

## **Putting the 'Public' in Public Programs: An Inclusive Approach to Program Development in Museums**

Kimberly Keith, Goldsmiths College, University of London

### **Abstract**

This paper outlines how museums could better address the process of developing public programs. It presents a strategy for involving community members more meaningfully in the program development process, in a way that can be tailored to the specific audiences of individual museums. It also addresses the contribution that community-based programs make in fostering diverse museum audiences and points towards ways of expanding sustainable audience support.

An examination of current public programs, art work projects and available toolkits provides a view of the landscape in which this kind of strategy would be placed. This initiative is different from other offerings in that it will literally put the 'public' back in public programs, by encouraging the participation of a diverse populace in the planning process. It proposes that an innovative methodology, which draws on aspects of evaluation research, action research and ethnography, can facilitate a new paradigm for public program development. This combination of approaches, while employing the methods of surveys, focus groups and interviews, produces rich and varied data which aids in more imaginative and innovative ways of involving museum users throughout the program design and development process.

**Key words:** program development, museum, audience development, public programs

**Correspondence to:** [kimbakeith@msn.com](mailto:kimbakeith@msn.com), [k.keith@gold.ac.uk](mailto:k.keith@gold.ac.uk)

## **Putting the 'Public' in Public Programs: An Inclusive Approach to Program Development in Museums**

### **Research Question**

What strategies will better enable museums to foster an engaging approach to public program development that will generate a sense of inclusion and community, while presenting a viable and appealing education and exhibition program?

### **Context for the Research**

In order to implement the best strategies for developing public programs, it is first necessary to define what public programs are, to examine what has already been developed and to articulate how an inclusive approach to the process will work in

tandem with the access and inclusion standards set by DCMS (Department of Culture, Media and Sport), the policy initiatives set forth by the MLA (Museums, Libraries and Archives Council) and with the vision and mission statements set forth by individual museums. This is achieved through an examination of current literature, project reports and toolkits, which are then viewed in context with the aims and objectives set forth in this paper.

In museums, 'public programs' can refer to any participatory educational activities that are offered to the visiting public, either free or for an additional charge, often as an enhancement to an exhibition or object on display. There are many 'publics' that programs can be geared towards, such as children, senior citizens, ethnic minorities or gender specific audiences. The particular public and specific program that a museum chooses to work with is determined by many factors, such as a museum's location, collection practices and content, resource allocation/donors and staff interest and ability. Much of the decisions about audience development and which publics to serve fall under the purview of access and inclusion policies, which are set forth both internally at individual museums and externally through government and other bodies. Therefore, this paper will focus on practice and policy issues rather than theory.

In creating projects to meet the needs of diverse publics, museums must do their homework in order to engage their potential audiences. This homework includes researching community needs, developing collaborative partnerships with organizations and individuals (both inside and outside of the museum field), developing internal and external support for the project, and demonstrating genuine commitment to the process. This will take a considerable amount of resources, both human and financial, which should also be examined during this process. This strategy includes practical components of development including creating surveys, convening focus groups, and conducting planning meetings, all of which are addressed in the methodologies section below. Thus, this paper is about the *process* of engaging the 'public' in the development of 'public programs' and can be applied to a wide range of programs set forth by museums.

Creating change in the *process* of how museums develop and deliver programming is critical. Museums tend to provide exhibits, programs and information to a portion of society that most closely reflects themselves (Hooper-Greenhill, 2001). For the most part this means a reflection that is white, educated, male, and upper middle class. In order to remain relevant it is imperative that museums expand their offerings and provide exhibitions and programs that resonate with a diversified audience (MLA, Diversity Policy). One way this can be achieved is by including the public in the process, rather than by giving the public internally developed programs – which is the traditional transmission approach to education and programming that museums have taken for years. Moreover, I assert this process should be engaged with on an ongoing

basis, not just when museums are presenting an exhibit about a specific country or culture or during black history month.

In this paper I will first speak to the background and precedent set for public art in the United Kingdom, then I will point out some of the current research and reading on the subject, outline the aims and objectives of the strategy, and then articulate the process. Experiential and anecdotal information shall be shared throughout, and it may be pertinent to state that this information was garnered while working on public programs in the United States. The combination of practice-based knowledge from the United States and theoretical/academic knowledge acquired in the United Kingdom is an ongoing synthesis in my current research and writing.

