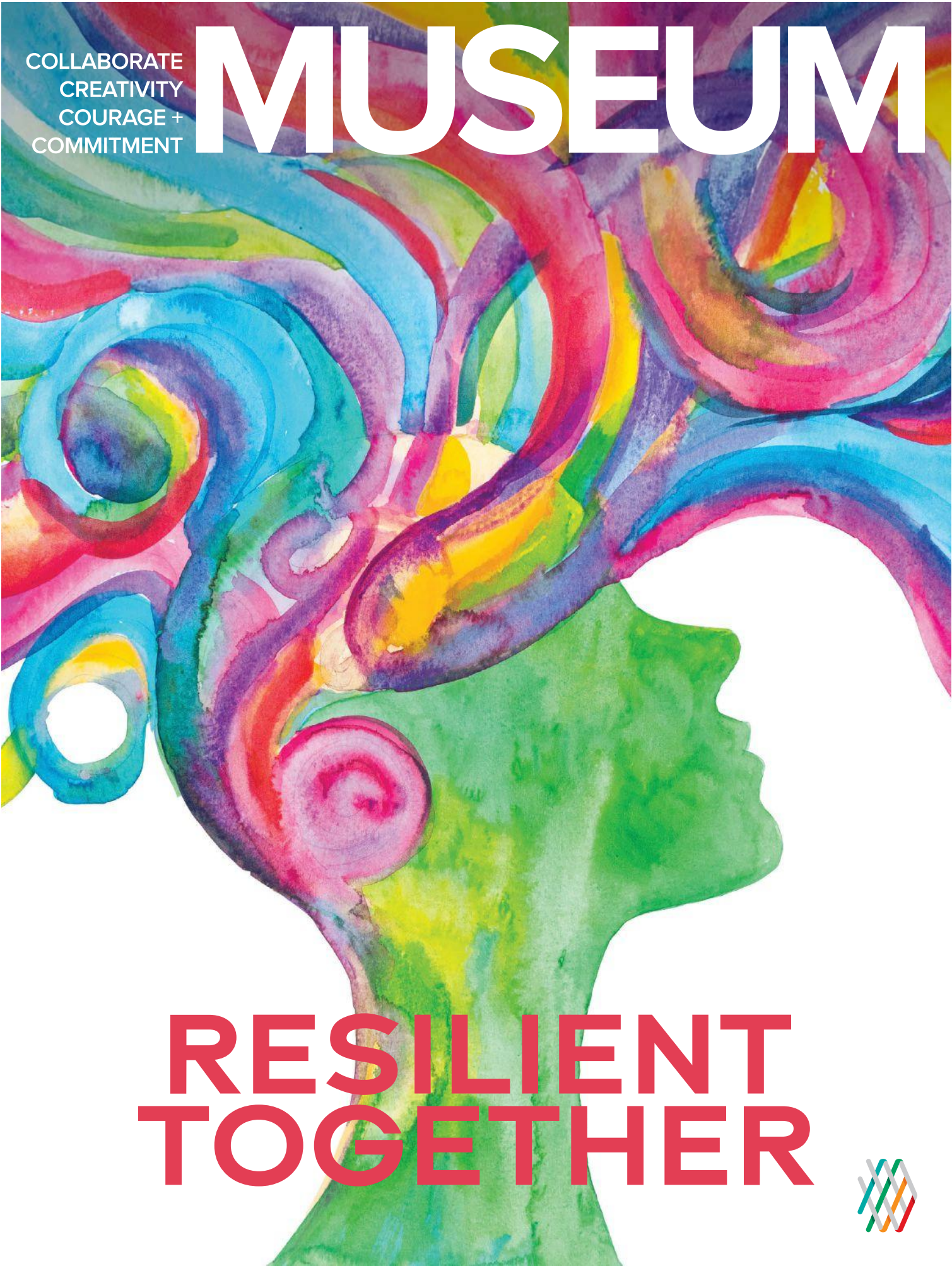


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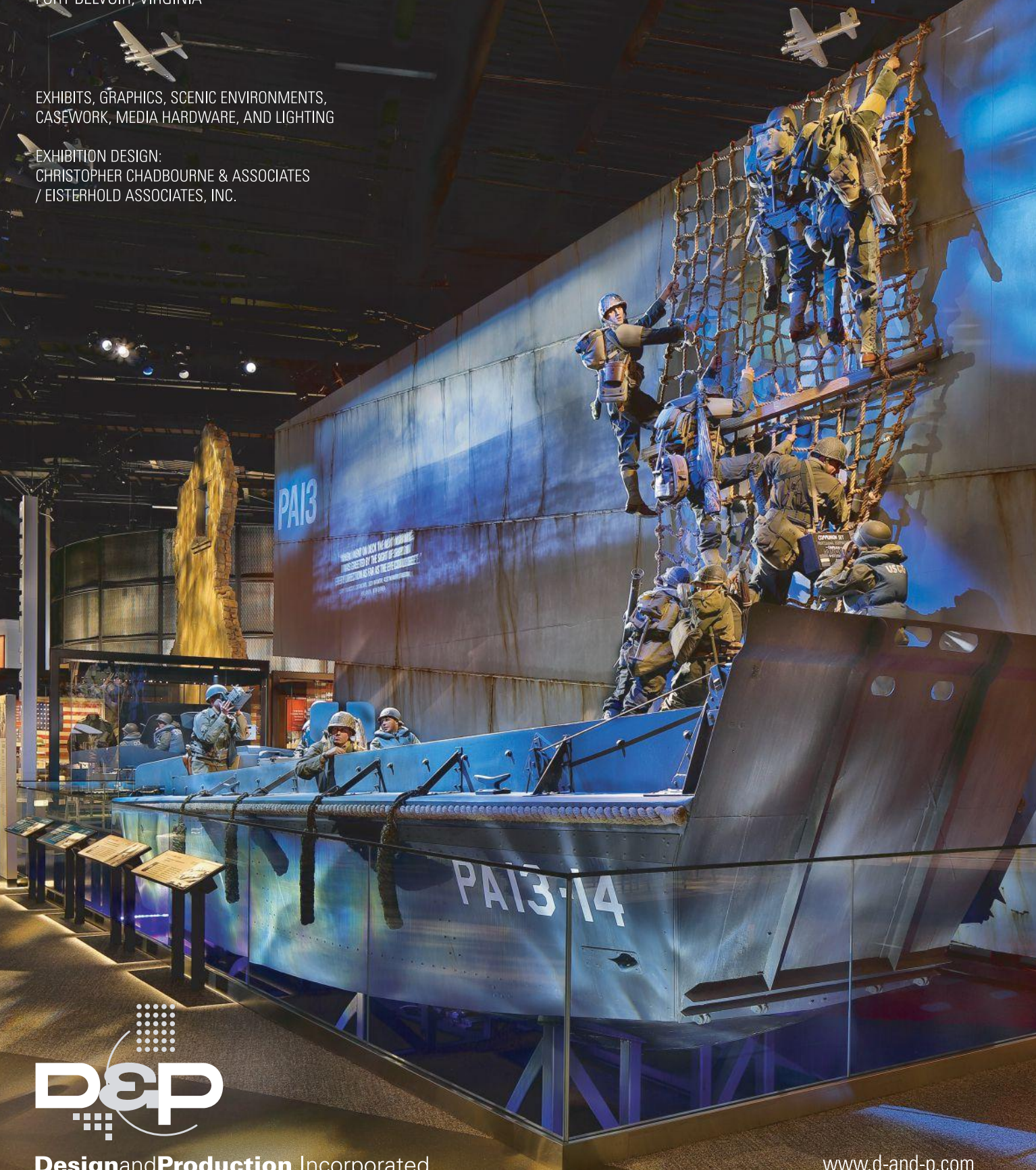
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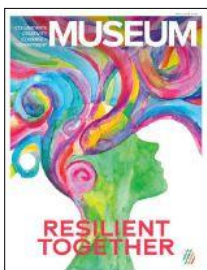
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MUSEUM (ISSN 0027-4089)

MAY/JUNE 2021, VOLUME 100, NO. 3

PUBLISHED BIMONTHLY (J/F, M/A, M/J, J/A, S/O, N/D)  
BY THE AMERICAN ALLIANCE OF MUSEUMS

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# Resilient, Together

**What does resiliency mean** for a community, a museum, or the field at large?

It was just over a year ago when the in-person AAM Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo was cancelled for the first time in our 115-year history outside of wartime. Shuttering the largest annual gathering of museum professionals in the world was a gut-wrenching decision, but it was the right decision as a global pandemic soon led to a widespread lockdown. The AAM team wasted no time in quickly redesigning this important annual meeting during this unprecedented moment. The 2020 gathering moved to a virtual format and featured an inspiring and timely program of panels and speakers, engaging and connecting a larger and more diverse audience than we expected to gather in person.

We may not have been able to predict the extent of the disruption and pain the pandemic would cause, but we can be sure that this will not be the last time our country, and our field, experiences this kind of volatility. Many of you share my proclivity for strategic and proactive planning and understand that we must do better to prepare for a different world and future disruptions. Together as an Alliance we must learn from the successes and missteps of 2020 and develop a comprehensive plan for the resiliency of our museums.

Resiliency, as the many inspiring stories in these pages demonstrate, is not a concept limited to bouncing back, but comes from long-term planning and strategy that incorporate financial ingenuity; a deep commitment to diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion; a distinct demonstration of community value; and a structure that allows for agility and nimbleness in times of change.

That is why the 2021 AAM Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo's theme is "Resilient, Together." During

#AAM2021, May 24 and June 7–9, we are coming together as a field to embrace the change offered by the current crises and explore questions around building greater individual, community, organizational, and field-wide resilience.

How do we examine the challenges that create an uneven pattern of resiliency in the field? How do we fortify and adapt varying forms of resiliency to meet not only the present crises, but also determine and embrace what our future will hold? Becoming resilient requires examining the complexities of these topics, mapping paths to a more inclusive and equitable field, and adapting so that when a crisis occurs again, we will be stronger than ever before, together.

You might ask, what can we accomplish in four days? With thousands of museum professionals, daring thought leaders, and changemakers across the world, you will be informed and inspired to plan for a bold, hopeful, and resilient future for your museum—and connected to those working toward the same goals.

We have designed #AAM2021 to bring the energy of our in-person conference to a new and interactive virtual platform with an incredible program and ample opportunities to connect with colleagues. Thanks to the generosity of our donors, we are offering deeply discounted \$25 registrations to allow for the greatest access possible. Visit [annualmeeting.aam-us.org](http://annualmeeting.aam-us.org) to discover all that #AAM2021 has to offer and register today. I'll see you there!

3/16/2021



---

Laura L. Lott is the Alliance's president and CEO. Follow Laura on Twitter at [@LottLaura](https://twitter.com/LottLaura).

## Museum Relevance

In January 2021, the American Alliance of Museums and Wilkening Consulting surveyed a broader population sample of more than 1,100 adults. Here's a snapshot of what they said:

**1 in 4**

think museums should be inclusive in their content, including stories and perspectives of women, people of color, religious minorities, LGBTQ, etc.

**1 in 3**

think museums should provide places of respite, escape, and/or beauty outside of our daily lives.

**20%**

of respondents expressed strong concerns that museums may either never reopen or severely cut back on services as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Sources:** The 2021 Broader Population Survey was fielded as a comparison sample to the Annual Survey of Museum-Goers. Results will be shared with the field starting summer 2021.

By the Numbers was compiled by Susie Wilkening, principal of Wilkening Consulting, wilkeningconsulting.com. Reach Susie at Susie@wilkeningconsulting.com.





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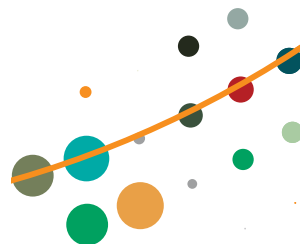
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## REGISTER FOR #AAM2021!

It has never been more critical that our field come together, embrace the change offered by the current crises, and build greater individual, community, organizational, and field-wide resilience.

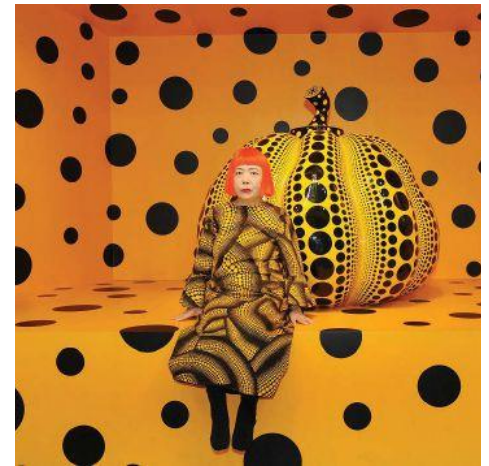
Becoming resilient requires examining the complexities of the issues currently facing our field; mapping paths to a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable future; and adapting—so that we bounce back with new vigor, together.

