



# Future of Museums: Literature Review





# Agenda

## Literature Review Approach & Process

### Key Topics of Interest:

- Business Models, Finances, and Sustainability
- Workforce
- Operations
- Boards & Leadership
- Audience Experience: Exhibits & Design
- Engaging with Audiences: Communication & Partnerships



# Literature Review Approach & Process



# Introduction of Literature Review

**Purpose:** Conduct work in advance of March 2023 convening to share key insights that help generate discussion during the in-person event.

## Guiding Question

1. Since November 2019, what topics have been explored in the literature from the museum and cultural institution field that relate to the future of museums? Which topics have been discussed extensively? Which topics are less frequently or not at all discussed?
2. For the topics that are currently being discussed, what are the persistent, unresolved questions in the field? If possible, identify what kinds of institutions are participating in these discussions?



# Literature Sources Reviewed

- American Alliance of Museums
- American Association for State and Local History
- Association of Science and Technology Centers
- Association of Zoos and Aquariums
- Association of Children's Museums
- American Public Gardens Association
- Association of African American Museums
- Association of Art Museum Directors
- The Getty
- American Institute for Conservation
- Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums
- Small Museum Association
- Visitor Studies Association
- SMU DataArts
- Culture Track
- Canopy Strategic Partners
- Artnet
- Cuseum
- Curator: The Museum Journal



# Method Used

- Included documents published since **Nov. 2019** that discussed topics related to the role and operation of museums and cultural institutions
- Reviewed an initial set of **981** documents
- Used a **coding process** to develop **major themes and sub-themes**
- In collaboration with IMLS, identified select topics for an in-depth review of the literature



# Major Codes and Subcodes

| Major Code                                    | Subcodes  |
|---|---|
| Business models, finances, and sustainability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Business models*</li><li>• Budget management and cuts*</li><li>• Revenue streams*</li><li>• Investments*</li></ul>  |
| Workforce                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Compensation*</li><li>• Staffing*</li><li>• Labor practices*</li></ul>  |
| Operations                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Operational changes post pandemic*</li><li>• Digital tools*</li><li>• Pricing/ticketing*</li><li>• Vendors*</li><li>• Resiliency*</li><li>• Facility design</li></ul> |
| Boards and leadership                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Board membership*</li><li>• Leadership models*</li><li>• Organizational mission</li></ul>   |

| Major Code              | Subcodes  |
|-------------------------|---|
| Audience experience     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Communication and outreach*</li><li>• Audience trust in the organization*</li><li>• Exhibition spaces</li><li>• Exhibition strategies</li><li>• Programming</li><li>• Addressing social issues and concerns*</li></ul>  |
| Engaging with Audiences | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Social impact*</li><li>• Museums as community infrastructure (e.g., education for children, livable communities for elders, mental health, disaster response,* and environmental sustainability*)</li><li>• Community-centered programs</li><li>• Facilities as community space</li></ul> |

\* Topics selected for in-depth review of the literature.



# **Business Models, Finances, and Sustainability**





# Key Insight: Apply Strategic Budget Planning

At the beginning of the pandemic, most museums lacked long-term financial resilience and growth plans.

## Recommended Best Practices

- **Align budgeting and strategic planning:**
  - Hold budget discussions that focus explicitly on the **museum's priorities**. Then, fill in numbers.
  - In isolation, budget allocations should communicate the museum's priorities.
  - Combine budget and strategic priorities check ins.
- Budget from the **ground up** (i.e., zero-based budgeting).
- Ensure that **senior staff** are a part of budget planning.
- Keep **fundraising efforts focused** on the museum's priorities.
- Consider what initiatives or plans need to be cut.

# Key Insight: Adapting Pricing and Ticketing Structures

## Optimizing Pricing Strategies to Maximize Revenue



- Analyze attendance fees to better understand standards for pricing
- Dynamic pricing adjusts ticket prices based on anticipated demand using factors such as time of year, day, and weather

## Virtual Events

- Implement digital contributions, fees, or pay-what-you-can for live-streamed events, online classes, virtual tours, and online galas



# Key Insight: Alternative Revenue Streams

## Renting Out Museum Space

- Create coworking or other remote workspaces in museums
- Rent out space for organizational retreats, employee meetings or other professional activities

## Converting Membership Models

Creating monthly membership structure:

- Creates a consistent revenue source
- Improves affordability and, thus, accessibility
- Generates high retention rates

# Examples From the Field

## Focus on Community



Some smaller organizations serving communities of color maintained strong financial health during the pandemic by shifting programs to meet the needs of and create value for the community.

