, IDEA, etc. in Museums

October 18 2021
12–1:30PM EST

ATTENDEES: 31

- I. INTRODUCTION AND GROUP AGREEMENTS
- II. MMF SURVEY
- III. SPEAKER BIOS

Gretchen Jennings has worked in museums for over 30 years. She was a project director on traveling exhibitions *Psychology and Invention at Play*, both of which received AAM awards of excellence. She was editor in chief of *The Journal of Museum Education* in the 1990s and *Exhibition* 2007-14. Currently she offers classes and workshops for university museum studies programs, including the National Council of Science Museums in India; edits museum publications; and collaborates on projects contributing to social justice in the museum field. She blogs at Museum Commons museumcommons.com, is a founder of the Empathetic Museum project empatheticmuseum.com, and is a participant in the MASSAction initiative. She is also a member of The Museum Group, an organization of museum consultants. She can be contacted at gretchenjennings934@gmail.com and @gretchjenn on Twitter.

Jackie Peterson (she/her) is an independent museum consultant with a focus on exhibit development, curation, and writing for history museums, historic sites, and other cultural institutions. With over a decade of exhibits experience, she has worked nationally with museums, communities, and stakeholders to uncover and illuminate meaningful stories and create authentic, truthful, and enlightening exhibitions. Jackie leverages the power of language and narrative to create exhibitions that attest to the nuances of our human experience, spark conversation, and bring people together. Much of Jackie's independent work has focused on storytelling through exhibitions highlighting the experiences and lives of African Americans in Washington State. She serves on the steering committee for Museums & Race, an initiative that seeks equity and justice for people of color in the museum field, and she is also a member of the Empathetic Museum, a metric for institutional transformation for the cultural sector.

Elisabeth Callihan is a museum practitioner working to connect education, equity, and public engagement, and co-creating programming that uses art as a site for critical reflection and dialogue. She most recently served as the Head of Multi-Generational Learning at the Minneapolis Institute of Art; and prior to that, was the Manager of Public Programs at the Brooklyn Museum. She is the co-founder of Museum As Site for Social Action (MASS Action)

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and has written extensively on the topic of museum culture, community engagement, and social action.

IV. PRESENTATIONS

Gretchen Jennings: Empathetic Maturity Model – Institutions can learn empathy

Museums are disconnected from their communities, BIPOC populations, and civic infrastructure. The Empathetic Museum works with museums to set and achieve goals through a series of incremental steps, from the “regressive” stage (lowest maturity) to the “proactive” stage (advanced maturity).

Five Characteristics of Empathetic Museum [Maturity Model](#)

- *Civic Vision*
 - What is the connection between the institution’s civic role and mission?
- *Institutional Body Language*
 - Who do you want to attract to your museum? If your goal is to appeal to a diverse audience, it must be reflected in your collections, staff, visuals on website, and marketing materials.
- *Community Resonance*
 - Interest in the institution’s relationship to local/national/global issues.
- *Timeliness & Sustainability*
 - Ability to respond quickly and appropriately to single events or ongoing issues.
- *Performance Measures*
 - Developing standards for internal assessments, conducting them, and acting on the results.

Jackie Peterson: Part One - The implementation of The Empathetic Museum as a professional development tool to bring about institutional change

EM conducts workshops and creates activities for deeper self-reflection, in small groups or with individuals. The goal is to assist the museum in making an internal cultural shift, changing its values, structures and policies. They have a survey linked to the maturity model to get feedback from users.

The 4 Stages of Group Development:

1. *Forming* - Diagnosis and inquiry.
2. *Storming* - Self-assessment (baseline).
3. *Norming* - Strategic planning: skills.
4. *Performing* - Strategic planning: transition and onboarding

Jackie Peterson: Part Two - Museums & Race

Museums & Race focuses on race-based transformation and justice. The lack of museum response to post Ferguson was a systemic omission. Have to go beyond simply naming white supremacy within museums and talk about how it operates in the museum, personal life, and larger society. [M&R developed a set of tools](#) for

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institutions to use to design and implement anti-racist strategies.

Museums & Race Report Card

- Maturity Model: graded on proactiveness and awareness
 - Six Categories:
 - 1. Governance
 - 2. Funding
 - 3. Representation
 - 4. Responsiveness
 - 5. Resources
 - 6. Transparency.

Museums & Race Report Card Rubric

- Outlines the path of DEAI transformation, Grades F to A, by category.
- Includes 7th category, Accountability.

Action Steps and Framework

- Set realistic goals, timelines, and progress checks (how are we doing on getting there?)

Elisabeth Callihan (with Anniessa Antar): How do we keep the spotlight on social justice and create a system of accountability for museums' change work?

MASS Action formed in 2014 after the murder of Michael Brown. Elisabeth moved from the Brooklyn Museum to Minneapolis Institute of Art— from an institution that was actively engaging to actively ignoring — how to reconcile the difference between these two? Reached out to people in the field also engaged in this work and formed Museum As Site for Social Action.

Interested in working with MMF and collaborating/sharing data. How to make sure we aren't duplicating efforts and also how to build on each other's work.

