

DRIVING SOCIAL CHANGE THROUGH I.D.E.A.

A Forum for Bay Area Museum Professionals

CHM

On May 26th, 2022, the Computer History Museum hosted a half-day forum for leaders and staff from Bay Area museums to share challenges and discuss strategies around implementing IDEA (inclusion, diversity, equity, and access) values and work at our institutions. We were delighted and inspired by the enthusiastic participation of our colleagues—33 participants from 14 museums (see addendum).

We believe that Bay Area museums can be innovators and leaders in IDEA, and CHM is committed to serving as a hub to foster growth and learning and will convene conversations in what we hope will be an ever-growing, dynamic community dedicated to helping each other on our IDEA journeys.

Made possible by the generous support of the [Kapor Center](#), the event included networking over breakfast and lunch, a panel discussion, and the opportunity to explore specific topics in breakout sessions. This report summarizes what participants discussed and shared.



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05.26.22

IDEA

PANEL DISCUSSION



A panel discussion explored on-going IDEA efforts at local museums, particularly in the areas of audience, content, and metrics. Moderated by CHM Vice President of Innovation and Programming and co-chair of IDEA initiatives, Marguerite Gong Hancock, the panel featured:

- Julia Li, Director of Inclusion and Belonging, Asian Art Museum
- Talance Orme, Senior Director of People, Oakland Museum of California
- Davida Lindsay-Bell, Chief People and Inclusion Officer, SFMOMA

PANEL DISCUSSION

Audience

How can museums make everyone feel like they belong? How can they include and engage community voices?

After sharing their personal and career journeys, the panel focused on strategies to include and engage community voices at their institutions. It is critical, they noted, that everyone feel like they belong in a museum.

Content

How is IDEA being incorporated into content? Who decides what content is created?

At SFMOMA, diverse voices are brought to the table to make content decisions using a framework called R-A-P-I-D: R, who recommends; A, who approves; P, who are the performers; I, who do you need to seek input from; and D, who is the ultimate decider. The museum engaged in workshopping activities to embed “leading from the bottom” into its culture, says Davida Lindsay-Bell. They now incorporate a DEI statement of intention throughout the entire exhibit-planning process.

Metrics

What IDEA metrics do you collect? How do you use the data?

If you don’t measure it, it often gets lost, warned Julia Li. Capturing metrics at the Asian Art Museum is not about punishment, she said, but rather to be honest about identifying the gaps in meeting IDEA goals and working to do better.



Julia Li discusses empowering audiences in this video.



Talance Orme advocates for casting a wider net to include diverse voices.



Davida Lindsay-Bell describes building accountability into IDEA planning.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS



Participants selected one of three breakout session choices to discuss questions around audience, content, or metrics. They then reported back to the full group.



BREAKOUT SESSIONS



Audience Engaging and Involving Diverse Audience Communities

“Our conversation involved authentic relationship-building and talking about the work involved in listening to your audiences and getting their feedback in a meaningful way. We talked about focus groups and all the individual relationship-building that is necessary to engage your audiences and communities.

“We also touched on making sure the voices in your programs and events are really thoughtful and bringing something valuable to your audience that will honor and uplift your topic—not just shallow representation.

“Once you invite the community with a topic that resonates with them, they will keep coming, even if the next program/exhibit is entirely different, because they feel welcome. Also, there is so much intersectionality in our communities, you can’t assume what group(s) any one person belongs to.

Case Study

The Lawrence Hall of Science created an exhibit with a new community through an after-school program for middle-school children. A student media team explored the pandemic by interviewing medical researchers and then created videos for their families, friends, and neighbors as well as content for the exhibit.



Content Reimagining Content to Align with IDEA Values

“We talked about the extent to which our collection and collection policies will limit some of the stories we can tell and some of the strategies that institutions have been using—from deaccessioning to reaching out to other communities—to make sure that our collections give us the resources we need to tell the stories we want to tell.

“We talked about the pressure from the audience-building side or publicity and marketing sides to do a lot of exhibits that target different audiences. But that general approach can lead to tokenism. So, how do we make sure our content is collaborative from the very beginning and not just a marketing strategy to different audiences?

“Turning out exhibits quickly doesn’t allow for building genuine partnerships with our community. To have diverse content that gets at our values and tells a narrative that is inclusive, you need a collection that lets you do that and the time to develop a relationship with a community. One strategy to get to a shared experience might be to find topics that cut across different cultural groups. For example, you could have different voices engaged in a conversation about gender. A place-based model might also work.”