### **Why Public Art?**

The United Kingdom has a long, rich history of addressing the social and aesthetic needs of its people through the content of its built environment. From Stonehenge and the White Horse in ancient times, to the architecture of the Houses of Parliament and the monuments along Whitehall, to the contemporary art inhabiting the Fourth Plinth on Trafalgar Square, there is a precedent set for art that creates a sense of place and builds community. This artwork that has the power to be transformative and that creates this sense of space and community is often referred to as 'public art'. But what is public art? For the purpose of this paper the definition will be:

*Public Art is any work of visual art or craft produced by an artist or craftsman and sited in a location that is freely accessible to the public. It may be new work commissioned specifically for a particular site, or a work sited in a public place but not necessarily created for that location. It may be made by an individual artist or as a result of a collaborative process involving other design professionals, such as architects, urban planners or landscape designers, or members of a local community. (Milton Keynes web site, mkweb.co.uk)*

The Arts Council of England has provided funding and support for public art initiatives since its founding in the late 1940's, yet "the priorities it promoted were generally those of the artists and the art itself, rather than those of the public" (Selwood, 1995, pg.xvi). Traditionally the public was more likely to be told rather than asked about public art works content or placement. Also, "given the lack of evidence about the impact of public art in Britain it appears that many organizations in the public and private sectors promote public art and commit resources to it largely on the basis of traditional, social conventions" (Ibid, pg. 2). These traditional approaches to the creation, commissioning and placement of public art works are warranting change, however.

The dichotomy in the approach to developing and exhibiting public art mirrors the dichotomy in the epistemology of museums, which manifests as a split between

traditional essentialist notions of displaying objects for their own sake and adaptive approaches to display which engage the public (or the viewer) in an educational process (O'Neill, 2006). The strategy that I am proposing resides squarely in the adaptive camp; it is externally focused and has the public at the center of the process. This approach presents an opportunity to create change in program development, yet, museums firmly entrenched in the essentialist mode of preservation and display may find this approach not only difficult but irrelevant. The discourse about creating a new museum epistemology, which could aid in establishing the relevant necessity to engage in a strategy such as the one presented here, is set out by O'Neill in *Essentialism, Adaptation and Justice: Towards a New Museum Epistemology* (2006). First, it is necessary to examine previous and current best practice, much of which is being conducted by regional and local government initiatives, in order to place this current strategy in a public arts context.

### **Background Reading**

#### ***Access and Inclusion***

Engaging the community in program development is a function of access and inclusion. In *Museums for the Many, Standards for Museums and Galleries to Use When Developing Access Policies* DCMS provides standards and principles which, if applied, should enable museums to offer the widest possible access to their collections, programs and staff. Strategies for increasing access are given and examples of current best practice are described. The barriers to access cited by DCMS are strongly correlated with those cited by the MLA in their *'Access for All' Toolkit: Enabling Inclusion for Museums Libraries and Archives* which provides a template for organizations to assess their strengths and weaknesses in seven key areas that impact access. The checklists and scoring mechanisms are straightforward and allow the users (museum staff, for example) an opportunity to reflect on current and future practice, the results of which could in turn provide a roadmap for enhanced services and public programs. Access is also addressed by the Arts Council of England in their *Cultural Diversity Action Plan*, where they state that "barriers to access are historical and attitudinal, deeply buried in the thinking and structure of organizations", and an action plan is outlined demonstrating steps that can be taken to reduce or eliminate the stated barriers.

#### ***Impact of Public Art***

In *Personal Views: Public Art Research Project*, Massey and Rose explore issues of public art for Artpoint on behalf of the Milton Keynes Council. Their report focuses on the subjects of place, public and identity, which are all explored in the context of social diversity. Much of their findings relate to the implications of engaging in a public arts program in the first place, but in terms of how their report informs this paper it is important to consider the following:

*For an artwork to be public, it needs to invite engagement not only from different groups, but between them. It needs to have some potentiality for*

*the negotiation of social differences. The negotiation can be strong or weak. But for an artwork to be public, in our argument, that negotiation has to be part of what the artwork does. If negotiation among diverse social identities is not invited, then the artwork is not public.* (Massey and Rose, 2003, pg.19)

This negotiation can begin from the outset of the public program design, by engaging the audience in the initial planning phases of creating and displaying public art works. This early engagement leads to developing ownership, which generates increased buy-in to the project, which leads to creating and citing artworks that will encourage that negotiation between and amongst constituent groups, and individuals in the community. In the case of museums this process can also result in increased visitorship through the relationships built during the process and through word of mouth afterwards.

