



Engagement and Access

**Innovative Approaches
for Museums**

Edited by Juilee Decker

Engagement and Access

Innovative Approaches for Museums

About the Series

The *Innovative Approaches for Museums* series offers case studies, written by scholars and practitioners from museums, galleries, and other institutions, that showcase the original, transformative, and sometimes wholly re-invented methods, techniques, systems, theories, and actions that demonstrate innovative work being done in the museum and cultural sector throughout the world. The authors come from a variety of institutions—in size, type, budget, audience, mission, and collection scope. Each volume offers ideas and support to those working in museums while serving as a resource and primer, as much as inspiration, for students and the museum staff and faculty training future professionals who will further develop future innovative approaches.

About the Series Editor

Juilee Decker is an associate professor of Museum Studies at Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) where she teaches courses focusing on museums and technology so as to bring theory and praxis together in the classroom environment. She has worked as a public art consultant and advisor for more than 15 years and has managed several public and private collections of public art. Since 2008, she has served as editor of *Collections: A Journal for Museum and Archives Professionals*, a peer-reviewed journal published by Rowman and Littlefield.

Titles in the Series

Technology and Digital Initiatives: Innovative Approaches for Museums

Engagement and Access: Innovative Approaches for Museums

Collections Care and Stewardship: Innovative Approaches for Museums

Fundraising and Strategic Planning: Innovative Approaches for Museums



Engagement and Access

Innovative Approaches for Museums

Edited by Juilee Decker

Bib.

Item.....

Barcode.....

Call no.

.....

.....

Date

ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD
Lanham • Boulder • New York • London

Published by Rowman & Littlefield

A wholly owned subsidiary of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706
www.rowman.com

Unit A, Whitacre Mews, 26-34 Stannary Street, London SE11 4AB

Copyright © 2015 by Rowman & Littlefield

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the publisher, except by a reviewer who may quote passages in a review.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Engagement and access : innovative approaches for museums / Juilee Decker.
pages cm. — (Innovative approaches for museums)


Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4422-3875-6 (pbk. : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-1-4422-3876-3
(electronic) 1. Museums and community. 2. Museums—Technological
innovations. 3. Museum techniques. 4. Museums—Educational aspects. I.
Decker, Juilee, editor.

AM7.E54 2015

069—dc23

2015009773

™ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

Printed in the United States of America

Contents

Introduction	1
1 Listening to Our Audiences <i>William Hennessey and Anne Corso, Chrysler Museum of Art</i>	17
2 Museum Access for All: Engaging Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders <i>Ashley Hosler, The Walters Art Museum</i>	27
3 STAMP: An Innovative New Program to Engage Teen Audiences <i>Alison Zeidman, Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance</i>	35
4 #CulturalHeritage: Connecting to Audiences through Instagram <i>Margot Note, World Monuments Fund</i>	43
5 How the Boca Raton Museum of Art Captures Attention and Shifts Perspectives <i>Marisa J. Pascucci, Boca Raton Museum of Art</i>	51
6 Expanding Family Access and Engagement in an Historic House Museum: A.B.C.D.E. <i>Janet Sinclair, Stansted Park, U.K.</i>	61
7 A Natural Solution to Increasing Engagement with Our Local Environment and Museum Collections <i>Jan Freedman, Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery, U.K.</i>	71

8	Closing the Fossil Hall and Opening Fotorama! Online and Onsite Engagement at the National Museum of Natural History	81
	<i>Charles Chen, Jennifer L. Lindsay, Siobhan Starrs, Barbara W. Stauffer, National Museum of Natural History</i>	
9	The BioLounge at the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History	91
	<i>J. Patrick Kociolek, University of Colorado Museum of Natural History</i>	
10	Art and Beer: The Drunken Cobbler	99
	<i>Sarah Lampen, Stephanie Parrish, and Eric Steen, Portland Art Museum</i>	
	Index	107
	About the Contributors	111

Introduction

In January 2014, when I most recently led a study abroad course on the history and theory of museums, sixteen college students and I gathered in Room 41¹ of the British Museum to see the gift of Mrs. E. M. Pretty.² I was prepared to give time for the students to read the didactic panels quietly before gathering everyone into a circle to have an impromptu discussion on how we can relate to these items recovered from a mound called Sutton Hoo (now Suffolk, England) fifteen hundred years after their creation. I did not want the objects—particularly the purse cover, one of the first items I had learned in an art history survey course many years ago—to go unobserved, unnoticed, untemplated.

Fortunately, the British Museum anticipated my concern. Here we stood in a room boasting a “hands-on” desk. I couldn’t believe my eyes: a knowledgeable, enthusiastic volunteer gave us the unique opportunity to handle objects from the collection (not from Sutton Hoo, but from the Anglo-Saxon period no less). An elderly woman, our guide showed us how to handle the gold ingot and engaged us in discussions about the object and the cultures it represented. This is access on an unprecedented level. But the program was not new. In fact, the British Museum has been running this program for more than a decade. A visitor studies report from Morris Hargreaves McIntyre (2008) noted the successes of the program, remarking that these desks attract the attention of “more families than the British Museum does overall”³; that 94 percent of the visitors decided to stop at the desks incidentally⁴; and that 96 percent of the visitors to these spaces said that the experience increased the quality of their visit and brought it to life.⁵

Visitors are attracted to the desk, the objects displayed for handling, and the galleries boasting such desks. Visitors engage with collections and, in turn, they gain from this experience just as my students and I

did. On our visit, students were texting, posting, tweeting, and otherwise sharing with their friends and family back home the object that laid in their hands. They experienced it in a tactile way and they wanted to share that experience with all their followers—everywhere.

Engagement and Access: Innovative Approaches for Museums reveals the ways in which museums have designed experiences to engage with their audiences and to provide opportunities for their audiences to engage with them. The idea of engagement in the museum context is not entirely new, of course, as founding impulses of museums centered on social interaction, connection, and engagement with the public, although the definition of engagement has changed over time. In the twenty-first century, we are engaging with objects, content, and context in more social and participatory ways. What environments promote the best forms of engagement? To what extent should authenticity and engagement be opposed? What do we as visitors expect from museum experiences that we undertake? What do museums offer us? Beyond the ability to hold a gold ingot, how can we engage with collections?