## Virtual Events

Zoos offered cameo appearances from animals at video conferences for purchase.

## Innovative Partnerships

### Joint Initiatives

Four mid-sized nonprofits in the visual arts field formed an initiative for group fundraising.

### New Business Models

A children's museum implemented a new business model that included partnering with schools to create mutually beneficial programs.

### Cross-Sectoral Collaboration

A science museum formed an alliance with board members working across the creative, hospitality, and cultural industries to ensure the museum's financial sustainability, creating mutually beneficial programs.



# Questions for Consideration

1. What does the field need to prepare for the next financial crisis? What does long-term financial sustainability look like? What can institutions do to plan and prepare now?
2. How can new approaches to earned revenue contribute to long-term financial sustainability?
3. What additional research is needed to understand the tradeoffs involved in alternative pricing strategies? What data do institutions need to consider the viability of alternative revenue streams for them?



**Workforce**

# Key Insight: Create a Collaborative Environment

## GOAL

Create an environment of psychological safety

## WHY?

To support the creative collaboration necessary in the workforce

## HOW?

Establish core values on which teams base their everyday actions and interactions.

Create standardized feedback mechanisms to create a trusting environment.

Create codes of conduct to set behavior expectations.



# Key Insight: Provide Fair Compensation

Develop a fair and equitable compensation program that reflects the external labor market.



## Why?

- Low compensation is a common barrier to entry to the field.
- Fair compensation can help **attract** new hires as well as **retain** and motivate existing staff.



## How?

- **Increase pay** to meet a living wage standard (particularly frontline staff).
- **Place a cap** on what the highest employee makes in comparison to the lowest.





# Examples from the Field

## Aquarium Created a Collaborative Environment

Used the "Excite, Build, Consider" Framework for exploring new ideas

When a new idea is proposed, staff share:

- What excites them about the idea (e.g., I am excited about... because...)
- How the group could build on the idea (e.g., You could build on this idea by...)
- What the group could consider changing (e.g., Have you considered...?)

## Anthropology Museum Provided Fair Compensation

Adjusted the job profile for the Visitor Experience Associate

- Changed position from part-time to full-time to ensure all employees receive a benefits package
- Raised the hourly wage from \$13.75 to \$20
- Increased focus on professional development opportunities
- Redesigned the role to be a long-term career position



# Questions for Consideration

1. What policies and practices does your organization have in place to ensure diversity of your workforce? What changes or supports would you need to ensure a diverse workforce?
2. What are the barriers museums face in adopting the compensation policies and practices covered in this section? What changes or supports would you need to adopt them?



# Operations

# Key Insight: COVID-Influenced Operational Changes

## Visitor Experience



- **Digital kiosks** (e.g., standardize language on sensitive topics, engage visitors)



- **Virtual docents** who greet visitors through video chats

- **Artificial intelligence translation** of museum materials



- “Frictionless” augmented reality (e.g., headsets, projections, magic mirrors, optical illusions)

**Standardizing online ticketing and visitor self-service for concessions**



**Closure of cafeterias and shops**



**Reduction of hours of operation to allow more time to clean**





# Key Insight: Improving Digital Strategies

## Operations

### Increase use of data and analytics

- Boost visitor engagement and membership
- Identify possible donors
- Improve fundraising efforts

### Implement digital membership programs

- Reduce administrative work
- Lower operational costs
- Increase member satisfaction

### Develop digital facility reports

- More secure data
- Facilitate communication and collaboration between museums

## Strategies for Successful Digital Membership

1

Engage nonlocal and seasonal audiences

2

Expand program access with flexible “participation” options

3

Drive membership value for all types of members

# Key Insight: Disaster Planning Strategies



## Natural Disasters

- Build relationships with other museums and public safety officials
- Train staff for disaster preparedness
- Replace doors and windows
- Fortify the ground level of a museum
- Move collections and storage areas to higher floors

