MUSEUMS INVOLVING COMMUNITIES
PRACTICAL TOOLS FOR AUTHENTIC CONNECTIONS

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CONSIDERING COMMUNITY

- Community as a *place* – a neighborhood, for instance, or some other geographic definer

- Community of *interest* – people come together for some reason other than place, where they share a common interest, identity, etc.

- Community as *communion* – the feeling of community, of people coming together, with a sense of belonging
WHY INVOLVE THE COMMUNITY?

Consider:

• Why do you want to have stronger relationships with people and organizations in your community?

• What do you hope will happen as you become more fully involved in your community?
WHY INVOLVE THE COMMUNITY?

Consider:

Does your organization have the internal capacity to be involved with your community?
INTERNAL CAPACITY:
UNDERSTANDING YOUR ORGANIZATION

• How inclusive is the internal culture of your organization?

• To what degree is community-focused work spread throughout the organization, and to what degree is it the responsibility of just one person or department?
SAN DIEGO MUSEUM OF MAN

Photo: Museum of Man

Photo: Stacy Keck
INTERNAL CAPACITY:
DETERMINING PRIORITY COMMUNITIES

The museum leadership and staff will need to decide which priority communities they want to involve more fully.

- What is on the horizon for your museum in the next year?
INTERNAL CAPACITY: KEY ATTRIBUTES AND SKILLS

Attributes and skills that support museum-community connections:

• The ability to truly listen
• Patience
• Respect
• Empathy
• Humility
KEY ATTRIBUTES:
WHOLEHEARTEDNESS
LEARNING ABOUT COMMUNITIES
LEARNING ABOUT PRIORITY COMMUNITIES: KEY QUESTIONS

- What primary institutions and organizations support this community?
- Who are the community leaders and stakeholders?
- What are the primary concerns, interests, and needs of this community?
- What assets exist within this community?
What are the primary complexities and nuances of this community?

What barriers or constraints exist that prevent or hinder this community from fuller involvement with your museum?
LEARNING ABOUT COMMUNITIES: SUGGESTED METHODS

A variety of methods will help museum staff and leadership gain deeper understanding about the community.

- Demographic research
- Online research
- Surveys
- Interviews and community conversations
LEARNING ABOUT COMMUNITIES: SUGGESTED METHODS

Demographic Research

• Data that numerically describe a community

• The national census is a primary source for useful information.

• Another resource: Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute at The University of Utah
LEARNING ABOUT COMMUNITIES: SUGGESTED METHODS

Online Research

• A great deal of information is available online

• Doing a web search on any aspect of the community will likely yield numerous sites
LEARNING ABOUT COMMUNITIES: SUGGESTED METHODS

Surveys

- A effective way to learn specific types of information
- Useful if a researcher wants to hear from many people
LEARNING ABOUT COMMUNITIES:
SUGGESTED METHODS

Qualitative Research: Interviews and Community Conversations

• Very useful ways to learn about communities

• An opportunity to build deeper relationships with community members

• Begin by identifying key stakeholders
INTERVIEWS AND COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS I

Process

• Create a list of potential interviewees, prioritize it, and determine who will follow up with each person. Then follow up!
Creating Interview Questions

• Be clear about what you want to know
• Ask open-ended questions
• Limit interview to 20 minutes
• Practice
• Ask “Who else should I talk to?”
• Send follow-up thank you note
SHARING WHAT YOU LEARN

• Share what you are learning about the community internally and externally.
• Use what you learn to inform your work.
MOVING FORWARD

• What are our goals and specific strategies?

• How will we nurture the relationships we are establishing?
ADVISORY GROUPS

• Most effective when the museum staff and leadership value the diverse perspectives that advisory committee members bring
COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Successful and effective partnerships:

• Are built on already-established relationships
• Have clarified goals and expectations
• Begin with smaller projects, with a high chance for success
• Have shared decision-making
MUSEUMS AND COMMUNITIES: AUTHENTIC CONNECTIONS
Museums Involving Communities: Authentic Connections

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