ABOUT THE INNOVATIVE APPROACHES FOR MUSEUMS SERIES

This series offers case studies, written by scholars and practitioners from museums, galleries, and other institutions, that showcase the original, transformative, and sometimes wholly reinvented methods, techniques, systems, theories, and actions that demonstrate innovative work being done in the museum and cultural sector throughout the United States and in England, Australia, and Peru. The authors come from a variety of institutions—in size, type, budget, audience, mission, and collection scope. Their geographical, authorial, and institutional diversity was an intentional part of crafting of this series as a means of offering a range of perspectives on issues confronting museums, and collecting institutions at large in some cases, that may be replicated entirely or scaled up or down by colleagues elsewhere.

Each chapter carefully examines a core issue by describing background information before turning to the identification of the problem, a solution to the issue, implementation, results, feedback, and assessment as well as next steps. Many chapters are enhanced with notes and/or resources to point the reader to contextual and additional information. Written with attention to the audience of peers and colleagues-in-training, each chapter is intended to offer ideas and support to those working in museums while serving as a resource and primer, as much as inspiration, for students and the museum staff and faculty training future professionals who will further develop future innovative approaches.

The volumes in this series are grouped under the following themes: technology and digital initiatives; engagement and access; collections care and stewardship, and fundraising and strategic planning. While each volume has a particular focus, the chapters in each volume rarely address the framing theme of that volume alone. Instead, the reach of the content often dapples in other aspects of that institution's operations. Such intersection and overlap speak to the integrative nature of museum work,⁶ as museums function optimally when their areas of operation are not constrained to silos but, rather, when collaboration becomes the driver. An example of this "optimization for innovation," as I like to think of it, is the pioneering work done by the team at the Cleveland Museum of Art in their efforts to bring the museum into conversation with its audiences in multiple, meaningful ways and, ultimately, to become more visitor-centered. Their collaboration yielded Gallery One, an innovative space that fuses art, technology, and interpretation. This space in the museum has become a destination for visitors interested in learning more about art through a variety of hands-on interactives, including the forty-foot microtile, multitouch Collection Wall. Not content merely to implant digital technology and interactives in the gallery, this museum's refocusing on the visitor—as a recasting of the triangulation between the museum, its collections, and its viewers—required changes beyond those in the physical space of Gallery One, such as clearer pathways through the galleries and other new amenities that enmesh the onsite visitor with an entirely new experience-based, interactive visit. Such optimization for innovation required a team of collaborators, who are cited prominently on the museum's website, which notes that this project and the broader initiatives associated therein represent "a true and equal collaboration among the curatorial, information management and technology services, education and interpretation, and design departments at the Cleveland Museum of Art."⁷ The chapter addressing this project appears in the volume on technology and digital initiatives, although the case study speaks to each of the other foci of the other three volumes in this series. Just as this project's design, implementation, and maintenance required the collaboration of a number of museum staff from many departments, so too may the case study, and all others in this series, find a home among many departments in your museum.

ABOUT THESE CASE STUDIES

The case studies in this volume address how museums forge two-way communication and engaged participation through the use of community curation, social media, collaboration, and inquiry-based learning.

Such approaches demonstrate how museums serve as thriving, central gathering places in communities that are positioned to offer meaningful, inclusive, creative, and educational experiences.

The examples of engagement and access in this volume are paradigmatic of a shift in thinking. Each of these case studies advocates for *doing* and *listening*. That is to say, these institutions understand the importance of meeting the needs of audiences. And, in the twenty-first century, those audiences are onsite as well as online. While these case studies represent only a handful of initiatives and engaging experiences thriving in museums today, they help us to see engagement and access in terms of virtual collections, the crowd (as in crowdsourcing, crowdfunding, and crowd-crafting), and the onsite experience.

Virtual collections may be limited or expansive, depending upon the purpose and need of both the institution and its audiences. Online collections may take a variety of forms from an online database of collections tied to a museum website or a blog-style narrative to more visual formats such as a Flickr page dedicated to collections items or an app. The range of possibilities is matched by the range of tools available to museums seeking to bring their collections to the fingertips of visitors who have visited their museum as well as those who have not. In the following paragraphs, I will share examples of online collections and tools that might help you to get information about and images of your collections treasures online. (As virtual collections are reliant upon technology, readers will wish to consult several case studies in *Technology and Digital Initiatives: Innovative Approaches for Museums* that address online collections and digitization projects.)

In September 2014, the Metropolitan Museum of Art unveiled its first-ever app to great fanfare (envision a launch party in the Egyptian galleries with the Temple of Dendur aflood with oversaturated lights), though every organization need not create its own splashy app from the ground up. Devoid of bells and whistles, but still providing an additional level of connection to collections, audio tours offer an economical option. A free platform is available through CultureSpots, which offers a user-friendly platform for creating audio tours in a free cloud-based subscription (and additional services including tech support, at a premium). Launched in October 2014, CultureSpots provides barrier-free access to collections that is slim and trim, with attention only to audio, rather than video and multiple points of engagement through media.⁸ Maintained in the cloud, the hosting infrastructure is not a burden for the museum or gallery interested in developing the tours. The tours may be created in any number of ways (for instance, by using software such as CultureSpots Voice Recorder, available on the App Store), which allows museums to play around with the technology a bit before initiating a free, “basic plan” that will provide

ten active audios with downloadable QR codes and multilingual access. When comfortable with the technology and maintenance, museums can move to a high-end subscription that allows for ten times as many tours as well as comprehensive support.

In late 2014, Google announced the release of a new technology platform to enable museums to take advantage of Google technology, including StreetView, and YouTube with the aim of using the app at home or in the museum—all the while sharing collections with friends on social networks. The first round of apps was produced in conjunction with eleven institutions.⁹ This Open Gallery platform enables registered users—individuals and museums—to upload images, videos, and audios to create online exhibitions. Put simply, Google Open Gallery has supplied highly sophisticated tools for museums to develop virtual collections.¹⁰

So if you are thinking of making a foray into audio tours or online collections, CultureSpots and Google's Open Gallery are entry points that will not drastically impact your budget but will afford you the opportunity to connect your collections with visitors through myriad means.