At #AAM2021, you'll be connecting, collaborating, and learning with thousands of other museum professionals at over 80 interactive sessions, networking events and meet-ups, and more May 24 and June 7-9.

**Registration for individuals, groups of 6 or more people, and student rates are available.**

If you would like to attend #AAM2021 but have been furloughed, laid off, or are otherwise unable to afford the full cost of registration, **deeply discounted \$25 registrations** are being provided on a rolling basis. BIPOC individuals and individuals who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ and disability communities are strongly encouraged to submit their interest. Complete our interest form today: [bit.ly/25reg-aam2021](https://bit.ly/25reg-aam2021)

Visit [annualmeeting.aam-us.org/aam2021-faq](https://annualmeeting.aam-us.org/aam2021-faq) to learn more.



### Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth

“Sean Scully: The Shape of Ideas,” organized by the Philadelphia Museum of Art, features the artist’s most significant works and examines his contribution to the development of abstraction over a span of nearly five decades. The exhibition highlights the close relationship between the artist’s paintings, drawings, prints, and pastels, which are rarely shown together.

**Location:** Fort Worth, TX  
**Dates:** June 20–Oct. 10  
**Partner:** Philadelphia Museum of Art  
**Learn more:** [themodern.org/exhibition/sean-scully-shape-ideas](http://themodern.org/exhibition/sean-scully-shape-ideas)

### Skirball Cultural Center

“Noah’s Ark at the Skirball: The Art of Imagination” is a suite of virtual programming and free educational resources developed for pre-K through grade 5 distance learning. Rooted in the gallery’s narrative of weathering storms, fostering community, and building a better world, “The Art of Imagination” includes streaming videos and interactive lesson plans, virtual field trips facilitated by Noah’s Ark educators, and online professional development courses focused on arts integration.

**Location:** Los Angeles, CA  
**Learn more:** [skirball.org/education/for-your-students](http://skirball.org/education/for-your-students)

### New York Botanical Garden

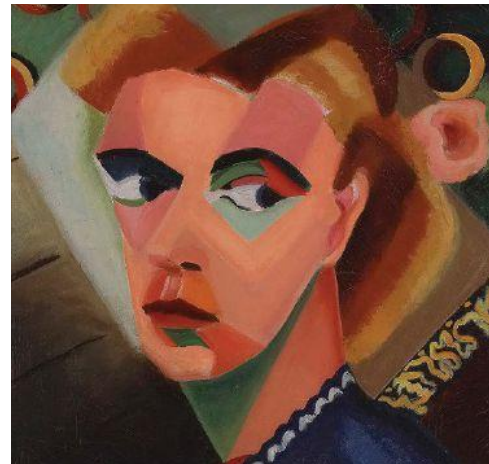
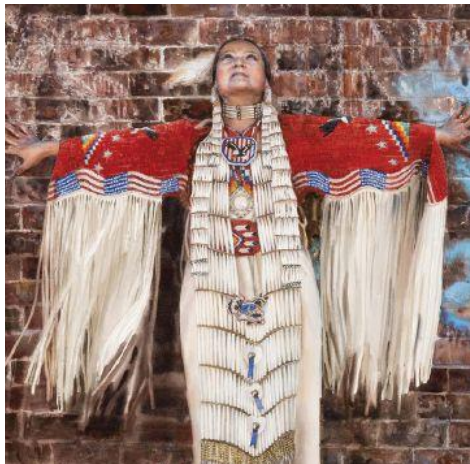
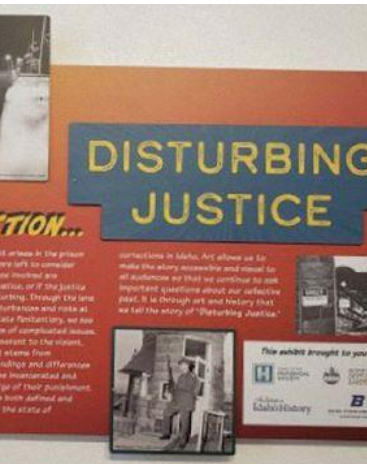
“KUSAMA: Cosmic Nature” features work by Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama installed in four experiences across the New York Botanical Garden’s landscape, conservatory, and library building. The exhibition includes works from throughout Kusama’s prolific career and multifaceted practice. By integrating seasonal horticultural displays, the exhibition will further illuminate the power of nature that pervades the artist’s practice and dynamic body of work.

**Location:** Bronx, NY  
**Dates:** through Oct. 31  
**Learn more:** [nybg.org/event/kusama/](http://nybg.org/event/kusama/)

### What’s New at Your Museum?

Do you have a new temporary or permanent exhibition, education program, partnership/initiative, or building/wing? Tell us at [bit.ly/MuseumNewsAAM](http://bit.ly/MuseumNewsAAM), and it might be featured in an upcoming issue.

Sean Scully, *Pale Fire*, 1988, Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth © Sean Scully; Skirball Cultural Center; Kusama with *Pumpkin*, 2010 © Yayoi Kusama, courtesy of Ota Fine Arts, Victoria Miro, and David Zwirner



### Old Idaho Penitentiary Historic Site

“Disturbing Justice,” a new permanent exhibition, interprets the seven riots and disturbances—in 1910, 1935, 1952, 1958, 1966, 1971, and 1973—in the prison’s history. The exhibition combines comic book–style art, historic photographs, interpretation, and a timeline highlighting major historic and prison events from 1872 to 2020. This merger of historic interpretation and artist vision brings previously untold stories to prison visitors in a unique way.

**Location:** Boise, ID

**Learn more:** [ncph.org/history-at-work/disturbing-justice/](http://ncph.org/history-at-work/disturbing-justice/)

### Huntsville Museum of Art

In 2010, American artist, author, and teacher Mary Whyte set out to paint 50 large-scale watercolor portraits of what it means to be an American veteran today. Over seven years in the making, “WE THE PEOPLE: Portraits of Veterans in America” took her across the United States to meet men and women of all ages and from all walks of life, and to paint some of our country’s truest patriots.

**Location:** Huntsville, AL

**Dates:** June 27–Sept. 26

**Partner:** The Jurenko Foundation

**Learn more:** [hsvmuseum.org/we-the-people-mary-whyte/](http://hsvmuseum.org/we-the-people-mary-whyte/)

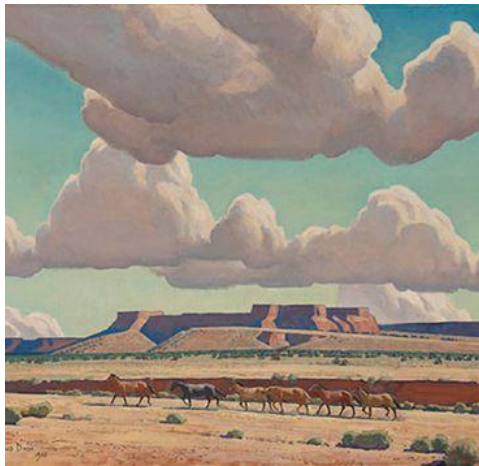
### Mississippi Museum of Art

“Piercing the Inner Wall: The Art of Dusti Bongé” is an expansive survey revealing the full range of the pioneering artist’s oeuvre. Considered Mississippi’s first artist to work consistently in a Modernist style, Bongé was active in New York’s dynamic art scene and the creative communities that flourished along the Gulf Coast in the 1930s through the early 1990s. During her lifetime, she created a multifaceted body of work that transitioned from figurative and Cubist depictions of scenes of her hometown Biloxi to a period of Surrealism and into Abstract Expressionism that defines her mature work.

**Location:** Jackson, MS

**Dates:** through May 23

**Learn more:** [msmuseumart.org/exhibition/piercing-the-inner-wall-the-work-of-dusti-bonge/](http://msmuseumart.org/exhibition/piercing-the-inner-wall-the-work-of-dusti-bonge/)



### National Mining Hall of Fame and Museum

“Miner Leaguers: Mining and the Great American Pastime” explores the unexpected connection between mining and baseball. US miners working under difficult and dangerous conditions in the late 19th and early 20th centuries let off steam on weekends by playing baseball. Some of them were so good that they ended up playing for minor league and major league teams, including teams in the Negro leagues. The exhibition features uniforms and equipment, historic photos, and a video about teams in West Virginia coal-mining towns.

**Location:** Leadville, CO  
**Dates:** through December  
**Learn more:** [facebook.com/nmhfm/posts/4094810003862733](https://facebook.com/nmhfm/posts/4094810003862733)

### Frist Art Museum

“Creating the American West in Art” showcases nearly 80 paintings and sculptures from 1822 to 1946 by such notable artists as Albert Bierstadt, Thomas Moran, Frederic Remington, and Maynard Dixon. Drawn from the Petrie Institute of Western American Art at the Denver Art Museum, the exhibition explores the nuances of a complex American West, including its often-challenging history—especially regarding the forced displacement of Native Americans—and its vibrant and diverse natural beauty.

**Location:** Nashville, TN  
**Dates:** through June 27  
**Learn more:** [fristartmuseum.org/exhibition/creating-the-american-west-in-art/](https://fristartmuseum.org/exhibition/creating-the-american-west-in-art/)

### Pulitzer Arts Foundation

In “Hannah Wilke: Art for Life’s Sake,” the artist’s versatility and innovative approach to materials are demonstrated through a rich selection of photography, video, and works on paper, as well as sculptures in clay, latex, chewing gum, and other nontraditional materials. The exhibition will offer new perspectives on the artist, revealing her to be a trailblazer who was as invested in advancing the position of women in society as she was in developing a unique artistic practice.

**Location:** St. Louis, MO  
**Dates:** June 4–Jan. 16, 2022  
**Learn more:** [pulitzerarts.org/exhibition/hannah-wilke/](https://pulitzerarts.org/exhibition/hannah-wilke/)

National Mining Hall of Fame and Museum; Maynard Dixon, *Wide Lands of the Navajo*, 1945, Denver Art Museum; Hannah Wilke with *Ponderosa* 4, 1975 © 2021 Scharf Family, Hannah Wilke Collection & Archive, licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society

## The Bakken Museum

Inspiration and innovation are cornerstones of the human experience. Together they form a cycle of discovery that people use to shape the world. This cycle begins with a spark. The “Spark” exhibition explores these moments to reveal a diverse and uniquely human tradition, one that fuels our wildest imaginations and satisfies our most practical concerns.

**Location:** Minneapolis, MN

**Partner:** Roto

**Learn more:** [thebakken.org/exhibit/spark/](http://thebakken.org/exhibit/spark/)



## Dallas Museum of Art

Devotional objects play an important role in the daily life of communities and can be admired both for their artistic value and spiritual significance. “Devoted: Art and Spirituality in Mexico and New Mexico” presents 35 devotional objects that highlight two distinct but related practices: bultos, wooden sculptures of saints and other holy figures, and ex-votos, paintings that commemorate personal miracles.

**Location:** Dallas, TX

**Dates:** through Jan. 2, 2022

**Learn more:** [dma.org/Devoted](http://dma.org/Devoted)

Twin Birch Studios; attributed to José Rafael Aragón, Unidentified Female Saint, early 19th–mid-19th century, Dallas Museum of Art

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# Collaboration as Resilience

The Prairie State Museums Project is a model for future museum partnerships.

By Daniel Ronan

## In the spring of 2020,

AAM announced that one in three museums could close permanently as a result of the pandemic. The International Council of Museums (ICOM) forecast that nearly 13 percent of museums around the world could close permanently. A year later, the museum community may have avoided some of the catastrophic closures most feared, but persistent questions about the future of the museum field linger.

Another sector not unfamiliar with cost-cutting, layoffs, and closures is journalism. The Pew Research Center reports that between 2008 and 2019, newsroom employment across the United States fell by 23 percent, a loss of about 27,000 jobs.

As the leader of Resilient Heritage, an arts, culture, and heritage firm, I noticed the similarities between these two sectors and sensed an opportunity for

collaboration. The opportunity came in the form of a grant from the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, based in Washington, DC.

In April 2020, Resilient Heritage applied, along with 236 others, for a grant from the Pulitzer Center's Coronavirus News Collaboration Challenge to explore ways newsrooms could jointly report on issues stemming from COVID-19. Resilient Heritage proposed the Prairie State Museums Project, which would explore the impacts of the pandemic on arts and culture by collaborating with 16 freelance journalists from 14 news outlets from across Illinois, one national news outlet, and five museum and cultural organizations, including the Illinois Association of Museums, Arts Alliance Illinois, the Association of Midwest Museums, AAM, and ICOM.