The Southampton City Council report *Art, People, Places: Southampton Public Art Strategy*, expresses that public art has the ability to uplift and empower communities and transform how people feel, behave and interact, which has an impact on quality of life issues. The report provides guidelines for the implementation and commissioning processes, as well as visual examples of good practice. In *Research on Public Art: Assessing Impact and Quality*, the researchers at OPENspace were asked to create an assessment tool for use by practitioners engaged with public art works. The nature of evaluation and impact assessment was explored, along with a review of claims about public art in relation to impact and practice, development of an evaluation framework and tools, and recommendations for expanding the toolkit. Findings included discussion about the difficulties of defining arts impact, quality and success; the challenges and necessity of embedding evaluation in all aspects of project development; and applying the evaluation findings to subsequent projects.

### **Reflexivity**

Yet, how reflexive are the users? The challenge of any tool is its user, and the user in this case is the museum staff that is going to implement these particular tools. Use in this case calls for complete transparency if there is to be any forward movement on improving access. If users are only familiar with their own class and cultural norms, as is customary in many museums (Bourdieu 1993, O'Neill 2006, MacPherson 2005) it will be difficult to create and implement the tools unless the utmost reflexivity is employed. When adapting the tools for use at specific museums or in creating unique tools it is important to ask specific and open-ended questions to elicit the most accurate answers, not to go on a fishing expedition to elicit the answers one already 'knows'. These tools should be used to gain genuine feedback from the audience rather than to support the initial claims and aims of the practitioner, so the questions need to be geared accordingly. Another problem with usage is that the answers received only reflect the experience of a restricted section of the potential public, i.e. those who

would answer “no” aren’t there to give their response. Without reflexivity using these tools would be an exercise in futility.

These are but a few of the public art works reports available. It can be surmised from this brief literature review that the creation and placement of public art works could be an integral component of fulfilling initiatives set forth in the missions of many museums. Accessibility to culture and community regeneration, promoting diversity and engaging with partners across sectors are objectives shared by many cultural arts institutions. Considering public art works in this context allows for a more precise development of aims and objectives for this paper, which leads to a clearly defined approach to methodology and methods.

### **Research Aims and Objectives**

Aims and objectives for this paper are to establish a public program development strategy for museums that will do the following:

- Advocate for the contribution of public art in the creation of a diverse social identity
- Strengthen community by engaging in inclusive and transparent decision-making
- Support creative thinking throughout the process of developing public programs
- Foster an inclusive, reciprocal relationship between art practitioners and audience, and
- Involve the audience in the creative process in order to encourage ownership and pride in the project and place

In setting these aims and objectives museums commit to creating public programs unlike previous models. The key difference being that the audience is incorporated as part of the planning and design process from the outset. People are a part of the ‘public’ in public programs (and public art), yet:

*It is strange, then, that ‘the audience’, or ‘the community’, for all its centrality to current definitions of public art, is never allowed to produce its own definitions of whether and how a particular piece is effective or affective. Examining audiences’ responses might allow a much more thorough understanding of how a public artwork is functioning. It might also bring to light aspects those complex negotiations at work in any place. (Massey and Rose, 2003, pg.14)*

### **Methodologies**

To address the various needs of this type of programming it is necessary to employ a degree of methodological pluralism, in particular drawing from aspects of evaluation research, action research and ethnography. The aspects employed from each methodology are described below. Subsequently, the specific methods are described in ‘how to’ present-tense language and anecdotal

information about their use in my professional practice is interspersed in past-tense throughout.

### ***Evaluation research***

Evaluation research "...attempts to assess the effectiveness of change intervention programs and policies, and is related more to a research purpose or goal than a particular methodological approach" (O'Leary, 2004, pg. 135). Change intervention in its application here is the process of collaborating and consulting with stakeholders in a decision-making process that represents a change from the regular operating procedures of many museums. Incorporating evaluation research into the program design from the outset demonstrates a desire to know from the public's perspective whether the strategies are successful, cost effective, and accessible or need to be modified to meet the needs of the stakeholders or the provider.