Collections, once online, can become a hub of engagement. They can engage audiences inside and outside of the museum through the wisdom of the crowd. To explain, the Center for the Future of Museums aptly forecast the power of harnessing the crowd (crowdsourcing) in the 2012 TrendsWatch. Following up with a report in 2014, Elizabeth Merritt commented on instances and potentialities outside of museums that elicit the dark side of peer sharing.¹¹ Crowdsourcing is often seen as a way of getting other people to do one's work for free, but in cultural institutions, the notion of unpaid work is welcome. It's a tradition. It's also, keenly, a form of public participation.¹²

Crowdsourcing is a platform for engagement and participation that may take any (or all) of three forms. The first is *initiating* new content in the form of creating a wholly new item (work of art, photograph, story, or other material) that becomes a resource for others to use. The second type of crowdsourcing involves *reworking collections* and mediating content, which might take the shape of transcribing documents. The third is *interacting with existing content* (such as selecting works for an exhibition), tagging images as favorites, or otherwise repositioning existing content through selection.

Museums may strive to utilize one, two, or three areas of tapping into the wisdom of the crowd—as demonstrated by several case studies in this volume. It is important to note, however, that crowdsourcing has been a part of the museum experience for years as the notions of initiating, reworking, and interacting with the collections speak to museum tenets of social interaction, connection, and engagement. Two examples, one involving technology and another that need not, serve to illustrate the

ways in which museums tap the crowd. The low-tech example is the traditional comment card or other evaluation instrument. When museums invite responses from their visitors, they are tapping into the wisdom of the crowd—albeit on a smaller scale than the vastness of the Internet's users. But the organizing principle of the crowdsourcing is the same: a query is posed and responses are submitted. Many museums have taken to a Post-it note variation that enables visitors to answer and share their ideas to questions that museums pose. For instance, William Hennessey and Anne Corso, Chrysler Museum of Art, and Marisa J. Pascucci, Boca Raton Museum of Art, describe their empowering use of a blank wall, Post-its, and pencils and pens to empower visitors to share their thoughts and to contribute to the exhibition experience through social interaction, connection, and engagement.

A second example of tapping the crowd speaks to the use of social media as a tool of social interaction, connection, and engagement. In contrast to the ubiquitous request not to photograph *anything* in a museum, institutions seem to be embracing their collections being mediated by visitors by overturning previous mandates against photography and, by extension, embracing the innate desire of visitors to document.¹³ Chances are you have witnessed one of these encounters or authorized one yourself: the museum selfie, a photograph that one has taken of oneself with a digital camera or smartphone that is often shared via social media. While certainly there is, still, the propensity for museum visitors to ask another patron to take a staged photograph of one's self (or a group), the trend is toward the selfie. Selfies have a kind of quaintness that speaks to the engaged practice of museums in a way that a formalized portrait cannot. By taking the photo, you authorize that you were there and—like my students amidst the treasures from Sutton Hoo—you share that experience with those near and far. You connect with your followers instantly on social media and you share this moment of engagement and access with them. But that is not to say that the gallery should revert to a Wild West, no-holds-barred shoot-out among visitors to fight for space in front of Sue, the *Tyrannosaurus rex* at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago or some other collections item.

Inside and outside of the museum, questions have arisen as to whether selfies and portable devices belong in museums at all. Coming out in favor of them, Marc Check, associate vice president, information and interactive technology at the Museum of Science (Boston), recently commented, "People don't necessarily come to the museum for the content. . . . Our studies are showing us that people are coming for a social experience."¹⁴ Initiated in 2014, #MuseumSelfie Day is a one-day, crowdsourced phenomenon that aims to promote awareness of collections of museums worldwide. Organized by Mar Dixon, a London-based advocate for culture and museums,

the event floods Twitter with visualizations of audience engagement from a range of tweeters, including museum directors. For instance, Gerard Vaughan posed in front of the title wall of the James Turrell retrospective at the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra.¹⁵ At the Royal Saskatchewan Museum, director Harold Bryant took part as well, and the poster even added some humor to his post: "Our Director Dr. Harold Bryant and Scotty the T. rex together in a #MuseumSelfie They both have great teeth!"¹⁶ The second time the event was held, January 21, 2015, yielded amazing statistics with more than 27,000 tweets (posts), 169,600,000-plus impressions (the number of times users saw the tweet on Twitter), 13,000-plus contributors, and 57,600,000-plus reach (how far the tweets traveled).¹⁷ Organizer Dixon, who has not worked for a museum but advocates for engagement, commented, "Today is about being happy, having a good time and getting involved. . . . Even if one person goes to a museum today who never goes, just to be a part of this hashtag experience, isn't that great?"¹⁸ Imagine the possibilities of bringing a work—or many—from your collection into the hands of more than 57 million tweeters!

Despite these astonishing figures that represent virtual engagement with collections and the people who visit them even if only on this day, there are some who oppose the phenomenon of the museum selfie, citing the disruption to the experience of others that such posing and posting enlist.¹⁹ Moreover, the focus of the image-making in the museum selfie becomes the viewer, not the collections item. Museum professionals, even as they have embraced the #MuseumSelfie, demonstrate myriad uses of social media for a variety of other purposes. In fact, cues as to how to engage audiences with social media may be gleaned from several of the contributions in this volume, and others in this series, in fact, touch on social media as part-and-parcel of museum engagement and (possibly) the museum experience in the twenty-first century. See particularly Margot Note's discussion on World Monuments Fund's experimentation and success with Instagram and the case study by Smithsonian staffers Charles Chen, Jennifer L. Lindsay, Siobhan Starrs, and Barbara W. Stauffer, which discusses the link between online and onsite engagement at the National Museum of Natural History. Each of these examinations realizes the capacity of social media to provide a platform for engagement onsite and online.