## Future Public Health Crises

- Identify a crisis management team
- Build redundancies for essential museum functions (e.g., IT, human resources)
- Form community partnerships and alliances with other cultural institutions to promote public health knowledge

## Cybersecurity Threats

- Increasingly important to address
- Only one article offers general guidance, not specific to the museum field

# Examples from the Field

## Disaster Preparedness



### Gardens

Build a seawall, add drainage pumps, relocate fragile plants



### Historic Houses

Relocate building to a safer place



### All Museums

Build relationships with other museums and public safety officials, and train staff throughout the organization in disaster preparedness



## Digital Strategies

### Natural History Museum

#### *Frictionless Augmented Reality*

- Immediate: experience doesn't require any waiting time (e.g., download an app)
- Intuitive: doesn't require complicated instructions, uses naturalistic behavior
- Inclusive: comprehensive & inviting

### Historic House

#### *Digital Kiosks*

- Worked with a contractor to design and build touchscreen pedestals
- Content can be updated as research becomes available
- Take what would've been 5 exhibit panels and put it on 1 screen





# Examples from the Field

## Example: Air & Space Museum

### Virtual Docents

#### Virtual information desk volunteer

- Get the visitor's attention by noting something visible about them

#### Artifact station volunteer

- Available to answer questions about large pieces in the collections

### Why?

- ★ Increases inclusion
  - Teleconferencing features (e.g., automated captioning)
  - Shift limit of one hour and remote nature allows for wider range of volunteers (e.g., volunteers with disabilities, working individuals, etc.)
- ★ Volunteers only need: (1) monitor, (2) web camera, (3) Wi-Fi connection, (4) collaboration platform (e.g., Zoom)





# Questions for Consideration

1. What evidence is needed about the value of digital tools to support the visitor experience and museum operations in the long-term?
2. What has your institution done to prepare for possible future threats?  
What do you think you need to do to prepare?
3. What guidance or support does the field need to support strategic planning for resiliency in the face of future threats?



# Boards and Leadership



# Key Insight: Board Membership Considerations

## Diversity

Arguments for inclusion of:

- Young board members
- Shareholders

Concerns:

- “Toxic philanthropy”

## Alternative Advisory Bodies

Auxiliary leadership advisory bodies can give more stakeholders agency in museum leadership.





# Key Insight: Board & Leadership Models

## Deconstructing Silos

**Goal:** Blending different perspectives, skill sets, and areas of expertise in museum leadership

## Models

**Learning Organizations:** Staff can experiment, collaborate, and share knowledge and feedback

**Transformational and Distributive Leadership:** Fosters innovative thinking, collaboration, mutual respect, experimentation, and reflection

**Collective Achievement Design:** Emphasizes trust and egalitarianism, goalsetting, accountability, sense of “*collective achievement*”



# Key Insight: Leadership Models

## Leadership Approaches

### Evidence-based and data-driven decision making

- The field needs think tanks
- Make data-driven decisions through surveys and contextual factors

### Foster a culture of trust and creativity

- Ethical leaders are aware of people's worth, able to build trust, inquisitive, and reflective
- Middle managers can facilitate trust between employees and leaders

## Flattening the Hierarchy

- Create egalitarian, inclusive leadership structures
- More equitable for employees and better suited for confronting systemic racism across society
- Incremental and reversible

# Examples from the Field

## Deconstructing Silos

### Natural History Museum

- Evaluated the extent to which a new exhibit allowed the museum to become a **learning organization**, in which staffers feel encouraged to innovate and grow the museum through autonomous collaboration, goalsetting, and inquiry
- To assess whether the museum was a learning organization, it looked for staffers' sense that they could **experiment, collaborate, and share** knowledge and feedback



## Board Composition

### Prison Museum

- Museum's board includes people who can **represent** and **give voice** to lived experiences relevant to the museum
  - E.g., incarcerated persons and their families, correctional officers, prison administrators, and crime victims

## Alternate Advisory Bodies

### Children's Museum

- Created a **guild** for parents to participate in museum leadership without the need to join the board or make the associated financial commitments
- This guild focuses on **fundraising efforts**—including managing a fundraising event and determining how a portion of museum funds would be used



# Questions for Consideration

1. In considering how to diversify board membership, what experiences (both lived and learned) are important for the successful leadership and oversight of your institution?
2. What is the leadership structure at your organization? What guidance or supports would your organization need to identify an alternative or more expansive leadership model and implement it?