The types of evaluation utilized here are formative (i.e. related to process) evaluation, aimed at providing ongoing information to aid in decision-making in the areas of program improvement, relationship building, project management, etc., and summative (or outcome-based) evaluation, which provides evidence of program effectiveness. Outcome measures, goals and objectives should be established by the museum and its funders, if applicable, before the public program begins.

To implement this change intervention it is first necessary for the museum to conduct a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis of what is currently taking place within their organization and out in their community. [An accessible introduction and overview of the SWOT analysis activity as developed by the Management Sciences for Health and the United Nations Children's Fund can be found at <http://erc.msh.org/quality/ittools/itswot.cfm>]. An internal organizational SWOT analysis will provide insights as to which existing programs are working in the museum (and articulate the components of their success), what resources are available to support new and ongoing programs (human, in-kind and financial), what are the gaps in current program offerings and services, and what are the potential pitfalls in offering or not offering specific public programs. An external SWOT analysis will inform the museum about what is currently working with specific populations in their broader community (what is offered by other museums and cultural arts organizations), what programs have failed to meet the needs of specific constituent groups, what unmet needs in the community (underserved populations, marginalized groups, etc.) and the potential negative impact that could effect the community if certain needs are not met.

An external SWOT analysis begins with a practitioner (or working group) brainstorming and listing their peer organizations in the community, agencies and organizations that serve specific audience groups that the museum would like to do outreach to (ethnic minority groups, religious groups, youth groups, etc.), and

any networks and institutions that provide services which could possibly be linked to the public program initiative. Once the organizations have been listed then the analysis can begin. Analysis can be done through an examination of printed material about the organization and through in person meetings with organizational representatives. This can be a time and resource consuming task, but it will greatly inform the museum as to the unmet needs in the community and allow for a thoughtful placement of the proposed public program into the landscape of public offerings in their community. A matrix for conducting this activity can be found at the website listed above.

For example, I worked for a contemporary arts museum that wanted to create a 'cutting edge, innovative' outreach program which would incorporate the production a piece of public artwork that would be displayed at the museum during its inaugural year. It was necessary to begin the development of this public program with a SWOT analysis. Since the museum was not yet open to the public (program development commenced one year prior to opening) there were no internal benchmarks to analyze against, so there was no internal SWOT as such. It was necessary to conduct an external SWOT analysis of the community to determine that this new program would be in sharp contrast to existing outreach programs offered by other museums. Analysis determined current offerings to be loaned or educator-facilitated kit boxes, traveling programs, a speakers bureau, and scouting partnerships (program type and content were assessed through a review of written material and through informal interviews with staff from various museums). Researching and examining what was offered by other arts organizations and museums in the region informed the program design – by knowing what was already offered we determined what would be 'cutting edge'.

Through interviews and focus groups with individuals in the education, cultural, religious and juvenile justice arenas it was determined that juvenile female offenders were the most marginalized and most underserved group in the community. This area was where the greatest need was, where innovative programming was warranted, so this was where the museum chose to focus its outreach efforts. An arts and humanities program serving 11 to 18 year olds in a maximum security facility was developed, and the main project the participants created during the first year was a piece of public artwork. In terms of the public artwork, the location of the piece was predetermined by the museum, yet the size, scale, content, materials and concept were determined by the juvenile female offenders through another capacity building process (not so dissimilar to the strategy expressed here).

The other critical function provided by the SWOT analysis process was in establishing a strategic way to engage with individuals and organizations in the community that could potentially provide ongoing partnership and support for the proposed outreach program. In determining areas of interest for potential public programs (i.e. the education system, recreational programs, juvenile justice, etc.)



it was necessary to examine which organizations and individuals were already working with specific groups and populations that we could potentially serve. By establishing relationships with classroom teachers, juvenile court officials, public health practitioners and youth advocates it was possible to develop a pool of individuals and groups that eventually participated in the program development process.