What does the import of social media and its online and onsite intermingling mean for museums more broadly? In the case of the Smithsonian, social media and crowdsourcing have meant an endorsement of their roots as well as recognition of the authority of the visitor who contributes to the call of the museum. Recently a term was coined for the individuals who contribute to such endeavors (as crowdsourcing refers to the method and crowdsourced refers to the outcome—neither term applies to the

participants). In the case of the Smithsonian transcribers, the “crowd” are called “volunpeers”—to recognize their role as both volunteers and peers collaborating on a large-scale project.²⁰ In discussing this project, Meghan Ferriter, project coordinator for the Smithsonian Transcription Center,²¹ has commented on the ways in which the transcription center has grown into a community of transcribers working in consort with Smithsonian staff. The partnership occurs within the transcription center through the use of the “Notes” field for each collections item to be transcribed.²² In addition, the Smithsonian responds to queries posted through social media, which has also provided an outlet for discoveries under the hashtag #volunpeer.

But this seemingly disruptive behavior is not new to the institution. Effie Kapsalis, Smithsonian’s head of web, new media, and outreach, connects current projects and initiatives to the institution’s earliest activities—the gathering of meteorological data in the 1840s by Joseph Henry, the first secretary of the Smithsonian.²³ Kapsalis explains, “Crowdsourcing is really what we do at the Smithsonian. It’s embedded in our DNA. Since our founding, our mission has been to increase and diffuse knowledge. So we’re increasing by taking in knowledge from our curators, our scientists, but also the public.”²⁴ Kapsalis acknowledges the role of technology in these endeavors: “We’ve been doing crowdsourcing for a long time, but today it’s really changed in scale because of technology, so today we have over thirty projects actively going on with thousands of volunteers contributing.”²⁵

Like the Smithsonian, the British Museum has launched a large-scale crowdsourcing project asking viewers to transcribe a handwritten catalog.²⁶ The site describes projects as “applications” and clearly connects the work of volunteers to that of the British Museum staff by noting the importance of the task. “This application will help the British Museum’s curator of the Bronze Age collections, Neil Wilkin, to make available a huge card catalog of British prehistoric metal artefacts discovered in the 19th and 20th century. . . . Metal finds are not only crucial forms of evidence for dating Britain’s prehistoric past, but also tell us a great deal about prehistoric society and economy.”²⁷ Another application is photomasking as a first step in rendering a 3-D model. MicroPasts asks contributors to draw polygons around the artifacts so as to outline the item and ignore the background.

MicroPasts also incorporates the other side of the crowd—crowdfunding—in order to draw support for community-based archaeological and historical projects. In the MicroPasts platform, funds only change hands when the minimum threshold is met within a stated deadline.²⁸ This program of conducting, designing, and funding research pools the wisdom, will, and purse of the crowd and, in exchange, offers up data to the public.

The key is that this platform embraces the notion of the citizen archeologist who can work collaboratively with researchers, historical societies, and other members of the public to create research data and to design and fund new projects as well. (As crowdfunding relates to fundraising, readers will wish to consult the volume *Fundraising and Strategic Planning: Innovative Approaches for Museums*, which addresses successful case studies in this area.)

In addition to initiating new content (in the form of uploading images) and reworking collections (as in the transcription examples above), crowdsourcing refers to instances of interacting with existing content. Recently, the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, England, took advantage of Flickr's visuality and commenting features to engage with audience members who performed the role of collaborators. Their project *Curate the Collection* resulted in a physical exhibit that went on view in the fall of 2012 at Greenwich.²⁹ Bringing the ideas from the collaboration and personalized learning trail forward, the Museum's Compass Lounge continues to imprint the collections on the visitor. The Compass Lounge and Compass Card "open up the Museum's objects and archives and demonstrate the connections between diverse histories and people."³⁰ Visitors are given a Compass Card that is their passport to expanded content. Card in hand, visitors look for compass point signals within the galleries and insert the card into the kiosks to "collect" the story about the item. The card can be read at the Compass kiosk in the lounge. A personalized collection is sent to the visitor as an e-book. Beyond the gallery visit, participants can sign up for a username to create their own collections (if not gathered onsite) and to tag items from the collection. In both of these instances, the collections are at the forefront of the online and onsite experience, and that experience is mediated through individualized learning trails.

Crowdsourcing isn't solely for the large organization or those with grand budgets: there is room for everyone and organizations of every type and size to shepherd a project like this. Though many examples exist of crowdsourcing platforms, a free, open-source alternative is Crowdcrafting, which was created in 2011 at a hackathon in Cape Town, South Africa.³¹ Though seemingly disconnected from the work of museums now, this kind of open-source platform asks volunteers for online assistance in performing tasks that require human cognition, such as transcription, geocoding, and image classification.³²

Thus, whether uploading an image (perhaps a selfie) to Flickr or a museum site or app, transcribing field books in support of the collections of the Smithsonian, or selecting works for an exhibition, online and onsite visitors have the authority and the ability to become contributors to the

work of the museum. Moving the focus from the institution to the institution and its audiences as a community, audiences in the twenty-first century have become empowered to contribute. They are authorized both *by* and *through* engagement and access.

Beyond the capacity of the crowd to contribute and (potentially) to fund the museum's endeavors, the audience at large has become an important focus of the museum and voice within it. In this regard, museum professionals and museum studies as a field of inquiry have benefited tremendously from the work of John Falk and Lynn D. Dierking, who began more than two decades ago to acknowledge the audience at a time when visitors were considered, if at all, the third wheel to the object and the (authority of the) institution. Continued efforts by scholars and practitioners in the field have paid tribute to the changing place of the visitor in the museum.

In addition to the framing of online collections, crowdsourcing, and, on occasion, the import of technology to some aspect of an engaging experience, how else are visitors given greater or, even, more focused but intentional access to collections? How are visitors curating their own experiences onsite?