These individuals and organizations worked together in the summer of 2020 to document the impact of COVID-19 on museums in Illinois, also known as the "Prairie State." The project sought to bring together the expertise of the museum field with the practitioners of today's journalism in

Susan Moran, Rockford Register Star



One of the museums featured in the Prairie State Museums Project coverage is the Laurent House in Rockford, Illinois, the only fully wheelchair accessible house designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.



newspapers of record, alternative weeklies, online blogs, and NPR affiliates. These partners created a unique model of collaboration that characterizes the flexibility and openness needed in a time that calls for resilience in museums and communities.

### How the Collaboration Worked

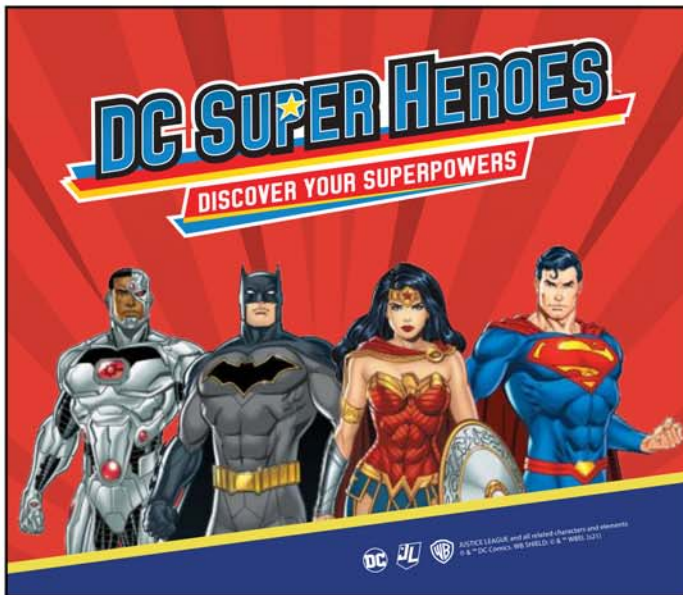
The grant from the Pulitzer Center funded more than 35 stories written by the journalists, who were informed by the local, national, and international perspectives of the cultural and museum organizations. In two Zoom meetings, the organizations

provided background information and sources and insights into potential stories on museum recovery and resilience, and the 16 journalists connected about potential story ideas and collaborations.

Throughout the project, the Resilient Heritage team facilitated the communication between the cultural and museum organizations and the journalists, including forwarding on presentations, relevant news articles, and reports documenting the COVID-19 crisis. The team also maintained direct relationships with each of the editors from the news sources participating in



Katherine Dunham, the famed artist and dance choreographer, in her home in East St. Louis in the mid-1980s. The Katherine Dunham Museum was also featured in project coverage.



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the project. To bring additional attention to smaller museums, Resilient Heritage facilitated introductions between the journalists and small-museum staff, with editorial discretion left to the journalists and their editor. As the stories were published, they were posted and promoted through the project website (PrairieStateMuseumsProject.org) and dedicated social media accounts that featured biographies of the journalists and links to the articles using #PrairieMuseums. The stories brought to life a detailed picture of museums across Illinois and the cultural and economic value they bring to their communities.

### What the Project Produced

In “Fighting for Katherine Dunham’s Dream in East St. Louis,” published in the *Riverfront Times*, reporter Eric Berger covered how the Katherine Dunham Museum in the economically depressed city of East St. Louis, Illinois, had to manage several emergency facility failures while also contending with the closures—and lack of revenue—caused by the pandemic. Nonetheless, dance legend Dunham’s goal to bring a “cultural awakening on the East Side” in the 1970s was palpable in the board’s determination that the institution persevere beyond the pandemic.

In another article, published in the *Rockford Register Star*, reporter

Alex Gary covered the July 2020 reopening of the expanded Laurent House in Rockford, Illinois, notable as the only house designed by Frank Lloyd Wright to be fully wheelchair accessible. The all-volunteer leaders of the museum dedicated themselves to creating a welcoming—if physically distanced—tour for visitors who come from around the world to see this architecturally significant house. The museum’s efforts to continue safely operating through the pandemic underscore its importance to the community.

Additional stories from the Prairie State Museums Project detail museums’ tenacity and problem-solving abilities during

---

## WORKING WITH JOURNALISTS

Approaching journalists with a story idea can be intimidating. Following are some recommendations on how to work with the news media:

- 1. Don’t diminish the medium.** Every medium—including newspapers, alternative weeklies, blogs, magazines, and radio stations—has an audience and is worth engaging.
- 2. Develop relationships with journalists before newsworthy projects come up.** Journalists don’t necessarily want to be your friend, but they appreciate consistent (but not constant) notifications about meaningful stories.
- 3. Journalists appreciate stories.** Stories are not just events and happenings, but narratives that have arcs and can relate to current events and history.

But don’t take it from me; here’s some advice from journalists involved in the project:

“Museums are responding to current events and showcasing how they tie into our collective history. I believe there are countless opportunities to strengthen the understanding about how museums are reacting to current events and that, specifically, can be of great interest to journalists.”—Brian Munoz, Multimedia Journalist, Carbondale, Illinois

“I would suggest museums think about not only what they are doing for their organization, but how what they do impacts as directly as possible their community. Journalists want a fuller picture than just an event or an exhibit to cover; they want a story to tell. I appreciate stories that can bridge the gap between the imaginative and the practical.”—Olivia Cunningham, Journalist, Chicago, Illinois

“The struggles of one museum in a midsized city in Illinois is not going to attract much notice, but when you bundle a dozen or so such museums together in one project, then you’ve got a story with real heft, a story that touches a lot of people and a lot of places.”—Tom Hundley, Senior Editor, Pulitzer Center, Washington, DC

COVID-19. “[This] project demonstrated that collaboration is possible between museums and journalism,” says Tom Hundley, senior editor of the Pulitzer Center. “In particular, the focus on engaging freelance reporters in a concerted fashion has demonstrated the potential for museum professionals and journalists to reach their distinct goals—the museums

to interpret and to preserve, the journalists to document and to tell.”

When the museum profession ventures outside its usual pathways of thinking and doing, new collaborations can reveal themselves. In a time marked by ever-increasing environmental shocks and stresses, from pandemics to chronic underfunding, museums can foster resilience

by being ready to collaborate creatively and proactively with unlikely or unusual partners.

**Daniel Ronan** is the principal of Resilient Heritage (ResilientHeritage.org), an arts, culture, and heritage firm based in Chicago, Illinois.

**RESOURCES**

The Prairie State Museums Project: [PrairieStateMuseumsProject.org](http://PrairieStateMuseumsProject.org)

The Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting’s Coronavirus News Collaboration Challenge [pulitzercenter.org/coronavirus-news-collaboration-challenge](http://pulitzercenter.org/coronavirus-news-collaboration-challenge)

Eric Berger, “Fighting for Katherine Dunham’s Dream in East St. Louis,” *Riverfront Times*, July 22, 2020: [bit.ly/3sjMg4E](https://bit.ly/3sjMg4E)

Alex Gary, “Expanded Laurent House reopens with safety restrictions,” *Rockford Register Star*, June 30, 2020 [pulitzercenter.org/stories/expanded-laurent-house-reopens-safety-restrictions](http://pulitzercenter.org/stories/expanded-laurent-house-reopens-safety-restrictions)

# Call for Entries

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# INSIDE OUT OUTSIDE IN

A resilience model for museums  
offers strategies to address  
challenging realities.

By Anne W. Ackerson, Gail Anderson, and Dina A. Bailey

**Extraordinary times demand** that museums rethink and reposition themselves to be more integral and valued members of their communities. As the pandemic unfolded, societal inequities intensified and revealed structural, philosophical, and ethical weaknesses within museums and cultural organizations. Additionally, it became clear that government agencies and the general public did not view museums as essential players contributing to the vitality of community life.

These stark realities necessitate new approaches to address the loss of public participation, diminished financial resources, and racial inequities and systemic exclusionary practices in museum workplaces, boardrooms, collections, and programming. Further, climate change and environmental injustices, agile digital strategies, flexible internal operations, and healthy community partnerships are but a few of the realities museums need to acknowledge and address. Unfortunately, many museums are still operating with inflexible mindsets, outdated assumptions and practices, and long-standing traditions that have been immune to critical examination.

This is an opportunity to “go down to the studs,” tackle embedded assumptions, and reimagine museums as integral to public vitality and the greater ecosystem of which they are a part. To do

so, institutions must rethink holistically—inside out and outside in—and re-envision what they are and what they can be.

Resilience positions museums to nurture more flexible and responsive operating models for a world where disruptions will continue and social and environmental issues will persist. Are museums part of the solution? We believe they are, but we also know that meeting this moment will require more than a pivot; museums will need to undergo transformational change.

### The Resilience Model

What do we mean by resilience? Most definitions of resilience focus on the ability of an organization to bounce back from adversity. Resilience is much more than reacting to events thrust upon us or those of our own making; resilience is about anticipating disruption and generating an array of responses to flourish in the face of change.

Without a strong, strategic foundation from which to grow resilience, institutions are vulnerable to ongoing disruptions. The process of reframing, realigning, and reinventing any museum’s understanding of its work first requires analysis and ownership of its institutional history and current practices. When organizations are able to do this, they harness the

“For museums, the choice is either resilience or irrelevance. When museums see themselves not only as serving their community but as their community, they will undoubtedly be resolute, fortitudinous, adaptive, and unrelenting despite the challenges they face.”

—LaNesha DeBardelaben, President and CEO,  
Northwest African American Museum, Seattle, Washington

awareness needed to build resilient mindsets, values, skills, and relationships that elevate their value in a rapidly evolving world.

The Resilience Model highlights five resilience goals forming a system of tightly interrelated operational components that are the lifeblood of agile, responsive organizations. Immediately surrounding the goals in the diagram at right are six resilient characteristics that institutions must embrace in order to effectively address the constantly changing external realities of the local and global environments in which they operate. The Resilience Model, featured in the resource *The Resilience Playbook*, outlines five goals, each supported by four plays, that capture a series of actions for museums to undertake the work of becoming resilient. This unprecedented opportunity is the moment to reimagine museum relevancy moving forward.

The Resilience Model is a holistic approach to institutional transformation that addresses the changes needed to establish museum resiliency. It is built on:

- tackling embedded racial inequities and colonial and exclusionary practices to achieve greater resiliency;
- examining all institutional assumptions to reveal inherent strengths and vulnerabilities and identify the re-envisioning and rebuilding needed;
- participating in resilience work at the board, executive leadership, staff, and volunteer levels while engaging communities and stakeholders;
- listening with humility, learning, and co-creating solutions internally and externally;
- re-envisioning a resilient institution not as an isolated effort but an integrated way of being for the greater good; and
- remembering transformational work is a long-term commitment of revitalization where short-term benchmarks create momentum.

## The Five Resilience Goals

### Goal 1. Activate Equity and Inclusion

Resilient organizations need to move past intention and into action. Resilience is about mindsets and being ever flexible. “Activate Equity and Inclusion” is Goal 1 because it is central to the success of an institution’s internal and external relationships and current and future resilient decision-making. Equity and inclusion reflect a complex and expansive ideology to be embraced throughout the organization and with their communities.

In the US, in particular, there is an imperative to address racial inequities; however, all diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion work is embraced within this goal. Equity and inclusion efforts require both individual (personal) and institution-wide work.

#### COMMIT TO RESILIENCE: Center equity and inclusion in all of your decision-making.

- Reflect on and acknowledge the organization’s current status in relation to equity and inclusion, including a focus on gaps and opportunities.
- Develop shared language and shared understanding about the power of diversity, equity, access, inclusion, and anti-racism as the foundation for current and future initiatives.
- Develop specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound actions that will lead to greater equity and inclusion across the organization.
- Make equity and inclusion the work of the entire organization at all levels now and into the future.