It is important to note that subsequent reading on the subject of community capacity building and community empowerment, particularly in the field of health care provision, has provided additional information in support of the strategy developed here. The literature suggests that although traditionally patients have not been able to shape their medical treatment, actively encouraging patients to participate in the creation of their treatment plans develops ownership and increasingly effective programs (Watt, Higgins and Kendrick 2000; Laverack 2001). This notion can be extrapolated out to the process of community members participating in the development of public programs in museums. In taking a broader view of participation in community efforts it is useful to examine Arnstein's *A Ladder of Citizen Participation* (1969), which examines different levels of engagement in the community building process. The levels between manipulation and citizen control in the political process have some correlates with the levels between viewing objects for arts sake (essentialist, transmission approach to education in museums) and participating in the development and facilitation of a public program. The strategy here is an attempt to synthesize the concepts found in the literature with my own professional experiences, including insight based on the application of the tools.

### **Action research**

Action research is a methodology where action and knowledge are pursued in tandem, with stakeholder participation as a central part of the process. Action research utilizes a cyclic model of observation, reflection, planning and action when developing and implementing tools for use in the collaborative decision-making process (O'Leary, 2004). This process is aligned with the approach taken in evaluation research; this is where the methodological pluralism is evident. The tools of evaluation are employed with the mechanisms of action research – the process and application are consistently revised for use as the public program continues.

Action research is concerned with real-life problems and situations – such as deciding upon how to create and place public art works. But what sets it apart from consultancy is that it produces knowledge and change concurrently – it is about process *and* product, not just product. In this model the change enacted by action research would be the inclusive practice of audience participation in the creation, commissioning and placement of public artwork process – the 'democratization' of the process. The barriers are broken down between the researcher and the researched with the amateur (community members) and the professional (artists, designers, museum staff, etc.) working side by side on the

same project. This process works *with* the 'researched' not *on* them. The researcher's role is to facilitate a sustainable change process, which may entail expanding his or her boundaries of participant-observer into more of a leadership role when the situation is called for. The methods action research works with are the same described in the evaluation research section.

Pacing could be a challenge with this type of process. Working through the cycle of observation, reflection, planning and action can be quite time consuming. Having a projected timeline and a Gantt chart with projected benchmarks should be utilized in creating an initial framework for this process.

In the detention project we developed a cyclic process that had two main components: regular group discussions and creating a handbook documenting the process of creating the artwork. Since the program was conducted in a county facility there were girls coming and going on a weekly, if not daily, basis (as opposed to a state facility, where girls are incarcerated for months or years). It was imperative to keep everyone informed about what activities would take place each day, discuss the themes and content of the artwork, illustrate how the day's activity fitted in with the overall goals of the project and examine how each person could participate; this information was shared through group discussion. Notes were taken during the discussions which were then placed in a binder, along with photographs and examples of artwork. This binder became a handbook that was viewed by each girl as they entered the program, so they could see what had come before and prepare for engaging in the process themselves.

Here I offer a very brief sketch of the program and how it progressed through various stages over a one year period of time. In the beginning there were introductory sessions in drawing and poetry writing, followed by more advanced sessions in two- and three-dimensional art production. Ongoing writing, journaling and poetry sessions complimented the hands-on art production workshops. Photography and audio recording were also explored. Individual art projects and skill building were developed alongside an ongoing dialog about collaborative artwork and public art. Themes and content of the collaborative artwork were created and debated, and a maquette for a sculpture was developed. Once the maquette and a theme for the public artwork were established we began carpentry workshops. The sculpture was built and installed at the museum. Throughout this entire program there was a circular process whereby the content of the artwork and the design of the program itself were shaped by the participants. The museum provided the framework – staff, materials, resources – and the community of young women in the detention center provided the content. This is a brief example of knowledge and change, process and product, working concurrently to build a collaborative project.

### ***Ethnography***

Ethnography is a qualitative research method used to examine a 'cultural' group bound together by shared understandings, beliefs and/or behaviors (Seale, 2004); in this case, 'cultural' can be interpreted as community members (such as the young women in detention). The research aims to study the cultural groups in their 'natural setting' (i.e. in the museum, in the detention center) in order to explore the research question from their point of view; to observe what happens, to listen to what is said, to ask questions, and collect data are all ethnographic pursuits employed throughout this research process. With the researcher acting as an observer-participant in the program development activities, in conjunction with the activities listed above, it can be argued that this entire research proposal is an ethnographic study.