Several museums have begun thinking about their audiences in new ways. For instance, the Denver Art Museum (DAM) has proposed that *style*, rather than age, become a means of looking at audiences. While we tend to think of audiences by *age group* (young adult, emerging professionals, seniors), we can gain much by orienting the crafting of an experience around collections that pays heed to broader *interests* (mystery lovers, foodies). The interest and experience becomes the driver rather than a defined age group. For instance, DAM developed their "Demo and Do" program with young adults in mind, but found that families and older individuals liked the balance of time learning and doing. The propensity toward making is the driver, rather than the mere age of the experience seeker. Another example that stresses interest over age is the *Murder at the Museum* program begun in November 2014 at the World Treasures Museum in Wichita, Kansas. The program is a riff on the murder mystery party where attendees are given an identity to assume upon arriving at the museum (in costume, of course). The evening combines mystery with food and drink as well as collections. Building upon the theme and context, the interactive mystery experience is held at the museum and situated in the 1920s, thereby affording the museum staff to select an appropriate item from their arms collection for the curator of collections, Steven King, to display and handle during the event.³³ In this volume, Jan Freedman of Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery, and Janet Sinclair, Stansted Park, examine site-based opportunities that speak to the importance of place and its connection to heritage. Further case studies by J.

Patrick Kociolek, University of Colorado, and Sarah Lampen, Stephanie Parrish, and Eric Steen, Portland Art Museum, highlight sensory experiences as drivers. Kociolek discusses efforts to attract students and faculty to the university's Museum of Natural History through the reframing of a portion of the space as an exhibition and programming area called the BioLounge, complete with free coffee and tea! In Portland, museum staff collaborated with an area artist (Eric Steen) to create *Art and Beer*, an event first held in 2014 that celebrates craft brewing in conjunction with the genre painting in the museum's collection. Both projects—one ongoing and the other an annual event—are a siren call to lure the thirsty to the gallery.

Thinking about their audiences in new ways also means *redefining* an audience of a museum as *audiences* (plural). To this end, a key area of development has been the capacity of museums to serve underserved audiences through their collections. From 1991 to 1999, the Wallace Foundation aimed at propelling art museums, in particular, into a new era of service by challenging them to find ways to attract and serve diverse audiences. The resulting reports from the foundation demonstrate changes in practices, identity, and ethos of museums while authorizing a challenge for museums to follow in the footsteps of the twenty-nine museums funded over those years.³⁴ Ideas from these publications include the establishment of teen councils and business partnerships, the embrace of the authenticity of visitors, and outreach to neighbors of museums—that is, the residents who live near the facility itself. Each of these suggestions, if carried out, like the work of engagement as well, requires careful research, planning, and coordination among museum staff and the constituencies served.³⁵

This volume comprises evidence of successful access initiatives. For instance, Ashley Hosler details the Walters Art Museum's programming that aims to reach and engage children with autism spectrum disorders. Her case study demonstrates the careful planning, implementation, assessment, and evaluation that has been undertaken to provide modified programming attuned to user needs while being fully aware of the atypical demands that passing through the threshold of a museum may put on an individual and his or her family. Alison Zeidman, Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance, explains a wildly successful program implemented in 2013 that seeks to empower Philadelphia's youth by offering free access to museums and other cultural institutions and by promoting cultural institutions as destinations for leisure activities.

Engagement and Access analyzes how and why engagement and access can, and should, be mediated online and onsite. Such activities, done well, will broaden audiences by increasing their size, deepen them by enriching the experiences that the participants and visitors have, and

diversify them. Contributing to the discussion, a recent publication offers advice for all museums on creating meaningful experiences for audiences—and, by extension, the staff of the museum. *Advancing Engagement* looks at ways of reaching out to audiences through the collections. Some suggestions are to position the museum as the center of learning; to set up a poets-in-residence program; and to craft opportunities for repeated engagement over the course of a student's career. Each of these, and the many other experiences described in the volume, elucidates the ways in which the museum offers learning potential, experiences, and opportunities far beyond subject-based frameworks of education.³⁶

Likewise, the case studies in *Engagement and Access: Innovative Approaches for Museums* offer suggestions for museums by calling attention to the importance of museum audiences onsite and online. The chapters demonstrate the ways in which museums are using social media and crowdsourcing (be it the paper-and-pen, Post-it, or online variety). Further, the case studies highlight a variety of focused, onsite experiences that broaden, deepen, and diversify audiences, all the while offering the potential to broaden, deepen, and diversify the experience of the museum visitor—a symbiotic relationship made palpable on that winter day with my students and the volunteer at the “hands-on” desk in Room 41 of the British Museum.

NOTES

1. The items are currently in Room 2 of the *Collecting the World* installation at the British Museum.

2. The 1938 discovery at the village of Sutton Hoo lay neatly and compactly in several vitrines. From a mounded plot of land came a cavernous space that held the remains of a ship, coins, and other decorative metalwork. Among these were a leather purse with a jeweled lid and forty-one pieces of metal: thirty-seven gold coins, three blanks (semifinished pieces of metal intending to be struck into coins), and two ingots (lumps of metal). The coins were struck in France between the years 575 and 620 CE. Excavation that occurred in three phases over the twentieth century yielded a sword and sheath, helmet, scepter, bowls, and other objects on view here and at the Sutton Hoo heritage site in East Anglia.

3. Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, “Touching History: An Evaluation of the Hands On Desks at the British Museum,” Manchester, 2008, 3.

4. Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, “Touching History: An Evaluation of the Hands On Desks at the British Museum,” Manchester, 2008, 7.

5. Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, “Touching History: An Evaluation of the Hands On Desks at the British Museum,” Manchester, 2008, 9.

6. For instance, technology and digital initiatives require financial support (as does everything!) while informing strategic planning which, in turn, may aim to enhance engagement, access, collections care, and stewardship, among other areas

of concentration and action. (Every title of the books in this series is included in the previous sentence!)