The 360 Museum Equity Index

Process:

Qualitative Internal Assessment + Qualitative External Assessment + Quantitative Index Criteria Audit = Equity Index Score

Established based on a growth mindset

- White institutions are often afraid of trying because of fear of messing up.

360 Assessment: Look at all aspects of the museum

- Have honest, unvarnished talks with staff — not just cleaned up presentations for the board.
- The attitude and needs of the public also needs to be taken into consideration.
- Speak with stakeholders and members of the public who are not coming to the museum.

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- Constantly developing criteria.
- Would eventually create an Index Score for each institution.
 - Prospective staff can decide if they want to work there, funders can decide if they want to give, and the public can decide if they want to visit.

Links:

- [Museums and Anti-Racism: A Deeper Analysis](#)
- [\[Collective Liberation\] Disrupt, Dismantle Manifest, June 2-4, 2021](#)
- [TOOLKIT FINAL-KT #2](#)

V. DISCUSSION

Art museums within the broader landscape

How many art museums are taking part in these DEAI assessment tools/opportunities?

- Has mostly been presented at conferences — history and science museums — hasn't been a lot of active engagement from art museums.
- Art museums feel like the furthest behind.
- MASS Action has had higher degree of art museum participation, probably because it was established at Minneapolis Institute of Art.

Incentives

What is the motivation for our institutions to actually make these changes? What's the value proposition for them? Many of us have experienced active resistance in our efforts.

What will incentivize them to embrace organizational change?

- There is a moral case and a business case. But also needs to be integrated in the discussion of mission. This work is mission critical.
- From a MASS Action perspective, this is about the future and cultural relevance of museums.
- How to incentivize museums? Begin with empathy. Remember this is a journey for us all, individually and collectively.
- How to get the data from these institutions when the data might paint a negative picture and where white supremacy is alive and well (actively eliminating negative image of themselves)?
 - Establish a national rating system that makes it mandatory to keep/release this data?
 - Boards are very influential—some are very controlling and don't allow cultural shifts, so the director's hands are tied. E.g., public statements that get watered down by the board.
 - Peer pressure from other board members
 - Mandated certification or seal of approval by AAMD might work(who are primarily white, hetero men).

What role could MMF play in supplying resources and assistance? How much of the problem is that directors don't know how (or don't want) to advance this work, and how much of the problem is that boards don't want to (or won't let directors/leadership)

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advance this work?

- We need some data on this but it's going to be very hard to get.
- All seemingly negative data is hidden from the public.
- In many museums, the director and the board work together to preserve the white supremacy culture, e.g., Newfields. Not even sure they know they are doing this but it is extremely dangerous to be a staff member caught in those crossfires.
- In some cases, we might actually need to develop tools/resources for directors who are allies. They might need help too.

Links

- [Facing Change - American Alliance of Museums](#)
- [2020 study from CCLI](#) (Cultural Competence Learning Institute) on the national landscape of DEAI practices in museums:
- [Leading with Intent Report](#)

Culture Change

Museums need organizational and individual change. Each of us, and certainly museum leadership (directors, boards, everyone) needs to commit to a pretty significant amount of self-reflection on a personal level, self-awareness, willingness to pay attention to and change one's own biases, practices, beliefs... We need to understand and accept our own racism, our own classism, ableism, etc. DEAI work is impossible without this. This is step one, and many of us have found this individual change part to be the trickiest. What do you do when there is deep personal resistance to self-reflection in the room?

- Culture shift has to occur on every level: personal, interpersonal and institutional.
- Maybe we don't need to wait for institutional buy-in to have transformation:
 - External pressure to adopt DEAI standards, e.g., the 360 degree review. No other choice but to participate.
 - "Making the revolution irresistible": be transformed or get left behind and become a vestige of colonial extraction.
- Create constant, external pressure:
 - Through external coalition building.
 - Through financial accountability, e.g., COVID funds. [Museums received a lot of PPP money then laid off a lot of BIPOC staff.](#)
 - "Power isn't going to give up without the lower levels pushing." Look at Hollywood, for example, and the requirement is that now to be considered for an Oscar you have to have diversity. (Let's look into this further and see what the actual language is, what the actual requirement is?)

In what ways can MMF help incentivize change? Should MMF create an award system? Best and worst lists based on criteria outlined in today's session and other pertinent data?

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- Examples of positive change, e.g. ICA Boston
 - Divested their endowment from private prisons and fossil fuels.
 - Also took a survey of staff salaries and was able to bring everyone up to the living wage for the Boston area.
- Positive reinforcement is great but a self-congratulatory attitude can lead to backsliding, especially in larger museums.
- How to sustain DEAI progress? Often tied to an individual or a group of staff members and if they leave, the efforts cease.
- A Best of/ Worst of list: best/worst workplaces, best/worst in retention of BIPOC staff, best/worst in data transparency, best/worst in pay equity, best/worst in community engagement, best/worst in leadership, best/worst board culture, etc.
- Boards respond to external auditors:
 - Everyone wants a clean audit.
 - Can DEAI values be included in the auditing procedures? Or within governance or finance audits?
 - Could there be an aspect of this that gets integrated into the accreditation process?