The epistemological underpinnings of this paper include accepting 'community members' [publics, such as the girls in detention, as a bounded cultural group] as culture, and museum as 'natural setting' when interpreting the definition of ethnography. From an "ontological position which values people's knowledge, values and experiences as meaningful and worthy of exploration" (Seale, 2004, pg.182), this strategy clearly resides in the realm of ethnography, because valuing the contributions of community members is both at the center of the research question and in the change intervention of the public program development process.

The methodological approach outlined above is both dependable, in that it demonstrates systematic and rigorous approaches to research, and auditable, it is verifiable through full and transparent explication of methods undertaken.

### **Methods**

#### ***Surveys***

Surveys should initially be used to gather input from the broad community. The purpose of the survey is to use a structured and standardized set of questions to collect data about the community's interest in public art works and interest in engaging in a participatory process leading to the creation and placement of a piece of public art work. The survey should be structured, to reduce bias, and standardized, so as to not influence subsequent questions or lead respondents, in order to ensure validity and reliability (Seale, 2004). The survey should be distributed by the museum through existing mechanisms in place for reaching its constituency (i.e. mailing lists, distribution to partner organizations such as libraries, schools and cultural arts centers) and through new mechanisms to reach non-traditional audiences (i.e. through new partner organizations, targeted media outlets, existing support and service groups for specific audiences). Surveys should be returned to the museum and the results will give the museum an impression of where its public stands in relation to public art works in general, and will include an ask for further participation in focus groups. An additional

survey should be given at the conclusion of the entire process; examples are provided in Appendix A.

This process is fairly straightforward, but where museums tend to let themselves down is in the follow-through. There needs to be someone connected (and preferably invested in) the public program dedicated to seeing this process through, whether that is a staff person or a volunteer or a researcher (who may fall into the volunteer category). This individual needs to be clear about the reasons the survey is being distributed and set benchmarks for targets to be achieved. Often surveys are distributed from the marketing arm of a museum, rather than from the program practitioner or project personnel. This creates disconnect between the developer/distributor and the practitioner and problems can arise- content of the surveys may be inappropriate, trying to cover too much information in one form, rate of return may be low, forms may not be returned to the correct person or department. All too often evaluation is seen as a burden placed upon staff by funders or policy makers. I argue that surveys should be regarded as a valuable tool rather than an inconvenience, as they are meant to inform the development of the program and can greatly benefit both the project personnel and community stakeholders if they are carried out effectively and the resulting data is properly employed.

### ***Focus groups***

Focus groups will then delve deeper into the specifics about why public art works are being planned by the museum, what type of public art works should be created and where it should be located. They will involve structured discussions about the opinions and attitudes of a representative group toward the commissioning and placement of public art works; examples of focus group questions are provided in Appendix B. Focus groups allow for a more casual setting than a one-on-one interview, and they have a high instance of validity since the idea of engaging in conversation is easy to understand and the results are credible. All focus groups should be audio/video tape recorded if possible. The number of focus groups will depend on how many individuals are interested in participating, but generally focus groups contain 8 to 12 participants and last between one and two hours (Seale, 2004). Individuals from the focus groups should be invited to participate in subsequent planning meetings with members of the museums staff and additional stakeholders, such as artists, planners, architects, designers, etc. During this entire process the discussion and interactions of participants will be observed, with the intention of recognizing whether the aims and objectives of the project are being met.

For example, at the museum I worked for, after completing an external SWOT analysis a survey was sent to organizations working in the areas of education, the arts and juvenile justice. From the feedback I received it was determined that the museum would concentrate its outreach efforts in the juvenile justice field. Further surveys and feedback within the juvenile justice arena demonstrated that the area of greatest need within this domain were incarcerated females age

eleven to eighteen in maximum security detention. After garnering this information I arranged an initial focus group meeting with representatives from various groups that worked with females in our local juvenile detention center, the same center we were proposing to conduct our public program in. Security staff, mental health practitioners, classroom teachers, juvenile court officials, recreation specialists and museum staff all participated in the first meeting. We explored questions such as what were the practical aspects of working in a maximum security detention center, what were the particular needs of incarcerated youth, what were the specific needs of female offenders, and how could the museum best serve this population. Two subsequent focus group meetings were held to further investigate topics and issues that arose in the initial meeting.

Through this series of meetings we were able to establish a rapport with the other service providers working in the detention center and gain a deeper understanding of what our role would be in the larger landscape of support services for incarcerated girls. Additionally, we discussed how the museum and the detention center played specific roles in the wider community and how through the collaborative creation of a public artwork there was an opportunity to address multiple community needs simultaneously while linking the goals and missions of the two organizations.