Case Study

The Asian Art Museum removed their founder’s statue to do what they could to destabilize the colonial practices in the origins of the museum and convey their intention to bring diversity to their current-day collection practices.



Metrics Defining Meaningful Metrics

“We looked at metrics in a couple of different ways: internal metrics on our board and staff; external, we’re talking about our visitors, members, donors. standard metrics we’re collecting include race, age, socioeconomic, location data, and even sexual orientation, which requires building a relationship of trust. Don’t use that information in a performative way—collect it and put it on your website.

“We talked about how we engage with the community. How can we know who is coming into the museum? How can we build trust with underserved or marginalized communities who traditionally have not been a part of these spaces? That takes time. How can we learn from them and not just approach them with our own agenda? How can we work with community-based organizations so they can help us diversify.

“What happens when we don’t meet the metrics? That’s ok, just honestly acknowledge it and have open discussions around how we can do better and what we can do differently.”

Watch a [video](#) of the full panel discussion and Q&A and breakout session wrap-ups.

NEXT STEPS

The quest to make our institutions more diverse is complex, challenging, and absolutely necessary if we are to bring in the audiences we want and for museums to be relevant into the future. In a follow-up survey, participants made suggestions for future discussions, including:

- Deep dives into specific IDEA topics.
- Tools, techniques, and strategic frameworks museums are using.
- Broaden the invitation list to include additional museum roles, like CEOs, and IDEA experts from other fields, such as tech

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ADDENDUM

Workshop participants in a range of roles came from 14 organizations, representing a diverse array of museums in focus, size, audience and history, including:

Asian Art Museum

Children's Discovery Museum of San Jose

Computer History Museum (CHM)

The Contemporary Jewish Museum

Exploratorium

Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco

History San Jose

Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) of San Jose

Lawrence Hall of Science

Los Altos History Museum

Oakland Museum of California (OMCA)

San Jose Museum of Art

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA)

The Tech Interactive

Breakout Session Notes

Audience

- Learn what the community needs and what you can do for them.
- Reach out to all kinds of community members, including community centers, churches, schools, Title 1 schools, teachers.
- Be authentic and know that it takes time to build relationships.
- To make people feel more welcome: offer a reward or free access to the museum. It can be helpful to hire a professional to do focus groups to expand diversity.
- Children's Museum San Jose has had some success inviting focus groups from the community to help them plan Cultural Celebrations programming.
- Choosing the right topic is important. Protest art at the Asian Art Museum has been a great theme for exploring diversity and inviting new voices. Another museum crowdsourced wedding photos for an accessible topic, and another reached out to the LGBTQ+ community to help plan programs around an exhibit.

- Don't shy away from difficult topics, even in your own organization's history. One museum started a program called "re-history" to address the imbalances.

Content

- Institutional priorities; strategic plan must support action with time and staffing
- Execution often falls short of vision; "do less better"
- Build space for iteration, pivoting, and observation as well as space for the dissenting view and for audience feedback
- Challenge of balancing so many interests/stakeholders: funder voices often loudest; space for softer voices
- Is it fundable? Telling the right story to the right stakeholders (tailoring the message)
- Aligning stories with real-world events
- Curatorial voice: multiplicity/collaboration
- Community is key, consulting with neighbors; community-curated galleries
- Business case for diversity

Metrics

- Staff demographics; audience demographics: income levels
- Audit of collection: on display, archives
- How do we include people not inclined to take surveys? Build trust/relationships; be authentic/transparent; what's the value prop for participants?; listen to what communities need first
- Cultural celebrations as trust-building tools
- Technology to collect data on who's in galleries
- Multi-factor identification in surveys/ etc. helps people feel respected
- Continue to live your values
- Data as a living resource
- How do you compensate for blind spots in data? Include qualitative data and different perspectives

Resources

[Culture Amp](#)

Employee engagement, performance and development platform

[COVES](#)

Collaboration for Ongoing Visitor Experience Studies

[IDEA dashboard](#)

from SF MOMA

[Intersections Consulting](#)

Psychologist Dr. Darlene Hall

[Leverage to Lead](#)

Career consulting for women and people of color

[Race Forward](#)

Racial justice organization offering training

[Sand Chang, PhD](#)

DEI consultant, trainer