### Goal 2. Renegotiate Community Value

The realization that museums were not considered essential at the outset of COVID-19 laid bare that museums have a lot of work to do to earn community respect. Effective community engagement is a long-term

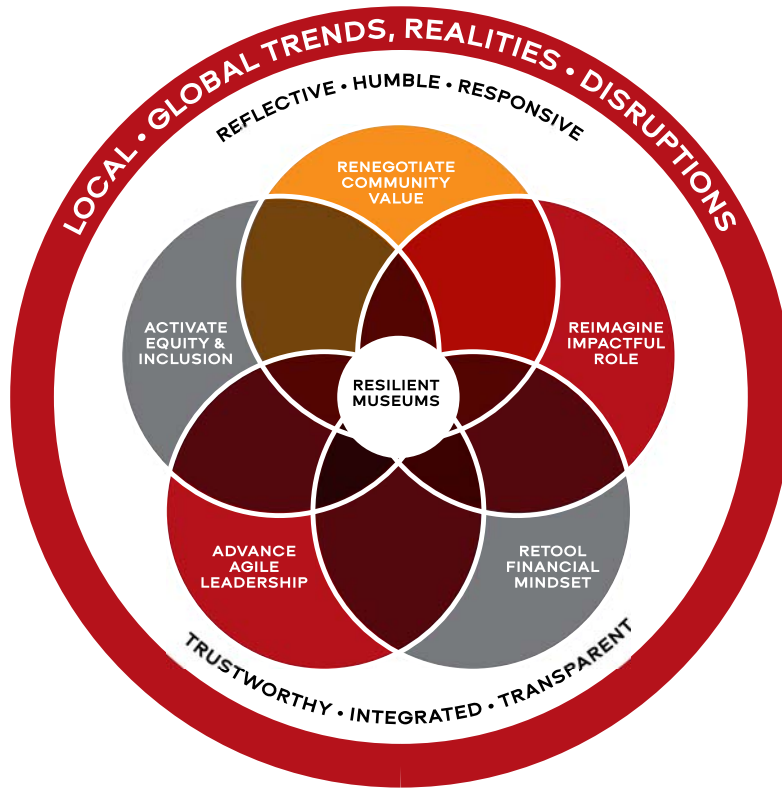
## RESOURCES

Aaron Ambroso, “Museums Are Being Tasked With Radically Transforming the Way They Work. Here Are 6 Practical Steps They Can Take to Do That,” *artnet news*, September 1, 2020  
[news.artnet.com/opinion/museum-ethics-op-ed-1904895](https://news.artnet.com/opinion/museum-ethics-op-ed-1904895)

Christy S. Coleman, “In Times Like These: Managing Museums Through Crises,” AAM, April 7, 2020  
[aam-us.org/2020/04/07/in-times-like-these-managing-museums-through-crises/](https://aam-us.org/2020/04/07/in-times-like-these-managing-museums-through-crises/)

Richard Evans, “On Adaptive Capacity and Resiliency,” ArtsFwd, January 2020  
[artsfwd.org/on-adaptive-capacity-and-resilience/](https://artsfwd.org/on-adaptive-capacity-and-resilience/)

## RESILIENCE MODEL



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*The Resilience Playbook: For Museums, Arts, Culture, and Heritage Organizations*

commitment based on listening to communities and co-creating strategies that strengthen community vitality. Further, this goal is about shifting the role of the museum from being a destination toward being a fully integrated community partner that actively affirms that collective problems, such as socioeconomic inequities, climate change, and educational systems in crisis, require collective solutions. Museums cannot stand on the sidelines expecting others to address these persistent and urgent issues; museums must do their part.

**COMMIT TO RESILIENCE: Redefine the organization as integral, relevant, and vital to public life.**

- Integrate shifting external realities and needs locally and globally as part of staying current and relevant.

- Identify opportunities where the organization can be a key player in the community ecosystem and larger world.
- Leverage institutional capacity, offerings, collections, and facilities to make a meaningful difference to communities.
- Build strategies, relationships, and partnerships to expand the museum's impact.

### **Goal 3. Reimagine Impactful Role**

This goal advances resilience by asking institutions to challenge their assumptions about how their pasts continue to influence current operations for good or ill. Confronting, naming, and owning exclusionary practices and colonial roots is essential internal work: no museum can achieve true resiliency without addressing the evidence and nature of past decisions, harms caused, and the embedded practices that may have left many without a voice or representation.

While part of this goal is about decolonizing the museum, it is also about addressing institutional priorities, practices, and processes that reveal realities about authority and power, diverse approaches to working with the public, and collection equity and access. Understandably, this process of deep assessment will lead to repositioning the museum's purpose, mission, and institutional commitments.

**COMMIT TO RESILIENCE: Reinvent the organization for the greatest relevance.**

- Address the organization's historical origins in order to rectify past practices that excluded, misrepresented, or disrespected the rights and identities of people, cultures, and traditions.
- Redefine principles to strengthen connections with communities and the public to support relevant, meaningful, and inclusive practices.
- Revitalize the strategic framework with a relevant mission, an inspirational vision, core values, and an institutional commitment to equity, inclusion, and anti-racism supported by policies and practices that champion positive, sustainable change throughout the organization.
- Commit to agility and resilience as external trends and issues prompt shifts, further refinements, and responses over time.

**Goal 4. Retool Financial Mindset**

This goal underpins the essential need for financial strategies to support the work of transformation, building financial resilience, and instilling the ability to be flexible and prepared. Understanding the connections between financial resources and the institution's internal and external realities is about aligning institutional convictions with the resources required to address them.

Critical examination of the museum's business model once again challenges assumptions and assesses where and how every resource is secured and invested, thus catalyzing new decision-making criteria and processes and laying the groundwork for rigorous resilient practices. Instilling institution-wide financial literacy gives board and staff members an understanding of, and respect for, the intricacies of running a museum's complex operation.

**COMMIT TO RESILIENCE: Build financial resilience.**

- Build financial rigor and minimize vulnerabilities through informed actions.
- Strengthen financial literacy among all staff and board members.
- Align financial and physical resources to support the organization's mission, vision, values, and equity and inclusion commitments.

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“We find ourselves in the most critical and crucial time to think about resilience—to examine our value to people, now and in the future. We face an urgency to react but also must respond deeply and rise to meet the call to change and share systems of knowledge and power. Resilience is now fundamental.”

—Julie Decker, Museum Director/CEO, Anchorage Museum, Alaska



“A museum’s resiliency will not only be measured by its ability to recover from lost revenue during closures and financial downturns, but also by how it responds to the needs of the communities it serves and how it redefines its core values to adapt to a new museum model.”

—Jorge Zamanillo, Executive Director, HistoryMiami Museum

- Develop a financial road map with tools and metrics that deliver on anti-racism and inclusion, community value, impactful role, and leadership.

#### Goal 5. Advance Agile Leadership

The final *Playbook* goal speaks to our understanding that institutional reframing, realigning, and reinvention are unlikely to occur without organizational leaders (including staff leaders) who are receptive to making change. Change requires a sense of urgency and champions for change combined with an integrated and inclusive approach to examining organizational culture and structures. That means unlearning old behaviors in order to pursue a new clarity of purpose rooted in a “values first” approach.

Museums must re-examine board and staff roles and responsibilities and their policies and procedures in order to ensure agility. Accept that no individual has all the answers, especially when it comes to complicated crises like COVID-19 and systemic racism. Resilient leaders use diverse teams to help them problem-solve, and, in doing so, they foster learning environments.

#### COMMIT TO RESILIENCE: Recalibrate leadership for peak performance.

- Create a leadership model that is holistic, integrated, and inclusive.
- Co-create a value-driven organizational

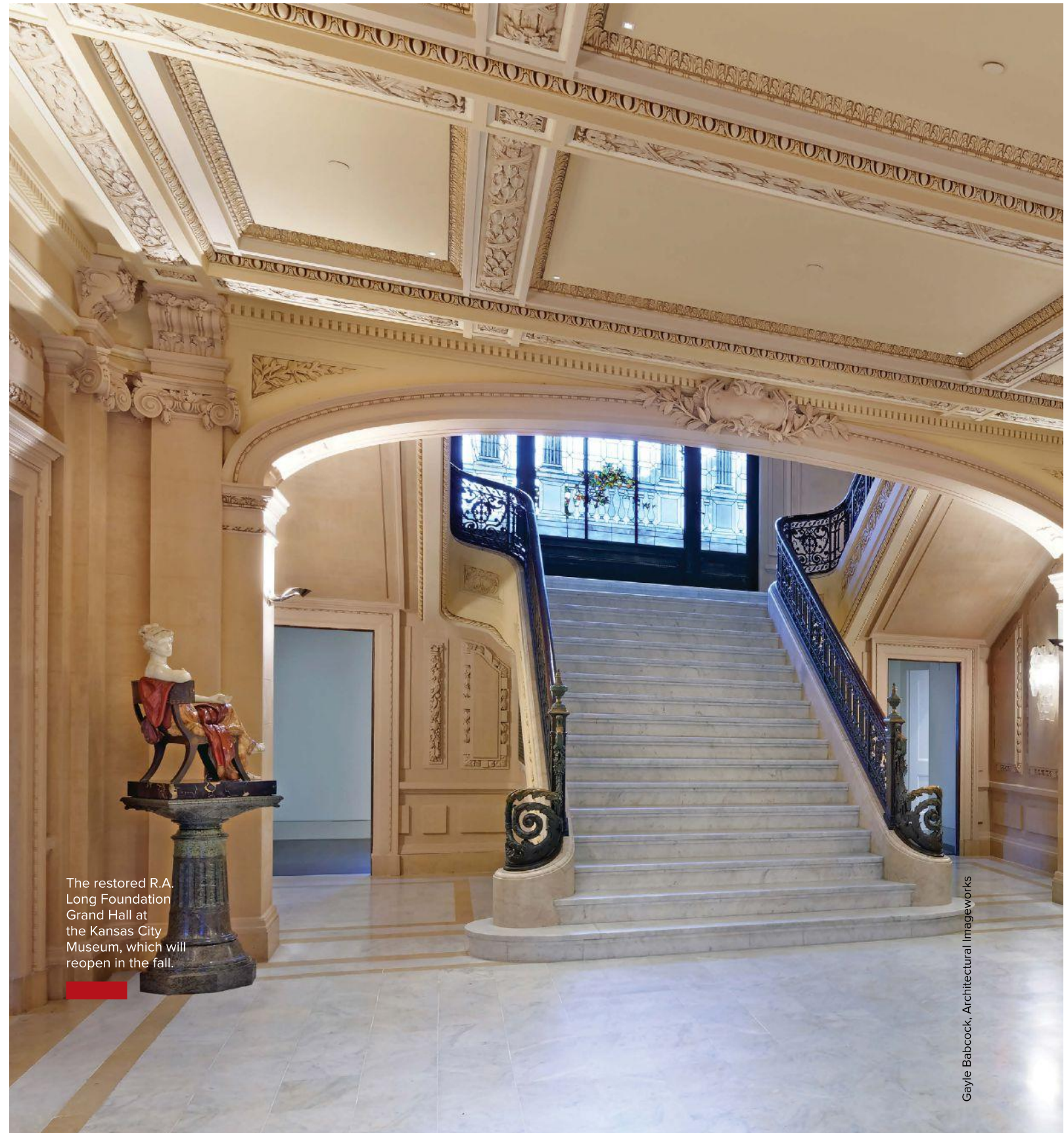
culture that informs how work is done at the staff, board, and volunteer levels.

- Reconfigure your organizational structure to achieve greatest impact.
- Build a learning organization that is responsive and agile.

Many conversations, actions, and decisions will occur before organizations are authentically equitable, inclusive, resilient, and active participants in their communities. While each institution will envision its own path into the future, all must address past and current practices before moving forward.

The Resilience Model requires intentionality, diligence, courage, patience, and, above all else, an institutional commitment to do the work and accept the need for change. In the end, we hope the Resilience Model and *The Resilience Playbook* generate deep self-reflective conversations in the field, leading to meaningful changes and a growing community of resilient museums.

**Anne W. Ackerson** is an independent consultant, **Gail Anderson** is president of Gail Anderson & Associates, and **Dina A. Bailey** is CEO of Mountain Top Vision. They are the developers and authors of *The Resilience Playbook*.



The restored R.A. Long Foundation Grand Hall at the Kansas City Museum, which will reopen in the fall.

Gayle Babcock, Architectural Imageworks



# HISTORY IS HEALING

The Kansas City Museum is using restorative practices to develop exhibitions and programs for and with its community.

By Anna Marie Tutera and Paul Gutiérrez



## In 2015, the Kansas City Museum

in Missouri began a multistage, multiyear restoration and renovation in partnership with the city, its Parks and Recreation Department, and the Kansas City Museum Foundation. This time of change has been an opportunity to not only restore the museum's physical structures, but to also reimagine the museum as a welcoming, inclusive, and responsive gathering place where visitors would learn about the past, present, and future of Kansas City, Missouri.

The Kansas City Museum—formerly the private estate of lumber baron and civic leader Robert Alexander Long and his family—is comprised of five original Beaux Arts-style buildings on 3.5 acres in a residential neighborhood of Kansas City, adjacent to extensive and historic parkland. The museum began collecting in 1939 and boasts holdings of more than 100,000 artifacts and archival materials that document, interpret, and preserve Kansas City's local and regional history. The museum closed to the public in 2017 for construction on Corinthian Hall—the main building on the property and former Long family mansion—and will reopen in fall 2021 with history exhibits.