### ***Interviews***

Interviews should be conducted with a selection of community members taking part in the planning meetings. Interviews will allow for access to attitudes, values and beliefs of individuals that may not be as accessible through the surveys or focus groups. A thoughtfully developed interview, with open-ended questions, can "...provide better access to interviewees' views, interpretations of events, understandings and experiences and opinions" (Seale, 2004, pg. 182). This will aid in the success of the action research process described below. An example of interview questions can be found in Appendix C.

In the detention project that I worked on the evaluation methods of surveys, focus groups and interviews were also used in the development of the public artwork project, which was the central focus of program. It had been decided, prior to the SWOT analysis and public engagement, that the museum would conduct an outreach program that would produce a piece of public artwork that would be displayed at the museum during its inaugural year. So the output or product was predetermined, yet the content and form were not. So the initial phase of the public artwork project consisted of gathering information from the girls in detention through surveys and group and individual discussions. The component parts of the artwork developed over time and the methods were continuously employed, as described in the action research description.

The cultural and social significance of public art, and the decision-making process behind it, can be determined by employing the methods described

above. Evaluation provides evidence as to whether a program is meeting its objectives or not; this in turn feeds into the development of policy for the support of public programs.

### **Likely Data Outcomes and Methods of Analysis**

Evaluation research allows for gathering data before, during and after a project in order to effectively document, improve upon and assess what has occurred. Prior to implementing the public program development project, it was necessary to employ this strategy in order to plan for subsequent evaluation and data collection. During the program it will be necessary to record and monitor data collection and program activities. When the process is complete it will be vital to evaluate the outcomes and impact discovered.

Surveys will produce both quantitative and qualitative data. The forms in Appendix A provide examples of questions posed to constituents and stakeholders in the public program development process. The quantitative data collected should be put into an Excel spreadsheet for analysis to be conducted. Analysis of this data will provide a demographic breakdown of age, ethnicity and gender from participants in the *Public Art Works at the (Museum Name) Survey*. The qualitative information gathered (about opinions and examples of current public art works) could be coded and also entered into a database. An analysis of this information should provide a 'pulse' of where the community stands in relation to the subject of public art works. Sophisticated software packages such as SPSS could be used in data analysis, but Excel and Access are more realistic for museum use. Data analysis could prove to be labor intensive for museum staff, yet it will provide valuable information for current and future programming initiatives.

### **Dissemination Strategy**

Project personnel should generate regular progress reports at the end of each phase of the project. At the end of the entire project a final report should be created, both in hard copy and web-based formats. This final report should be made available on the internet in order to promote best practices in collaborative public program development. All of the survey tools should be made available for use in both word and pdf formats. The findings will be of interest to practitioners in various fields wanting to develop strategies for working with audiences during the concept and design phases of program development.

### **Resource limitations**

This strategy presents a new way of approaching program development with the visitor at the center of the process. Although the methods themselves are fairly straightforward in their application, the organizational capacity to utilize them should be examined prior to starting the process. The time required for utilizing the tools provided here (not to mention the time to customize them) and the skill set required by staff to implement them may be considerable depending on the size of museum wishing to carry out the process. Additional training may be

required to build staff skills. Additional financial resources may be required to cover the costs of this process: staff training, time to conduct a SWOT analysis, time to conduct surveys and interviews, printing and postage, travel to partner organizations and meetings, etc. There will be an impact of human and financial resources that should be weighed against the potential benefits of creating an inclusive development process and the potential loss or status quo of traditional approaches to programming.

One of the biggest limitations may be that of will. Museums face limitations in their budgets and resources, yet there is always a choice in how resources are divvied up. If there is a commitment to implementing a change intervention, if the policy makers or leadership are convinced that a change is warranted, then the will to make the change should develop. If there is a resistance to change and the leadership is unconvinced of the merits of the process then it will not happen. That may seem rather simplistic, but the bottom line is that there is a rationale for the choices made during resource allocation and moving forward on any project is a matter of priority and will.