7. Cleveland Museum of Art, "Collaborators," www.clevelandart.org/gallery-one/collaborators. The statement continues, "The development process was guided by CMA's chief curator and deputy director, Griff Mann—an atypical and noteworthy approach among museums in the design of interactive technology spaces. Museum educators were instrumental in curating the space and its related experiences, and IMTS staff worked closely with internal and external partners on both concept and interactive design. This collaborative organizational structure is groundbreaking, not just within the museum community, but within user-interface design in general. It elevated each department's contribution, resulting in an unparalleled interactive experience, with technology and software that has never been used before in any venue, content interpreted in fun and approachable ways, and unprecedented design of an interactive gallery space that integrates technology into an art gallery setting." The site also recognizes their partnership with Local Projects, who, under the direction of Jake Barton, designed all of the media and collaborated with the CMA team on concept design development.

8. See CultureSpots, "About," culturespots.com/about/.

9. See Google Cultural Institute, www.google.com/culturalinstitute/home.

10. See Google, www.google.com/opengallery/.

11. Elizabeth Merritt, "Thursday Update: When Does the Crowd Become a Mob?" Center for the Future of Museums, August 14, 2014, futureofmuseums.blogspot.com/2014/08/thursday-update-when-does-crowd-become.html.

12. This differs from crowdfunding, which asks for individuals to contribute to support a project, as we will encounter in the *Fundraising and Strategic Planning* volume in this series.

13. The broader phenomenon of visitors documenting the museum experience, not necessarily the selfie, is the subject of a forthcoming publication that heralds the visitor as creator, *Museums and Visitor Photography*. The book examines what kinds of photographs are produced, how they are created, and why. See the notice for the publication in "Museums and Visitor Photography: How Visitors Use Photography," January 2015, *MuseumsETC Magazine*, museumsetc.com/blogs/magazine/16667260-museums-and-visitor-photography-how-visitors-use-photography. The publication will be edited by Theopisti Stylianou-Lambert.

14. See George LeVines, "Do Selfies and Smartphones Belong in Museums? Many Curators Say Yes," betaboston.com/news/2015/01/21/do-selfies-and-smartphones-belong-in-museums-many-curators-say-yes/.

15. The caption reads, "Our director Gerard Vaughan striking a pose for #MuseumSelfie Day! #NGATurrell," January 21, 2015, www.facebook.com/JamesTurrellRetrospective/photos/a.750608358309384.1073741828.747271798643040/796919933678226/.

16. See the image and caption at the Twitter feed for the Royal Saskatchewan Museum @royalsaskmuseum: twitter.com/royalsaskmuseum/status/558012490789834752.

17. Mar Dixon, "#MuseumSelfie Day 2015—Press, Stats and More!" January 21, 2015, www.mardixon.com/wordpress/2015/01/museumselfie-day-2015-press-stats-and-more/.

18. Jareen Imam, "Selfies Turn Museums into Playgrounds for a Day," January 21, 2015, www.cnn.com/2015/01/21/living/feat-museum-selfie-irpt/.

19. In 2014, Chloe Schama, writing for *New Republic*, asked people to ignore this inaugural endeavor and to give up this behavior for the sake of everyone in an art museum. See Chloe Schama, "Stop Taking Selfies in Front of Works of Art!" January 22, 2014, www.newrepublic.com/article/116310/stop-taking-selfies-front-works-art. As the statistics reveal, her appeal fell on deaf ears.

20. See "#volunpeer" on Twitter: twitter.com/hashtag/volunpeer as introduced by @TranscribeSI. The Smithsonian Transcription Center works with digital volunteers to transcribe the collections to make "our treasures more accessible."

21. Smithsonian, Smithsonian Digital Volunteers: Transcription Center, transcription.si.edu/.

22. Meghan Ferriter, "Growing to a Community of Volunpeers: Communication and Discovery," July 8, 2014, siarchives.si.edu/blog/growing-community-volunpeers-communication-discovery.

23. Elena Bruno, "Smithsonian Crowdsourcing Since 1849!" *The Bigger Picture: Exploring Archives and Smithsonian History*, April 14, 2011, siarchives.si.edu/blog/smithsonian-crowdsourcing-1849.

24. Smithsonian. "SI-Q: How Can You Help Make History with the Smithsonian," October 3, 2014, www.youtube.com/watch?v=EXU-JQ_TemA.

25. Smithsonian. "SI-Q: How Can You Help Make History with the Smithsonian," October 3, 2014, www.youtube.com/watch?v=EXU-JQ_TemA.

26. MicroPasts: Crowd-sourcing, crowdsourced.micropasts.org/.

27. British Museum, "British Museum Bronze Age Index Drawer A19: Devizes Museum," www.crowdsourced.micropasts.org/app/devizes. An example of a 3-D render is www.micropasts.org/3D/. The site also includes a forum with queries and troubleshooting.

28. Andy Bevan, Chiara Bonacchi, Adi Keinan-Schoonbaert, and Dan Pett, "Introduction to Crowd-funding," April 30, 2014, crowdfunded.micropasts.org/how-it-works.

29. For views of the museum's Flickr stream, see www.flickr.com/photos/nationalmaritimemuseum/. The exhibition page is here: "Curate the Collection," March 13, 2013, curatethecollection.wordpress.com/. The images selected were on view at the Compass Lounge. The projects were directed by Bronwen Colquhoun, a Ph.D. student at Newcastle University, and the museum's digital participation officer, Jane Findlay. See Flickr blog, "Curate the Commons," May 23, 2012, blog.flickr.net/2012/05/23/curate-the-commons/.

30. Royal Museums Greenwich, "The Compass Lounge," www.rmg.co.uk/whats-on/exhibitions/compass-lounge.

31. Crowdcrafting, "About," crowdcrafting.org/about.

32. Employing PyBossa software, Crowdcrafting allows users to download the software, follow the tutorial, and create a new project.

33. Joe Stumpe, "Crack the Case at the Museum of World Treasures," *Wichita Eagle*, November 6, 2014, www.kansas.com/entertainment/article3603723.html.

34. See "Opening the Door to the Entire Community: How Museums Are Using Permanent Collections to Engage Audiences" (1998); The Wallace Foundation, "Engaging the Entire Community: A New Role for Permanent Collections" (1999);

and "Service to People: Challenges and Rewards: How Museums Can Become More Visitor-Centered" (2000).