As we embarked on this renovation, we visualized the reopened museum as a portal into Kansas City's history and cultural heritage, where we'd showcase our partners and inspire visitors to explore other attractions, destinations, and activities in the city. We pictured bold exhibits and programs that featured the unfolding and often *untold* stories of the city's history through multicultural, intergenerational, and multidimensional experiences. We brainstormed about how we could co-create offerings with the community and sustain a truly participatory environment. We contemplated how the museum's content could be a call to action for visitors to become more engaged citizens.

All our ideas and aspirations were driven by a core belief that museums play a vital role in the equitable development of neighborhoods, parks, and public spaces and that museums are catalysts for social justice and positive systemic change. We realized that many residents, and especially youth, don't know the city's history and, in particular, don't understand how American Indians, enslaved African Americans, immigrants, and refugees have contributed to the growth, vibrancy, and creativity of the city. We knew

that the Kansas City Museum could be a place and a key catalyst for a more just and unified Kansas City.

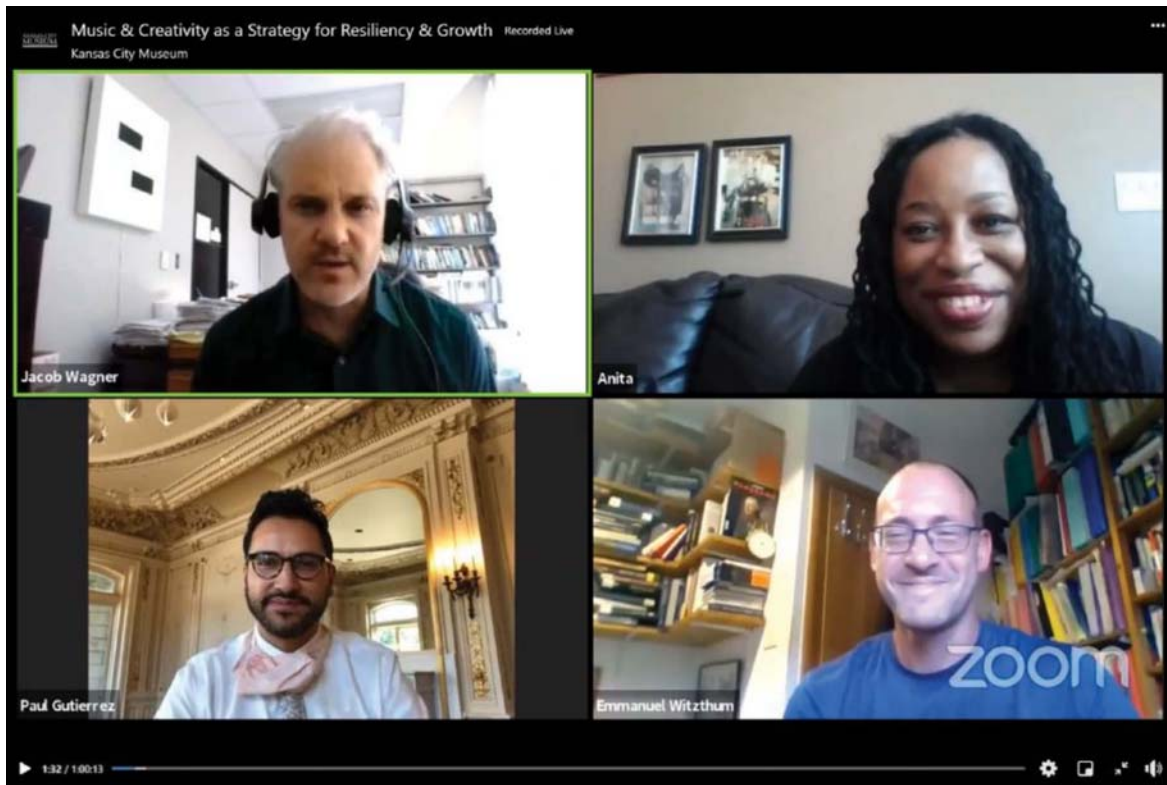
Back in 2016, in the midst of a nascent renovation project, we didn't fully understand the magnitude of our social responsibility to fulfill this vision, the depth of the political implications of our work, or the level of commitment we'd need to realize our goals. During those early years of planning, we didn't yet know that the word "restoration" would mean so much more than the physical design and construction of the museum, that it would come to define how we work with our community and how we produce programs and exhibitions for and with them.

### Turning to Restorative Practices

In 2019, during construction on Corinthian Hall, the museum assembled a team of consultants and organizational partners to develop history- and humanities-based education and public programs. A couple of members of the team with expertise in restorative practices proposed using such a model to develop programs *with* the community. They believed that restorative practices would honor the extensive restoration of the museum's brick and mortar project and carry that transformation forward to strengthen relationships between the museum and its diverse community.

According to the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) Graduate School, "restorative practices is an emerging social science that studies how to strengthen relationships between individuals as well as social connections within communities. Though new to the social sciences, restorative practices has deep roots within indigenous communities throughout the world." IIRP explains that the main principles of restorative practices are empowerment, honesty, respect, engagement, voluntarism, healing, restoration, personal accountability, inclusiveness, collaboration, and problem-solving.

Often used in social work and some innovative judicial systems and schools, restorative practice intentionally connects people. It validates all experiences and perspectives to repair trust and unity among individuals and communities that have been harmed. Restorative practices focuses on how to work *with* (not to or for) community to co-create and negotiate truth.



“Music & Creativity as a Strategy for Resiliency & Growth” was a Restore KC program that took place on August 28, 2020.

Restorative practices values and prioritizes healthy and equitable relationships—how to form, maintain, and restore them after conflict or damage has been done. Restorative practices recognizes that every individual story has meaning and is comprised of—and leads to—a multiplicity of voices and a shared experience that transcends the boundaries and borders that separate us. This approach often stands in contrast with traditional ways of telling history, wherein an exclusive, white-centric point of view drives the narrative.

On the third floor of Corinthian Hall, we’ve designed an exhibition gallery called “A Cultural and Community Restoration: Kansas City 1970s to

Present” that will feature one Kansas City neighborhood for six to nine months. In partnership with the University of Missouri-Kansas City Center for Neighborhoods and UNESCO Creative Cities-Kansas City, museum staff will work with neighborhood residents to co-produce exhibits, digital media, programs, and events that explore the history, identity, accomplishments, challenges, and dreams of each neighborhood. Through a series of meetings and gatherings, residents will build a community timeline, collect objects, and document stories. We will fabricate an installation component that also lives permanently in the neighborhood when the exhibition closes at the museum.

**RESOURCES**

International Institute for Restorative Practices Graduate School: [iirp.edu](http://iirp.edu)

Center for Neighborhoods at the University of Missouri-Kansas City: [cfn.umkc.edu](http://cfn.umkc.edu)

UNESCO Creative Cities-Kansas City: [en.unesco.org/creative-cities/kansas-city](http://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/kansas-city)

Black Archives of Mid-America: [blackarchives.org](http://blackarchives.org)

Bruce R. Watkins Cultural Heritage Center: [kcparks.org/places/bruce-r-watkins-cultural-heritage-center](http://kcparks.org/places/bruce-r-watkins-cultural-heritage-center)

African American Artists Collective: [aaackc.org](http://aaackc.org)

## Creating Restore KC

In May 2020, we were deeply engaged in using restorative practices to develop future exhibits and programs for the reopening. It occurred to us that we needed to build awareness about the work we are doing and expose our city to the restorative practices philosophy. So we established Restore KC (#RestoreKC)—a series of virtual programs for Kansas Citians to connect, process, and heal during the global pandemic, economic crisis, and social awakening on systemic racism after the murder of George Floyd.

Restore KC was launched in July 2020 in partnership with Bruce R. Watkins Cultural Heritage Center, Black Archives of Mid-America, University of Missouri-Kansas City's Center for Neighborhoods, UNESCO Creative Cities-Kansas City, and African American Artists Collective. Together, we believe that history- and humanities-based experiences provide new opportunities for equity, justice, collaborative action, and solidarity. We committed to present programs that identify creative, resourceful strategies to achieve a mutual understanding, strengthen relationships, repair harm, and embrace a shared humanity.

From July 2020 to December 2020, the Restore KC team produced 11 one- or two-hour virtual programs using Facebook live and radio podcasts. The format included a moderator and two or three panelists talking about a topic and highlighting projects in Kansas City. Each program included audience questions and answers, and additional resources were

listed on the museum's website. Topics included an introduction to restorative practices; restorative justice; creative placemaking during crisis and reckoning; music and creativity as a strategy for resiliency and growth; food as a bridge to unity; the tradition, significance, and evolution of Día de los Muertos; mindfulness; and mental health and well-being in Spanish.

The museum also produced a two-part Restore KC program called "Shining the Light on Human Trafficking in Our City" to expose the perpetrators, violence, injustice, and trauma of human trafficking; to reveal a largely unacknowledged crime in our city; and to illuminate the healing, hope, and redemption of the survivors. The conversation included architect and glass artist Hasna Sal, who made *Into The Light: A Memorial for Victims of Human Trafficking*, a permanent art installation in Kansas City; survivors of human trafficking; and city and neighborhood stakeholders.

It was important for us to offer virtual programs to stay connected, engaged, and relevant with our community. Our biggest concern from the outset was how to make these digital programs accessible. Therefore, in addition to sharing the programs on Facebook, One Kansas City Radio, a multicultural radio station, turned the programs into podcasts. In 2020, Restore KC programs reached more than 21,000 people on Facebook in just five months.

We have continued Restore KC in 2021 and plan to produce virtual programs specifically for elementary through high school students in the fall

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## SPREADING THE WEALTH

Since the late 1960s, the Kansas City Museum has received an annual property tax levy, enacted by Missouri state statute and dedicated to the Kansas City Museum. Currently, the museum annually receives approximately \$1.8 million from the levy. This public funding source continues to be the financial lifeblood of the museum in addition to the earned and contributed revenue needed for sustainability. The tax levy can be increased with a public vote.

Over the years, we've talked about the possibility of increasing the levy to benefit both the Kansas City Museum and our small- to mid-sized museum partners that are also either city owned or operated and continue to be underfunded. During these discussions, we've grappled with how we would effectively allocate and distribute additional public funds.

In 2020, it occurred to us that we could employ a restorative process for the strategic planning necessary to convene a consortium of institutional partners and work with our community on an equity framework for prioritizing funding and mobilizing resources. Although there are no current plans to increase the levy, we will continue to work restoratively with our partners, advocate for one another, and pursue a sustainability plan for the city's cultural assets.



A view of the parkland that is adjacent to the Kansas City Museum.

in collaboration with our teacher and youth advisory councils. Some topics will connect Kansas City history to school curriculum, including the Indian Removal Act of 1830, racial residential discriminatory practices, women’s suffrage, and civil rights and desegregation. Other topics will cover the impact of COVID-19 on students and teachers and the disparities exposed by the pandemic.

### Lessons Learned

Have you ever heard the saying “Get your own house in order first”? Recently, we acknowledged that before we continue our work with the community, we must implement an internal restorative process for ourselves as staff and leadership to address conflict more effectively, respond to criticism, and express opinions and concerns. Currently, we are a small staff of six, and as our capacity grows, we want to ensure that we build restorative practices into trainings for staff and volunteers.

We have also learned the following in our restorative practices work and will move forward accordingly:

**Collaboration is a necessity.** We will begin to work with the International Institute for Restorative Practices Graduate School and our Restore KC partners to deepen our collective capacity and competency. We want to explore how to engender a restorative framework for working with residents, colleagues, and stakeholders to co-curate exhibits and programs on

Kansas City’s neighborhoods; for conducting effective community input meetings; and for creating a space in the museum that fosters open, respectful conversations among visitors and for making decisions about collections acquisitions that allow us to tell the stories of those who are often unacknowledged and overlooked. We want to design a model that can be replicated for the museum field.

**Restorative practices is a commitment.** It requires patience, honesty, time to build trust, and a willingness to embrace your humanity. Restorative practices requires vulnerability and courage. Impassioned, hard conversations will happen, emotional and mental exhaustion will arise, fear and doubt can occur. Yet, as we navigate those dark moments, hope, creativity, and transformation emerge to shine a bright beacon of light to lead our way.

Today, we refer to the Kansas City Museum as the “Home of the Whole Story,” where often overlooked perspectives and experiences from people and communities are acknowledged, honored, and elevated. Restorative practices has helped us stand firm in our conviction that “history is healing” if we share the stories that are often intentionally hidden, disregarded, or erased from traditional history learning.

**Anna Marie Tutera** is the executive director and **Paul Gutiérrez** is the director of programs and events at the Kansas City Museum in Missouri.

# NATIVE RESILIENCE

The Minnesota Historical Society created a department to implement a strategy for Native American programs and services.