# Audience Experience



# Key Insight: Challenges to Design Change



Museums hold competing values related to interpretation, curatorial power, and the societal aims of the exhibit.

Long-standing connection to colonialism and racism.



Wanting to maintain neutrality can lead to silence on social and political issues.



Lack of diverse staff, including leadership positions.



Attempts at change are siloed rather than systemic.





# Key Insight: Incorporate Diverse Representations

- Design exhibits that **undermine stereotypes** of otherness
- **Fill gaps** in representation in both exhibits and the museum's relationships
- Prioritize **first-person** narratives
- Provide visitors space for **reflection** (e.g., a response wall or videos)
- Partner with people who have **lived experience**

# Key Insight: Incorporate Diverse Representations

## How to Narrate the Many Stories and Voices That Make Up a History

- Tell **critical, inclusive** stories even if they are challenging or unsettling
- Focus on stories about **individual agency**, particularly community activists, to highlight social and political change
- Explore crises to understand their power to illuminate how **communities** have been defined—including who is excluded

Incorporate context, cultural exchange, dialogue, and hybridization into exhibits



Critically pair canonical works with previously excluded or marginalized works



# Key Insight: Concepts for Sharing Curatorial Roles

Diversify leadership positions by hiring curators of color.



Create a team of multiple curators.



Hand curatorial control over to people with diverse lived experiences.



Co-create with Indigenous or other communities.





# Key Insight: Enacting Change Through Exhibits

- Go beyond listening to taking **collective action**
- Know the **needs** of communities
- **Compensate** artists, and Indigenous groups fairly
- Prioritize **collective efforts** over exceptionalism
- Work to **repair** the relationship with communities that have been excluded



# Examples from the Field

## Art Museum

- Embedded DEAI expectations into strategic plan
- Publishes a newsletter with discussions on DEAI
- Staff discuss texts related to equity and racism

## History Museum

- Offers tours in Spanish
- Is working to include American Sign Language interpreters
- Plans to offer tours specific to the experiences of various audience identities (e.g., Black, Latino, Indigenous, LGBTQIA+, Jewish)

# Examples from the Field



## Art Museum Example

Made a custodianship arrangement with a Mayan artist based on terms set by the artist



## Contemporary Art Example

Transferred its land and building to a foundation for Native arts and cultures and dissolved the art institution



## University-Based Example

Develops and maintains relationships with Indigenous groups



# Questions for Consideration

1. What are the most pressing social and political issues in your community? How are you responding to those issues through exhibits and programming?
2. What guidance or support do you need to develop and implement more inclusive exhibits or programming?
3. In what ways are you exploring the sharing of curatorial roles within your staff and/or with members of your community?





# Engaging with Audiences

# Key Insight: Outreach to Diverse Audiences

- Recognize the **history** of relationships between cultural institutions and people of color.
- Reflect on the ways in which organizations **welcome or exclude** diverse visitors.
- Set **goals** for diversity and measure progress.



- Develop **partnerships** with influencers, brands, organizations, and community members.
- Make **internal changes** to demonstrate that you value diverse audiences.
- Ensure your website is **accessible** to people with visual impairments.



# Examples from the Field



## Prison Museum Example

Museum is being designed and developed to help audiences envision a more equitable justice system



## Art Museum Example

Implemented exhibitions and installations to educate and encourage action on the climate crisis



## Zoo Example

Encourages visitors to develop empathy for the animals and take action on the climate crisis through activities at home and at the zoo



# Questions for Consideration

1. What partnerships does your institution have with diverse members of the community? How can you further develop those relationships?
2. What tools do you have to measure social impact? As the role of the museum is shifting to include community impact, what guidance or support do you need to assess your organization's impact?