35. In 2014, the Wallace Foundation released a study that identifies and explains nine actions that arts organizations can take to engage audiences. See Bob Harlow, *The Road to Results: Effective Practices for Building Arts Audiences*, New York: Bob Harlow Research and Consulting, LLC. In 2014, the foundation also released Pamela Mendels, *Thriving Arts Organizations, Thriving Arts: What We Know About Building Audiences for the Arts and What We Still Have to Learn*. Both reports are available from the Wallace Foundation website. See www.wallacefoundation.org. In October 2014, the foundation also announced a multiyear initiative keyed to audiences and engagement entitled "Building Audiences for Sustainability." While each of these documents and the initiative are focused on the arts rather than museums, they can offer support and ideas for museum professionals who wish to increase access and expand, deepen, and otherwise broaden engagement. See the Wallace Foundation, press release, "The Wallace Foundation Announces Six-Year, \$40-Million Initiative to Support—and Learn From—About 25 Performing Arts Organizations That Engage New Audiences," October 1, 2014, [www.wallacefoundation.org/view-latest-news/PressRelease/Pages/The-Wallace-Foundation-Announces-Six-Year,-\\$40-Million-Initiative-to-Support-Arts-Organizations.aspx](http://www.wallacefoundation.org/view-latest-news/PressRelease/Pages/The-Wallace-Foundation-Announces-Six-Year,-$40-Million-Initiative-to-Support-Arts-Organizations.aspx).

36. Though aimed at academic museums, the publication offers sound advice for all museums seeking to further engage and to broaden their reach. Edited by Stefanie S. Jandl and Mark S. Gold, *Advancing Engagement: A Handbook for Academic Museums*, Volume 3, Boston: MuseumsETC Press, 2014.

ONE

Listening to Our Audiences

William Hennessey and Anne Corso,
Chrysler Museum of Art

We in the art museum world have always been very good at talking to ourselves. We have devised a special language that most outsiders find incomprehensible. Confident in our expertise and judgment, we often believe that we know what is best for our audiences. This is not a very attractive picture and, after a good hard look in the mirror, we at the Chrysler Museum have committed ourselves to changing it. We have rewritten our mission statement to focus not just on our collection but on how we use it; our new focus is on both art *and* people. We have reorganized our staff to support this mission and have begun the process of shifting our institutional culture so that we can become better listeners—understanding and responding to the needs of the audiences we exist to serve. In the pages that follow we outline the steps we have taken toward this goal.

PLANNING

First, allow us to introduce you to the Chrysler Museum—a midsize art museum in Norfolk, Virginia. Founded in 1933, the museum is home to a collection of more than thirty thousand objects covering five thousand years of human history. We present an active schedule of exhibitions, programs, and events for visitors of all ages and backgrounds. With an annual budget of \$8 million, we employ just over one hundred people. Our mission is to “enrich and transform lives by bringing art and people together.” We take this charge very seriously and believe that our continuing success depends on our ability to make the Chrysler a place that makes a positive difference in people’s lives. This means building a responsive relationship with our audiences. It means making the museum

a genuinely relaxed, welcoming, and accessible place. It means having a real conversation with our visitors, talking with, not at them.

From Haughty to Hospitable

Those of us who work in museums every day generally find them familiar and comfortable places, but our visitors have told us they find museums intimidating. In the past they've described our building as formal, wondered if they would be welcome, and worried that nothing inside would be relevant to their lives. When they did muster the nerve to enter, the first person they encountered was a uniformed guard. Like most security professionals, this individual had been trained to size up every visitor as a potential threat. No wonder visitors felt uncomfortable and had the sense they were being followed or regarded with suspicion. They worried that they were going to be chastised for getting too close, for not following some rule, even for looking too hard. Under such conditions it is no surprise that many visitors found it hard to relax enough to really engage with the works of art that were the reason for their visit.

IMPLEMENTATION

Sobered by these insights, we resolved to turn this dynamic upside down. We began by creating a new senior management position focused solely on improving the experience of our visitors. Then we removed our traditional security officers from the galleries (they still work behind the scenes) and replaced them with gallery hosts. Our hosts are informally dressed, and they open our front door for every visitor. In the galleries, hosts engage visitors in conversation or offer to take their picture; they smile and make eye contact with everyone, creating an environment where everyone—from grade-schooler to scholar—feels welcome. If they are asked a question and don't know the answer, they call colleagues for help. All of us—curators, conservators, educators, even the director—are ready to respond. No one is ever too busy to stop and assist a visitor.

It is worth noting that all gallery hosts also carry radios, are trained in CPR and first aid, have been drilled in emergency and safety procedures, and have learned techniques for effectively dealing with problems of all kinds. Their security function operates in the background, as their first job is to make visitors truly welcome, to enable them to relax and enjoy the collection.

The results of this shift have been dramatic. Visitors say that they now feel like honored guests. In surveys, comment cards, and letters they de-



Figure 1.1. Gallery host with young visitor. Photo by Ed Pollard, Chrysler Museum photographer.

scribe their visits in glowing terms, highlighting both the collection *and* the genuine welcome offered by the staff.

What Does Art Sound Like?

A young student stands in front of a vivid canvas depicting more than thirty musicians in the midst of a performance. A gallery host approaches the girl and casually engages her in conversation: “What do you think their song sounds like?” After a little discussion, the host holds up her iPad in front of the painting and says, “We think it might have sounded like this.” As the tablet recognizes the image, an orchestra bursts into song—a lively rendition of the music most likely played by the painted band. This project, *Listening to American Art*, pairs contextualizing audio with works found throughout the museum, and it is one piece of the Chrysler’s new interpretative model.

In the spirit of breaking down barriers, the museum sought to develop a new model for interpreting the exhibitions and works of art as part of

our 2014 renovation. The model had four distinct components. First, we reorganized the education department. Rather than having educators solely dedicated to certain segments of the audience, we created positions designed to focus specifically on interpretation, educational technology and new media, and audience engagement.