By Kate Beane, Amber Annis, and Rita Walaszek Arndt



The "Our Home: Native Minnesota" exhibition highlights the resiliency and strength of Native nations, communities, and individuals. Debuting in December 2019, this gallery at the Minnesota History Center is devoted to Native stories and experiences.

## Our Home Native Minnesota

Endaayang De ughapi  
*Anishinaabek* *Ne-Whatta Nakooj*

### Welcome to our homelands.

We are Indigenous people. We have lived in the Minnesota region for tens of thousands of years. We maintain rich and enduring relationships in harmony with the earth, its plants, animals, and people. We are resilient, and we are proud. We believe that each ancestor and descendant spirit has a soul and a spirit. Colonization, disease, and settlement disrupted and displaced us, but we have survived. We are resilient and creative people whose connections to our land, community, and traditions run deep and remain strong. We are still here.



**Mni Sota**, the *Land Where the Waters Reflect the Sky* in the Dakota language, has always been, and will forever remain, an Indigenous place. Today, more broadly known as the state of Minnesota, these lands hold the memory of Dakota origin, as this is where Dakota people, the eastern bands of the Oceti Sakowin (Seven Council Fires also known as the Lakota, Nakota, and Dakota people), came into being.

This is a significant place in the migration story of Ojibwe people, and over the years it has historically been, and continues to be, home to Native American people from many tribal nations and backgrounds. Currently, 11 Dakota and Ojibwe tribal nations have lands in Minnesota, retained over time through treaty making, in spite of removal, and most importantly through resilience.

Indeed, we carry this resilience with us as we navigate through the experiences of being Native and working within the walls of a deeply embedded colonial system such as the Minnesota Historical Society (MNHS), particularly since for many years this organization was telling our stories *for us* rather than *with us*. Working at MNHS can be an isolating and lonely experience due to the ongoing impacts on our communities caused by past actions of this institution and those who founded it. In order to commit to efforts of reckoning and inclusion within these colonial spaces, we have learned that a team approach, rather than a single position for engagement, is imperative.

MNHS was founded in 1849, nine years before Minnesota became a state. Like other museums during this time period, MNHS prioritized the collecting of Indigenous material culture while mythologizing the peoples and societies to whom these items belonged. These collecting practices supported archaeological projects that oftentimes included the excavation and collecting of human remains. The agenda of the time was to record evidence of our existence, with the expectation that we as Indigenous peoples would not survive colonization.

These initiatives continued well into the 20th century, contributing to the vast collections of Native American history at this institution. Over the years, MNHS has revised its collecting practices but

continues to hold items of cultural significance to Native nations that could and should be returned to tribes. MNHS and other museums must initiate systemic change to remove historic barriers to, and better support, repatriation efforts. Though difficult work, these efforts are necessary.

Acknowledging past (and often ongoing) harm, MNHS is now focusing on developing and building sustainable relationships with Native American communities, diversifying staff, and working to support public education on Native American histories throughout the state and region. We as Indigenous peoples must tell our own stories, and it is important to empower multiple community voices and perspectives so that we can share these stories more often and more authentically.

### Indigenizing the Field

In 2016, MNHS created the department of Native American Initiatives (NAI) to help develop and implement a vision and strategy for Native American programs and services. The first of its kind at MNHS, and quite possibly in the country, the NAI department seeks to work in collaboration with Native Nations and community members throughout the region.

This broader focus is important because for Native peoples, these state borders are not ours; they were imposed on us. We must remember and honor all Indigenous to Mni Sota, including our Dakota relatives who were removed by policy from the state after going to war with the United States government in 1862. Though we are a team of four, the NAI is growing, and our director sits on the leadership team of MNHS, reporting directly to Director and CEO Kent Whitworth.

Our team has incorporated Indigenous worldviews throughout our work, and we have navigated a path for Native inclusion within a large colonial institution not originally created to serve us. By implementing strategies for community collaboration and cross-departmental teamwork, we have strengthened partnerships, and we look to the future with a clear vision of where we fit and belong as Indigenous peoples within this institution.

The NAI department works closely with the Indian Advisory Committee (IAC), which has provided input



“Our Home: Native Minnesota” has been a collaborative and community-centered project. Pictured are co-developers and curators Dr. Kate Beane, Ben Gessner, Dr. Mattie Harper Decarlo, and Rita Walaszek Arndt.

and guidance on MNHS activities and initiatives related to Minnesota and Native American history for more than 30 years. The IAC is made up of tribally appointed representatives from each of Minnesota’s 11 federally recognized tribes and at-large members from Native communities.

One of the department’s first initiatives was the creation of a Dakota Community Council (DCC) in 2017, known as a *wi’wahokichiyapi*, or partnership, made up of Dakota members from Minnesota and surrounding states. The DCC’s objective is to ensure that Dakota people, history, perspectives, and homelands are honored at MNHS as well as at the historic sites within an area defined by the first treaty between

the United States and the Dakota people in 1805.

The DCC and other stakeholder groups are collaborating with MNHS on the revitalization of Historic Fort Snelling, which includes restoring the landscape to include Indigenous plants and medicines, renovating two historic buildings into a visitor center and orientation space, and presenting a new interpretive plan that tells the many complex histories of the area. Historic Fort Snelling is located at Bdote near the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers, which is a sacred site of creation for Dakota people.

These partnerships speak to the importance of engaging with sovereign nations in a reciprocal approach that puts the needs of the communities first.



Rita Walaszek Arndt and Native American Undergraduate Museum Fellowship Program alumna Sonia Miller represent the Minnesota Historical Society at the Owamni Falling Water Festival in Minneapolis.

preservation fields. Fellows learn about various career and academic paths in these types of organizations as well as the particular challenges faced by American Indian communities related to preserving tribal history. We consider this an essential component of Indigenizing the field.

### Meeting a Long-Awaited Need

As one of the largest historical societies in the country, MNHS has long been known as a place where Minnesotans can learn about their histories—although it has mostly focused on the settler colonial history. Our journey as an institu-

tion has been heavily involved in the silencing and erasure of not only Native histories and voices, but the voices of BIPOC and marginalized communities as well. Over the years, the institution has faced and addressed criticism on this issue.

In the past decade, interest from the public to learn about, and from, Indigenous peoples who reside within Minnesota has increased dramatically. This is due in large part to a change in the state academic standards in social studies that created several new benchmarks within K–12 education related to Minnesota’s Indigenous history.

Led by a content team composed primarily of Native staff, and in consultation with Native community educators, MNHS created the “Our Home: Native Minnesota” exhibition gallery, which opened in December 2019. “Our Home” is helping to change the narrative that is so often told about Indigenous peoples in our state. The 11 tribal nations that share space with the state of Minnesota are highlighted in the exhibition through stories provided by Native voices and supported by material culture, maps, books, and photographs from the museum’s collections. The languages of Dakota and Ojibwe peoples are seen throughout the panels, taking priority over English. Each section in “Our Home” has its own feel, not following any timeline, but sharing experiences from the

### Institutional Work

To be more inclusive of Native American people and tribal nations, and authentically engage with Native communities, MNHS must acknowledge the role it has played in helping to create a state narrative that actively excluded Indigenous peoples and perspectives.

A cross-departmental team is currently developing a framework for an Institutional Acknowledgment that includes a public statement, to be displayed at our historic sites, as well as a researched and reviewed historical report of the complicated relationship between the institution and Native American peoples past and present. This work is in progress, with a phased rollout planned over the next year.

Additionally, we are actively attempting to draw Native people into our work through experiential learning opportunities where their perspectives and voices are critical. In 2018, MNHS received a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to support its commitment to increase Native representation within the museum field. Drawing on the programmatic themes of a previous MNHS fellowship, the Native American Undergraduate Museum Fellowship Program seeks to engage undergraduates in professional opportunities within the museum and cultural resource, public history, and tribal historic

past and present. Voices of our youth can be heard as part of a learning interactive on place names, helping others better understand the deep meaning of place to Native American peoples.

MNHS' commitment to "Our Home" also includes many opportunities to further engage not only the general public, but also the Native community, specifically by working with Native professionals. MNHS hired interpreters from the Native community to better engage with other interpretive staff and the public. To strengthen our interdepartmental collaboration, we worked with the MNHS Teacher Education team to develop a curriculum covering the many subjects presented within the exhibition. The curriculum was reviewed and vetted by community partners and Native educators.

An additional rotating gallery space is connected to the larger exhibition and is designated for community partnerships. Though delayed due to the pandemic, an exhibition on traditional Indigenous games in Minnesota will soon be developed for this space in collaboration with Native community members and organizations.

Programming continues virtually as we navigate through the pandemic, making it easier to reach some Native communities that have difficulty making the trip to St. Paul. Now that "Our Home" is a permanent exhibition at the History Center, we will continue to use it to share Dakota, Ojibwe, and other Indigenous histories through a variety of programs.

### Empowering Our Colleagues and Building Sustainable Change

In order to successfully engage with Indigenous communities outside of the institution, we as Native professionals within MNHS feel it is imperative that we:


1. see ourselves represented as an integrated team within the workforce and leadership of the institution;
2. have a dedicated space where we can help to educate and serve as a resource internally as well as externally; *and*
3. hold the institution accountable for historic, contemporary, and ongoing impacts to Native communities.

We must always serve as advocates for our communities while working at MNHS. This is not an easy task, nor do we take this work lightly. We work *for* our communities *with and at* MNHS. We are focused on eliminating barriers and paving the way for sustainable institutional changes that will outlive our professional tenures at MNHS. This community-centered, collaborative, and forward-thinking approach is part of an Indigenous strategy rooted in our Indigenous tribal traditions.

While NAI may be a small team, we are working with our Department of Inclusion and Community Engagement and our Chief Inclusion Officer in advocating for more BIPOC representation across the institution. We continue to build strong relationships with our non-Indigenous colleagues and are modeling effective cross-departmental relationships, promoting allyship, and building capacity by encouraging collaborative projects and advocating for community partnerships.

While we haven't yet been able to reach all tribal communities in our region, we are building a strong foundation for future collaborations, and we continue to see progress as we remain committed to Indigenizing the field. We have learned that actionable opportunities follow the first step of land acknowledgements, and we encourage other institutions to follow our approach to this work: ensure you have strong relationships with Native nations, and follow the lead of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers and other Native leaders, educators, and organizations in your region.

Always ask yourself, "Are Native people visible in the work that we do?" If not, work hard to include Native perspectives and integrate rather than tokenize peoples and histories.

 **Kate Beane**, Ph.D., (Flandreau Santee Sioux) is director of Native American Initiatives, **Amber Annis** (Cheyenne River Lakota) is a program and outreach manager in Native American Initiatives, and **Rita Walaszek Arndt** (White Earth Ojibwe) is a collections specialist in Native American Initiatives at the Minnesota Historical Society in St. Paul.



# ONLINE AND THE BOTTOM LINE

The California Academy of Sciences focused on digital fundraising in the age of COVID-19.

By Jared S. Scherer



Gayle Laird © 2020 California Academy of Sciences

Scenes from the Serengeti captivate young guests in the California Academy of Sciences' African Hall, also home to a colony of African penguins.



**The pandemic's impact** on the museum field has been far-reaching and deeply felt, with the long-term outlook still unknown. For fundraising professionals like me, who are dedicated to cultivating and maintaining financial support for the important work of museums and cultural institutions, 2020 presented a new set of challenges—how do we sustain our operations and stay solvent when we're unable to welcome visitors through our doors? As museums suddenly faced enormous staffing and fiscal challenges, all eyes turned toward museum development teams to keep museums financially stable during this tumultuous time.

The California Academy of Sciences, founded in 1853, is a large, place-based science museum and research institution. We're an aquarium, planetarium, rainforest, and natural history museum in the heart of San Francisco's Golden Gate Park and a leading voice for biodiversity research, exploration, and environmental learning. Pre-pandemic, we had nearly 600 employees, 1.35 million annual visitors, and an annual budget of almost \$70 million. Approximately one-third of our annual revenue comes directly from admission tickets, so our temporary closure in March 2020 suddenly depleted a significant source of operating income.

In the early months of the pandemic, the Academy had to make some extraordinarily difficult

decisions to stay solvent, including significant budget and staffing cuts along with a draw from our endowment. At the same time, the development team was asked to rise to the challenge and determine how we would still meet our annual fundraising goals and maintain donor relationships during closure—all without face-to-face donor meetings, galas and donor events, museum tours, and other special programming critical to the flourishing of development programs.

The pandemic compelled us to fast-track the adoption of new technology solutions—resources that would help us raise urgent funds in the near term and a platform that would allow us to be flexible and nimble with future fundraising.

