



A Communiqué from the Museum Education Summit

Reflections on the Future for Museum Education Organizations and Educators

On December 4-5, 2012, the leadership of 16 internationally recognized US, European, and Canadian museum education organizations came together in Austin, Texas to consider the current and future state of museum education worldwide. The group of 22 highly respected museum education leaders and practitioners came together for a first-of-its-kind summit on the future of museum education, with a special focus on the opportunities ahead and the challenges that must be addressed. Organizations that serve the needs of art museum educators, whether through grants and other support, university training, continuing education, professional development, scholarly publishing, or professional networks, had never before met as a group to discuss their common interests and challenges — until now.

The meeting was officially sponsored and supported by the Marcus Institute for Digital Education in the Arts (MIDEA), as part of its ongoing focus on understanding critical challenges facing visual arts education, and building capacity in museums. Dr. Larry Johnson, CEO of the NMC and Executive Director of MIDEA, and Dr. Kris Wetterlund, President and Chair of the Board of Museum Ed, worked together as Summit Co-Chairs to plan how to tap into the energy and expertise of this august group to construct a common vision of how museum education is adapting to the world around it, and the ways in which it must evolve.

The notion was simple: in a world where museum audiences expect to engage with collections and museum expertise from anywhere, on any device; where, outside of the contributions of a shrinking pool of very special and dedicated teachers, schools have largely abandoned the arts; and where one can find a raft of answers and viewpoints on almost any question instantly and in the palm of one's hand — to what should museum educators turn their energies and focus in the next decade? What do leading institutions need to be doing now to best meet the expectations of the audiences they both educate and serve? What are the strategies that will provide them the most flexibility? The greatest chances of success?

Over two days of working sessions, the group engaged in wide ranging discussions on the current landscape of museum education, emerging opportunities, challenges they will face as communities — and ultimately ways in which the field is certain to evolve. Mary Stall, an accomplished visual recorder, captured the entire meeting in a visual format as Johnson and Wetterlund led the group over the two days of dialog that started very broad, funneled quickly to focus in on a discrete set of potential futures, and ultimately fostered strong consensus by the last day.

As the group moved from reflections on the current landscape of museum education, to notions of needs, challenges, and opportunities, to potential futures and transformation of the field, key points were captured on large charts that over the course of the meeting filled virtually all the wall space in the room. Of key significance to the thought leaders in attendance and to the larger world of museum education were the discussions that took place around the present and future role of museum education, both within and outside the institution. A wide lens was aimed at that question, and it emerged as a component of each of the major areas of focus. What interested the group especially was in the ways in which their organizations could build and expand the field itself — both as a way to attract top candidates into preparing for jobs in museums, and as a way to ensure that museum educators could stay up to date, grow professionally, and contribute to the strategic growth of their institutions.

Four key questions guided all the discussions: How is the role of the art museum educator changing, and what does that imply for organizations that support museum educators and museum education?

Where are there overlaps in what we are doing, and where are these gaps? How can we coordinate our efforts to address the unmet needs of art museum educators? What communications channels can we establish among our organizers so that we can work in concert to support our common goals?

From these discussions, some 40 areas were identified as either opportunities that could help address those questions, or challenges that would need to be addressed to help museum education organizations and museum educators to be effective and responsive to changes in both the expectations of learners and the ways in which museums engage with their many audiences. These were distilled into the following five key ways in which museum education organizations can create the greatest impact:

- **Grow the field.** There is a considerable opportunity and need to encourage new minds to see museum education as a vital and important doorway to working with and understanding cultural dimensions of our societies. Museum education organizations should sponsor more paid internships, and offer more and wider professional development options to working museum educators. Leadership programs are needed to ensure that the next and future generations of leaders are in the pipeline. Many museum education professionals see a critical need to consistently revitalize museum pre- and in-service training, and to find ways to increase diversity within the profession.
- **Increase collaboration among and between museum educators.** More collaboration is needed between museum education organizations, between such organizations and similar organizations in other sectors. Museum education organizations should expand ways for their members to collaborate with each other, to share resources and materials, and to engage in more research into both the theory and practice of museum education. Scholarly publications such as the *Journal of Museum Education* and *Studies in Art Education* are an essential avenue to stimulate such activity.
- **Stimulate new thinking, new approaches, and experimentation.** There is currently insufficient time, space, resources, or flexibility in most museum education programs to allow for new ideas to be tried out and refined. Museum education organizations have a critical role in shaping perceptions in this area, as well as articulating the value of experimentation as the pathway to new thinking and new approaches.
- **Expand research efforts within the community.** There are clear areas where more knowledge is needed about both the practice and impact of museum education. Museum organizations can help this by encouraging the development and dissemination of tools and approaches for research by museum education practitioners and scholars. Critical areas of need are how to measure community impact, conduct program and other evaluations, and in research design. University museum studies, arts, history, and other related departments can help bridge this gap. Additionally, graduate programs can and should encourage research into these areas by their students.
- **Document the history and evolution of museum education.** All fields are enriched when there is a clear understanding of the roots of their work, how it evolved and developed, and the resulting sense of values and purpose that result from such documentation. The field of museum education has a critical need to begin that work, especially while some of the founders and early thought leaders are still alive and productive.

The Museum Education Summit was the first of its kind in the field of museum education, and has laid the groundwork for a new model of collaboration among organizations that serve the needs of art museum educators. For the first time, grantmakers, universities, professional networks, continuing education providers, communities of practice, and scholarly publishers came together to seek common goals and ways to better understand and leverage each other's efforts. To be part of the continuing dialog, and to see where these discussions are going, follow #MIDEA, subscribe to Museum Ed, and reach out to your own museum education networks!