### **Conclusion**

Place and space have material and immaterial meanings and characteristics. Place could be a park that is physically made up of expanses of green grass, areas with foliage and water interests, playground equipment and buildings for numerous activities. The characteristics of that green space are interpreted differently by the dog walker, the footballer, the toddler and the naturalist. How people congregate and negotiate social relations in place and space is complex, and understanding this process is at the core of establishing a successful community-based public art works program. The interaction between people and artwork creates a sense of space and place, and this relationship is in constant flux. The proximity between object and viewer creates a synergy that does not exist when the two are separate; this synergy can effect our social relations to the object and to each other.

Museums want to provide the best place and space for their art and for their audience. In order to achieve this goal it is necessary to involve the people in creating that place and space. Implementing this strategy will allow museums to be successful in meeting the aims and objectives of creating inclusive public programs. Like the example in the detention center, it is possible to create a cycle of dialog, practice and production that will not only result in a piece of public artwork, but that will result in a workable model for program development that could be implemented throughout the museum's public offerings.

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## **Appendix A: Survey Tools**

### **Formative Survey**

#### ***Public Art Works in the (Museum Name) Survey***

1. Are you a member of the (Museum Name)? Yes No
2. How long have you been a member?
3. Are you familiar with any Public Art displayed in the area surrounding (Museum Name)? Yes No
4. If your answer was yes, which public art works are you familiar with?  
List existing public art works near (Museum Name)
5. What is your opinion of this public art work (for example: what purpose is it serving? What do you think about when you look at it? What do you think about the specific location/environment it is in? Etc.)
5. Are you familiar with any other public art works? Yes No
6. If your answer was yes, what public art works are you familiar with and where are they located?
7. What is your opinion of this public art work?
8. Would you like to see any additional public art works displayed near the (Museum Name)? Yes No
9. If yes, do you have any suggestions for where the art works should be placed? Do you have any ideas of what type of art works should be displayed? Any particular artists whose work you would like to see displayed?
10. What is your:  
Age: \_\_\_\_\_  
Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_  
Gender: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Would you be interested in participating in a focus group to discuss the public art works program at the (Museum Name)? Yes No

If yes, please provide the following information and a representative will be in touch by XX date :

Name:

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Email:

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Phone:

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Address:

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### **Summative Survey**

1. Was participation in this project a positive use of your time? Why or why not?
2. Were the activities assigned to you realistic for the time commitment given? Yes or No, please explain.
3. Were goals, directions and expectations for the group made clear? Yes or No. If no, please explain.
4. What were the most valuable experiences that you had as a part of this project?
5. What changes, if any, would you make to this process?
6. Did you establish any new relationships through this project?
7. Have your views about your community changed throughout this process? How?
8. Would you be willing to participate in another project of this type in the future? Why or why not?

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Appendix B: Focus Group Questions**

#### ***Why have public art works?***

What does 'public art' mean to you?

What is 'public' in public art?

What are the benefits of public art? (economic, social, aesthetic, practical)

What purpose does public art serve?

Who wants the art there? Why?

***What type of public art works should be created?***

Should there be a set of guidelines or criteria for public art? (content: subject matter-politics, cultural traditions; style: genre of art, particular artist)

How does the artwork (already in existence at (Museum Name) here and now relate to the past, present and future of the history and geography of the location?

***Where it should be located?***

What is the art for? Especially in terms of percent for the arts or urban regeneration, how does it regenerate?

What will the art “do” in the space?

Where specifically should the art work be placed?

Who uses the space and how do they integrate/negotiate/share the space?

What conflicts can and do arise from this shared use of space? How to combat it?

**Appendix C: Interview Questions**

1. Have you ever participated in a project with the (Museum Name) before? If yes, which project?
2. Why did you decide to get involved with this public art works program?
3. What has been your most satisfying aspect of the process?
4. What was your understanding of public art prior to working on this project? What is it now?
5. Do you see yourself reflected in the art works chosen for display? How? Why or why not?
6. What do you feel when you look at the new public art works?
7. How has contributing to the development of the public art works program influenced how you feel about yourself? ALTERNATIVE: Has working on the project changed how you feel about yourself?
8. What has participation in the program taught you about working in a group? ALTERNATIVE: What have you learned about working in a group?
9. Have you noticed any change in the community during the process? After the artwork was placed?
10. What are the top three things that you learned while participating in this process?
11. How did your actual experience of the process compare with your expectations prior to participation?
12. Do you have any additional thoughts that you would like to share about your experience?