### Deciding on the Tools

When implementing any new technology or platform, it is critical to partner with colleagues on decision-making. First, we took a closer look at alternative approaches to reaching our donors online while meeting our bottom line. Key staff from the development team determined we would need three essential, cost-effective tools to do our work: a dynamic, easy-to-use platform for online fundraising campaigns; a compelling way to manage and host our virtual events; and an instrument to allow for peer-to-peer fundraising. We explored our options, identified a few possibilities that would meet our needs, and consulted a broad cross-section of museum stakeholders and functional expertise to make our final decisions.

“It was essential to bring together internal development partners from donor events, individual giving, donor communications, and wider museum partners from marketing, creative, museum communications, accounting/finance, web, and IT departments to build consensus in adopting a new digital platform to successfully move forward,” says Kristina C. Kaiser, leader of the Academy's Development Information Services team, who focuses on fundraising data and systems to optimize tools the fundraising team uses to drive contributed revenue. “Launching new systems is all hands on deck. There is a bit of wrangling to make sure everyone has input prior to launching.”



Nearly 40,000 animals reside under the Academy's Living Roof, including free-flying butterflies in an indoor, four-story rainforest and a 10-foot albino alligator named Claude.





The Academy is home to one of the largest scientific collections on Earth, consisting of some 46 million specimens from around the world, including these very tall mammals.

Gayle Laird © 2020 California Academy of Sciences

The development team focused on whether the platform would meet the needs of fundraising campaigns; the quality of data collection; and the functionality of getting information back into our CRM database, which is the technology for managing an organization’s relationships and interactions with members, donors, guests, and other community members. We also needed to assess if the platform integrated into the Academy’s native web environment and could match the Academy’s visual look and feel. The ease of use from the donor perspective was another primary criterion.

We ultimately moved forward with two new platforms that checked nearly every box with both the back and front ends for multichannel fundraising: Classy, which is a third-party fundraising platform used by several peer cultural institutions, and the now-ubiquitous Zoom for our fundraising events. These two new platforms, in combination with our existing web, social, and email tools, were part of our resiliency-in-fundraising coterie.

### The Digital Campaigns

With technology platforms procured, we moved to



Rue Mapp of Outdoor Afro (left) and Nicole Ardoin of Stanford University (right) share the Zoom stage as co-presenters at Big Bang: Live Online, the Academy's first virtual annual gala.

the implementation phase. In the wake of our closure, we immediately needed to raise funds. The Academy Relief Fund (now the Academy Resilience Fund) was one of our first campaigns. It focused on critical funding needs: care and feeding of our animal residents; support for our scientific research; and the creation of new, virtual-learning resources to support teachers and provide equitable access to science learning for students.

Importantly, we were also transparent with our community, estimating and communicating our anticipated budget shortfall. Using email, our website, and social media, we created an awareness campaign, and our donor community enthusiastically responded: "How can I not donate when your streaming of the penguin feeding is such a bright spot in my shelter-in-place day!" and "Thank you for bringing the joy of nature and learning to so many people!" were some donor comments to this campaign.

We closed just five weeks before our annual in-person Big Bang gala fundraiser, so we had to quickly pivot to a virtual format. We chose to keep the event on the same night, leaving little time to condense a six-hour event into one. We chose Zoom's webinar functionality, prioritizing the ease of use for donors, the simple registration process (and ability to collect useful data like names, emails, and addresses), and features enabling interaction with viewers via chat, Q&A, and live polling.

We also opened the event to the public to engage the broader community in the Academy's ongoing

work during the pandemic, which increased attendance by 500 percent. We asked participants to give via a crowdfunding campaign that we highlighted throughout the live program, with the results displayed on a progress thermometer.

Another campaign involved a cross-museum partnership with our in-house social media team to help launch a

successful Facebook fundraising campaign, an atypical audience for our outbound fundraising efforts. We kept the messaging clear and simple: help support the feeding and behavioral care programs for our African penguins. With compelling content and beautiful photography, the (originally planned) weeklong campaign met its goal in just one day, reflecting the popularity of our penguin colony with visitors and supporters alike. We quickly decided to double our goal, which we reached two days later.

"This was a novel approach—we had not made a big ask like this of our social community before," says Laurel Allen, senior digital engagement and community manager at the Academy. She offers this advice: make the need relatable and specific. For example, we broke down the cost of what we were asking them to donate to: \$100 will help feed a penguin for a month.

### Metrics, ROI, and Evaluation

Critical to all fundraising is reflection, analysis, and evaluation of a campaign's successes and opportunities. With the investment of time and resources in new digital fundraising platforms, determining ROI was important to better understand their effectiveness compared to our typical solicitation channels. We looked at a number of metrics to gauge how and if we did things right.

"A whole suite of metrics are used to help determine the success of a digital fundraising campaign—including email open rates, website traffic, number of donors, dollars raised, average donation amount, and more," says Emily Denning Todd, the Academy's senior manager of digital fundraising. "These metrics help determine what areas of the campaign worked well and what areas need evaluation. The most exciting metric is, of course, the amount of funds raised; however, it is important to look at the campaign's



To learn more about the Academy's digital fundraising, please visit [calacademy.org/support-the-academy](https://calacademy.org/support-the-academy).

success as a whole to better understand what resonates well with your audience.”

Source codes allowed us to easily track what email, website, and social media links donors are clicking on. “This has helped us refine strategies and messaging and allowed very specific tracking of campaign solicitations,” Kaiser says.

It’s also vital to listen to your audience, in this case donors. From a strategy perspective, “being hyper aware of what’s happening culturally can help you run a successful fundraising campaign,” says Allen. “Everyone is being hit so hard with information and content, so it’s important to understand what your supporters are feeling and what’s going on in the world so you can appropriately craft your message.”

### Takeaways for the Future

We discovered several new, effective ways to connect with our donors via new-to-us digital platforms. We raised critical funds to maintain our museum operations and prepare for when we’ll be able to reopen.

Virginia Tusher, Ph.D., a longtime Academy supporter and trustee, wants the Academy to continue its digital campaigns. “These tools made things simpler,” she says. “The specificity, ease, and small gift asks were very well received, especially for people who already have a connection with the museum. And now that people have done it, they’ll support us online again.”

These newly adopted tools and resources will be instrumental in our fundraising efforts and strategies moving forward. Their flexibility will allow us to make adjustments based on what we learned.

Kaiser sums it up best: “During these difficult times, creating engaging digital fundraising opportunities is extremely important—don’t be afraid to be direct with your audiences on budget challenges you are facing. Strategic messaging coupled with segmenting your audiences and user-friendly systems for both donors and staff will allow your revenue to grow.”

**Jared S. Scherer** is the director of donor events & communications at the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco. Any comments or questions: [jscherer@calacademy.org](mailto:jscherer@calacademy.org).

## WHAT WE LEARNED

**Partnerships are key.** Bringing together all stakeholders early on helped secure buy-in for digital fundraising and simplified our timelines and implementation process.

**Research your options.** The many products on the market can feel overwhelming. Make a list of your digital fundraising priorities, and do the research to find the solutions that best suit your needs.

**Systems compatibility will save time and energy in the long run.** Find a product that will “talk” to your back-end systems, such as your donor database, email marketing software, and credit card processing network.

**Use fewer words and more photos in your digital campaign.** To make your story come alive, use beautiful, mission-driven imagery, which can create a lasting impression and inspire more supporters to click and donate.

**Flexible digital platforms can save money.** While we haven’t found a one-size-fits-all digital fundraising platform, there are many options available on the market that will likely meet most of your needs. A platform with various options—such as peer-to-peer fundraising, crowdfunding, and virtual event ticketing—can provide flexibility and save money.

**Your supporters are your ambassadors.** Donors to your museum are loyal to your organization—and can become your best fundraisers. Asking donors to fundraise on your behalf with a peer-to-peer digital fundraising tool can be a great way to deepen their connection to your mission.

**Social media can boost your message.** Outreach to supporters via our museum’s social media channels was key to the success of several of our fundraising campaigns. Many people donated through social media but with a smaller average gift amount than with some of our other channels.

**Focus on what resonates with supporters.** We know our supporters love our animals, so we leaned into this by asking donors to support our animal care and enrichment programs—and they enthusiastically responded.



# BLOCK BY BLOCK

The Toronto Ward Museum is building more inclusive cities through storytelling, one neighborhood at a time.

By Maggie Hutcheson and Nipuni Kuruppu

A spoken word performance in Regent Park, Toronto. The poem was written by a young researcher/curator to share her childhood memories of the neighborhood.



Kathy Grant, courtesy of Toronto Ward Museum



## **S**spoken word migration stories

performed in the lobby of a community center. A drum circle followed by live testimony about past neighborhood organizing. Memories of local services embedded in an urban planning document. Posters of community leaders in a bakery window.

While these may not sound like traditional museum exhibits, they are outcomes of Block by Block, a multiyear program of the Toronto Ward Museum. Block by Block documents and animates oral histories of migration, settlement, and civic life in rapidly changing urban neighborhoods, bringing personal histories to bear on contemporary concerns about inclusive city building.

How have newcomers staked their place in these neighborhoods by building their own support



networks, local economies, and grassroots organizations? Which physical, social, and cultural aspects of the neighborhoods do community members value most? And how are already marginalized residents experiencing the impacts of neighborhood change?

Currently running in four Toronto neighborhoods, all in the midst of significant redevelopment, Block by Block explores these questions up close and in all of their complexity, offering a model of museum programming that holds equity, lived experiences, placemaking, and community partnerships at its core.

### Toronto Ward Museum

Founded by a group of young professionals under the leadership of Gracia Dyer Jalea in 2015, the Toronto

Ward Museum (TWM) is a community-engaged museum that facilitates the creation, sharing, and preservation of migrants' personal stories. The museum takes its name from "the Ward"—a downtown Toronto district that continuously attracted the city's newest arrivals from the mid-19th century until just after World War II. Demolished in the name of urban renewal, the Ward was an early example of the multicultural neighborhoods Toronto has been known for—a site where, despite systemic discrimination and poverty, residents developed strong cross-cultural and entrepreneurial networks, survived together, and forged new cultural identities and practices.


While few newcomers settle in downtown Toronto today—they instead head for the suburbs—TWM's

name signals the museum's conviction that the best story sharing is rooted in specific places, whose histories, current dynamics, and futures matter. When it is socially grounded and genuinely collaborative, place-based story sharing can powerfully connect past and present, sparking dialogue about the future.

Having rejected more traditional museum models—we do not have a building or physical collections—TWM focuses on participatory programming and site-specific exhibitions in accessible community spaces and online. Our programs and exhibitions are always developed in collaboration with program partners from a range of sectors, including settlement services, arts and culture, government, urban planning, and postsecondary education. Collaborative program design encourages the active involvement of newcomers and a focus on community relevance and collective empowerment.

Since 2016, TWM has created several innovative programs that explicitly support young people in developing the skills and insights to document oral histories, organize

Kathy Grant, courtesy of Toronto Ward Museum

A woman with dark hair, wearing a green and yellow sari with a black lace blouse, is speaking and gesturing with her hands. She is standing in front of a display board. The display board has a white background with two photographs on the left and a large brown section with white text on the right. The text on the board is partially visible and reads: "...She encouraged me to oversee the multicultural sewing class at 7 Glamorgan, and the Tamil senior volunteering programs at the ANC office. Later on, volunteers were needed to create the Women's English Circle at our TCHC building. My friend Abeer and I, along with an assistant and Early Childhood Educator, took charge organizing the program, with a budget of five thousand dollars. After a year, TCHC was able to f... for another two years, with fifteen thou... we could pay our teachers for their... English Circle became a safe space... me, and we would try to help the... ardships." The woman is looking towards the right of the frame.

...She encouraged me to oversee the multicultural sewing class at 7 Glamorgan, and the Tamil senior volunteering programs at the ANC office. Later on, volunteers were needed to create the Women's English Circle at our TCHC building. My friend Abeer and I, along with an assistant and Early Childhood Educator, took charge organizing the program, with a budget of five thousand dollars. After a year, TCHC was able to f... for another two years, with fifteen thou... we could pay our teachers for their... English Circle became a safe space... me, and we would try to help the... ardships.

A community member elaborates on her exhibition content in Agincourt, Toronto.

community events, and mount participatory exhibits. The museum's popular "Dishing Up Toronto" programs have ranged from large community meals to smaller, more intimate gatherings, but all have acknowledged the truth that story sharing develops most naturally when food is also shared. Our "Not Just Numbers" program, where diverse audiences reflect on their own migration stories while using census data and historical documents to consider other experiences and identities, was first held in libraries and community centers and is now used in secondary schools.

### Block by Block

Block by Block is TWM's flagship program. It first ran nationally in 2017 as part of Canada's sesquicentennial commemorations. That year, with funding from the Department of Canadian Heritage, TWM trained and mentored three teams of young adults to record oral histories in three historic immigrant neighborhoods. Working simultaneously in Montreal, Vancouver, and Toronto, the teams were supported by a network of local and national program partners, some with expert community-building experience and others with expertise in oral history and museum interpretation.