Second, we rewrote every label and text panel for the reinstallation according to new standards: we abandoned art historical jargon and used clear and concise writing to direct the visitor to look actively at the object. We also sought to answer visitors' specific questions that we had collected through conversations over the years.

Third, we reconsidered how we choose what goes on display and how we display it. Although we installed the galleries chronologically, we intentionally included artwork and multimedia installations that break the chronological flow. For example, a cast glass dress by contemporary artist Karen LaMonte echoes the drapery of a reclining female form atop an ancient Roman sarcophagus. Such "activations" often surprise visitors and prompt rich conversations.

Finally, we explored the best way to use technology in the galleries. Focusing carefully on reinforcing our mission of bringing art and people together, we created programs like *Listening to American Art*. What makes this initiative successful is not simply the information that the technology provides or the multidisciplinary approach to conveying it, but rather that the technology serves as a tool, one that visitors already use in their everyday lives, to engage in a conversation.

"I Hate Tomatoes"

Art museum visitors read plenty of words on gallery walls. But what happens when the words are written by other visitors and not by museum professionals? At the Chrysler, on public view they'll find widely diverse phrases such as: "Powerful. I've struggled with addiction for 11 years," and "I didn't like the glass hamburger because it had a tomato. I hate tomatoes." At first, these two statements seem to be worlds apart, but they both have an important effect—they prompt conversations. Rather than being told what to think or see, visitors begin expressing their own insights, and they start to communicate with one another.

Some institutional history will paint a clearer picture. In 2012, the Chrysler hosted *30 Americans*, an exhibition of contemporary African American art that grappled with issues of race, sexuality, and violence, often in a deliberately provocative manner. For instance, an installation by Gary Simmons featured a ring of child-sized stools topped by white pointed hoods that encircled a noose hung from the ceiling. While committed to presenting the artists' works, the museum also wanted to be sensitive to

the visitors' emotions by encouraging their own expression. The museum tried a very low-tech experiment, but one whose immediacy had powerful results: we installed a series of response stations next to the art, giving people a chance to voice their opinions in direct response to the work. It required only blank wall space, Post-its, and pencils. Visitors did the rest. Although staff initially worried that visitors might harm a painting with a Post-it or write an inflammatory comment, the rewards were evident quickly. The walls became covered from floor to ceiling with sticky notes full of comments. Visitors voiced their own opinions, revealing aspects of the works no one on staff had ever considered. They also responded to other visitors' comments, creating conversations and thought-provoking debates. Every day, the staff found powerful expressions in the gallery. One notable comment read, "Makes me want to scream *I'm sorry* for what has happened."

Although *30 Americans* was a temporary exhibition, it reinforced that visitors want to actively participate in a dialogue with the museum, its staff, and with each other. More importantly, it prompted an institutional decision that the visitors' voice should always be heard in the museum in a way that is neither moderated by staff vetting and editing nor relegated to a subtly placed comment book. As the museum opened its doors after the largest renovation in its history, we installed large response stations

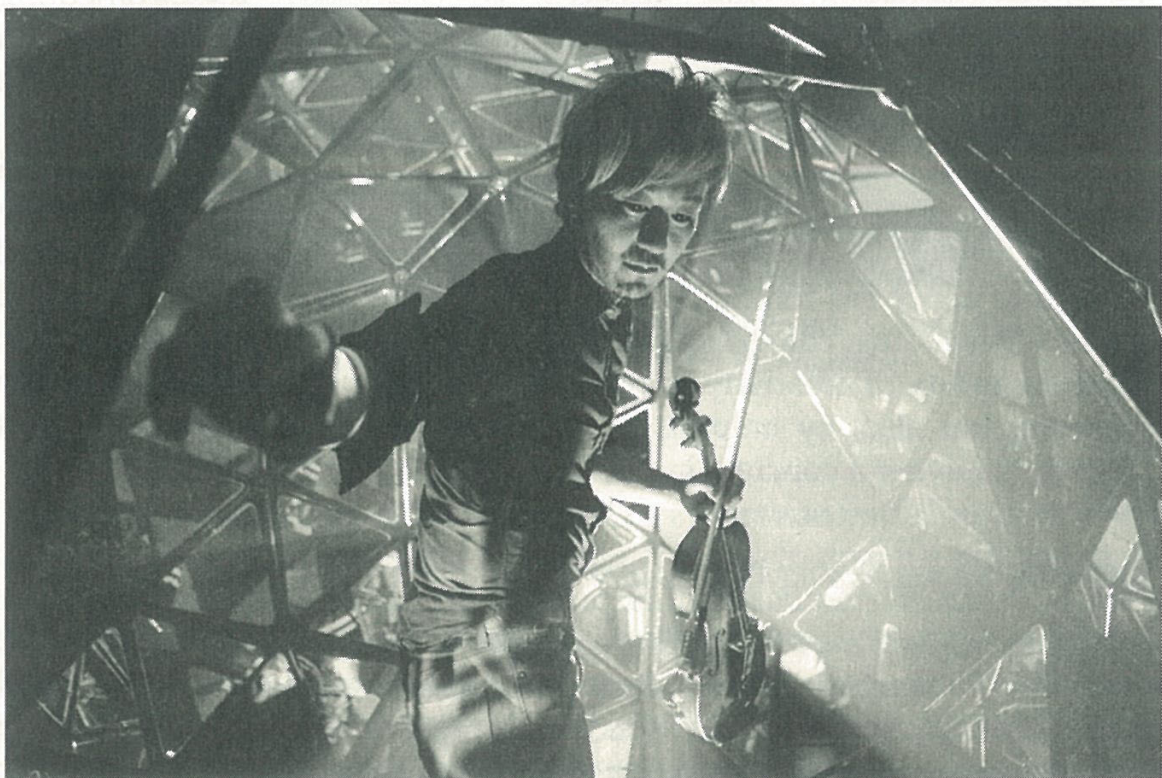


Figure 1.2. Kishi Bashi plays *Third Thursday* at the Glass Studio. Photo by Echard Wheeler for the Chrysler Museum of Art.