With guidance from a TWM lead researcher/curator, each team produced an exhibition to share with their neighborhood as well as a Block Party, a celebratory event that enlivened the local exhibition and invited participants to reflect on the histories presented. The Block Parties included games, music, performance, dialogue and, of course, food. An accompanying online exhibition made links between the histories of displacement, intercultural relationships, entrepreneurship, and community organizing in the three neighborhoods.

Thanks to a multiyear grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, TWM is now running the same Block by Block program model in four Toronto neighborhoods, all historic landing sites for newcomers to the city that are currently experiencing rapid neighborhood change. Since 2019, we have hired 16 racialized (non-white) and newcomer young adults citywide each year, training them in oral history and co-curation and setting them up in neighborhood



teams to collaboratively preserve and animate stories of migration, settlement, and community building. By 2022, Block by Block will have documented 100 oral histories, created 12 local exhibitions and 12 Block Parties, and co-curated an evolving online exhibition, the beginnings of which can already be found at [wardmuseum.ca/blockbyblock/](http://wardmuseum.ca/blockbyblock/). We are also building toward citywide programming and events for 2022 in an effort to foster dialogue between and beyond the neighborhoods.

In this iteration of Block by Block, our neighborhood research/curation teams each consist of one local programming coordinator and three young researchers/curators. As in 2017, we have prioritized hiring people with diverse community connections in the neighborhoods. Consequently, our team members have a wide range of cultural competencies, lived experiences, and professional interests.

TWM also continues to lead the program with strategic guidance and support from a multisectoral network of program partners, including a neighborhood-based film festival, a First Nations cultural center, multiple immigrant settlement agencies, a university, and a number of other nonprofit and government organizations. These program partners help

Block Party participants and storytellers in conversation in Parkdale, Toronto.



keep Block by Block grounded, forward-thinking, and relevant to the communities we are working in.

### Successes and Challenges

While Block by Block is not yet sustainably funded and TWM still has a very small core team with no full-time staff, the program shows many signs of success and significant potential for growth. In anonymous surveys, more than 95 percent of visitors to the 2019 Block Parties and exhibitions said the experience was of value to them, and the program's structure allowed them to engage with the storytellers. The vast majority also said they had learned something new and now better understood migrant experiences.

Our 2020 storytellers, who gained an intimate view of the program, have shared with us the power of seeing themselves represented in public spaces through our poster exhibitions and the ways that Block by

Block provided a safe and caring environment in which to tell their stories. The experiences of the young researchers/curators have been equally positive. In ongoing focus groups and surveys, they consistently reflect on the collective empowerment of this process. Our community partners also continue to affirm that Block by Block's research and exhibitions are of value to their own community building, teaching, and policy efforts.

And, yet, inevitably, there are challenges we are working through as we continue to develop the program. First, even when the lived experiences of members of the curatorial team are similar to those of the community members they interview, there is a distinct power dynamic and a risk that the oral histories will be distorted or manipulated from their original context. To combat this, a rigorous consent process is cultivated that must be carried



A Block by Block young researcher conducts an oral history interview in Côte-des-Neiges, Montreal.

Phyllis Lewis, courtesy of Toronto Ward Museum



out in a way that is both informed and intentional. Collaboratively negotiating power, storyteller consent, and issues of ownership and audience are critical to the success of the program and a challenge that necessarily accompanies our process.

It can also be difficult to synthesize these stories as curators—to distill the complex and lengthy histories that are shared through the interviews into exhibitions and participatory experiences. The oral histories the program has documented to date cover a wide range of lived experiences, including struggles with employment and housing, navigation of cultural identities, experiences of systemic racism, and more. Many of the oral histories include stories of multiple displacements, first those that prompted migration to Toronto and then local displacements within Toronto due to gentrification, high rents, and redevelopment.

As our research/curation teams bear witness to these often painful stories, they also seek stories of joy, strength, and community building. The oral histories provide a consistent reminder of the myriad ways that newcomers powerfully contribute to city building. How do we hold these multiple and complex lived experiences, both painful and joyful, marginalized and powerful, in single exhibitions and events? The learning that accompanies that process, and the ensuing dialogue with those who have been generous enough to share their stories, is perhaps the most complex, and therefore the richest, aspect of the program. We view it not only as a challenge, but also a success.

Finally, the sustainability of our archive, and of TWM as an institution, is a continued challenge. As of now, the full-length oral histories that we've recorded, along with family photos and other documents, are stored privately in the cloud and on external drives. As a forward-looking museum, how can we ensure that our archive remains active and publicly accessible, contributing to future public memory? TWM is often asked where archival materials will ultimately live, and the short answer is that we don't yet know. Again, a detailed informed consent process has been necessary in the face of that uncertainty.

## What the Future Holds

We are confident that the many contributors who have played a role in shaping the program, including our

founding executive director, ever-evolving research/curation teams, and committed program partners, have landed on a model of community engagement rarely seen in larger and more established museums. Such institutions have capacity and resources but are burdened by their histories, often rooted in colonialism and white supremacy, which are obstacles to building community trust and cultivating sustainable relationships with local communities.

TWM is a new and small player in Toronto's heritage sector, yet it managed in just a few years to develop and implement an inclusive, innovative, and consultative model of exhibition making. This kind of community-engaged research and co-curation requires meaningful funding and genuine collaboration and relationship building over time. It requires support from well-resourced institutions alongside the recognition that comes with the development of equitable partnerships.

Institutions cannot cut corners to apply this model, nor can they "scale up" hastily. Building reciprocal relationships in communities, sharing curatorial authority with interviewees, and allowing for iterative decision-making that is grounded in ever-evolving community needs require effort. Despite the cost and effort, this model of community-engaged museum practice is our answer to many struggles in the museum and heritage sector. It keeps us grounded in contributing materially to the communities in which we work and helps us avoid fetishizing newcomer struggles, marginalization, and urban change. Our next challenge is to both broaden and deepen our work, one we look forward to with optimism.



Listen to the article in audio format:  
[bit.ly/aam-block](https://bit.ly/aam-block)

**Maggie Hutcheson**, Ph.D., is the Block by Block program director at the Toronto Ward Museum.

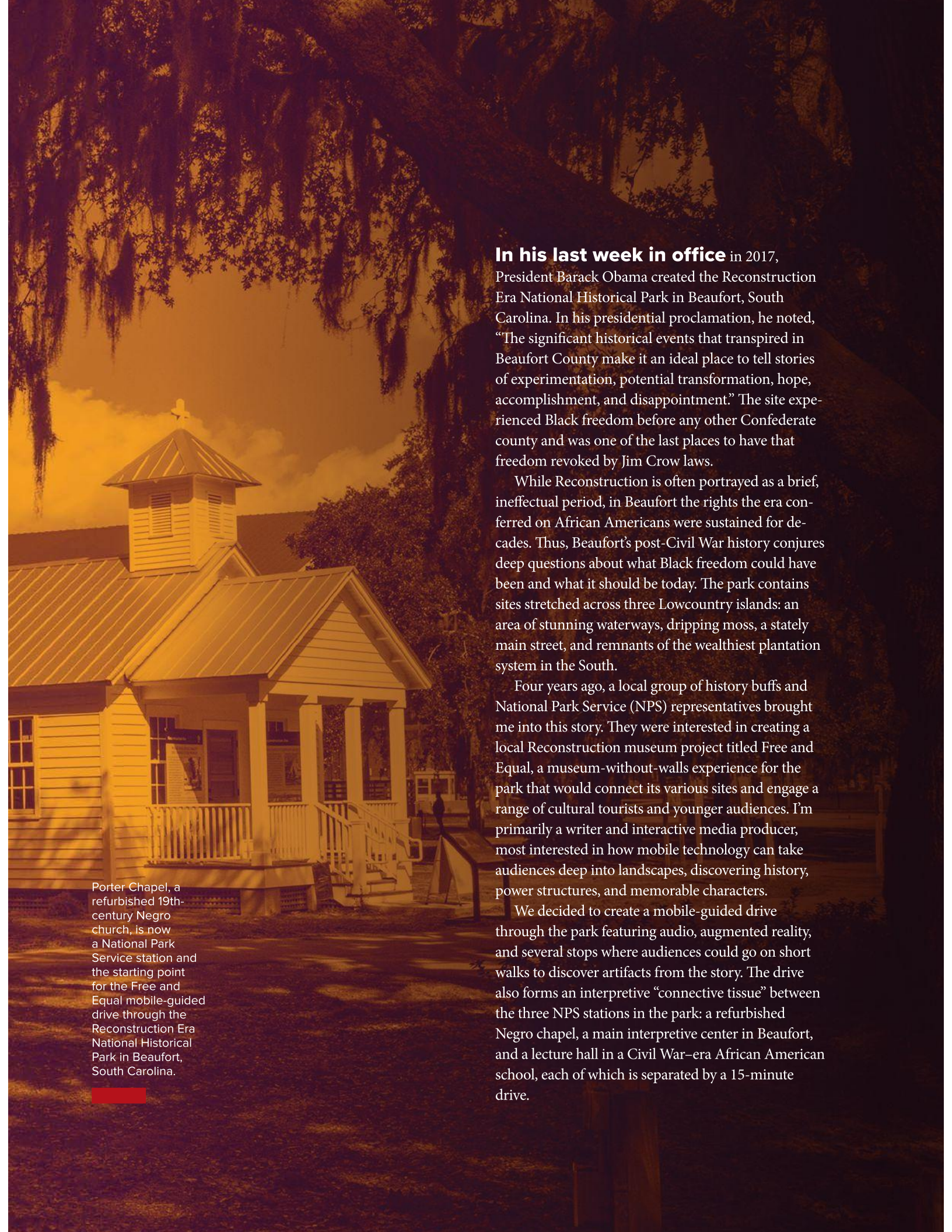
**Nipuni Kuruppu** is a researcher/curator for the Block by Block 2020 exhibition at the Toronto Ward Museum and a student at Ryerson University in the School of Creative Industries.



# LANDSCAPE OF CIVIL RIGHTS

The Free and Equal project created a museum-without-walls experience for the Reconstruction Era National Historical Park that connects its various sites and with audiences.

By Michael Epstein



Porter Chapel, a refurbished 19th-century Negro church, is now a National Park Service station and the starting point for the Free and Equal mobile-guided drive through the Reconstruction Era National Historical Park in Beaufort, South Carolina.

**In his last week in office** in 2017, President Barack Obama created the Reconstruction Era National Historical Park in Beaufort, South Carolina. In his presidential proclamation, he noted, “The significant historical events that transpired in Beaufort County make it an ideal place to tell stories of experimentation, potential transformation, hope, accomplishment, and disappointment.” The site experienced Black freedom before any other Confederate county and was one of the last places to have that freedom revoked by Jim Crow laws.

While Reconstruction is often portrayed as a brief, ineffectual period, in Beaufort the rights the era conferred on African Americans were sustained for decades. Thus, Beaufort’s post-Civil War history conjures deep questions about what Black freedom could have been and what it should be today. The park contains sites stretched across three Lowcountry islands: an area of stunning waterways, dripping moss, a stately main street, and remnants of the wealthiest plantation system in the South.

Four years ago, a local group of history buffs and National Park Service (NPS) representatives brought me into this story. They were interested in creating a local Reconstruction museum project titled Free and Equal, a museum-without-walls experience for the park that would connect its various sites and engage a range of cultural tourists and younger audiences. I’m primarily a writer and interactive media producer, most interested in how mobile technology can take audiences deep into landscapes, discovering history, power structures, and memorable characters.

We decided to create a mobile-guided drive through the park featuring audio, augmented reality, and several stops where audiences could go on short walks to discover artifacts from the story. The drive also forms an interpretive “connective tissue” between the three NPS stations in the park: a refurbished Negro chapel, a main interpretive center in Beaufort, and a lecture hall in a Civil War-era African American school, each of which is separated by a 15-minute drive.

## Walking Cinema's Approach

While Walking Cinema's work is a descendent of the museum audio guide, the core experience is more akin to documentary film and public radio. Our productions find a story hook and then, scene by scene, take audiences into a very specific world through the viewpoint of a central character. Most site-based museum productions start by identifying points of interest, but we start by identifying people of interest, not just from the time period, but from the present day.

A white, San Francisco-based producer telling the story of a Black community in South Carolina could be considered a stretch, but my team and I saw this as a productive bridge. The stretching we'd have to do to tell a story that felt authentic would be similar to the stretching visitors would be experiencing learning about this overlooked chapter in American history and the unique Gullah culture of the Sea Islands. And the key was to involve the local community in the storytelling and curation process. In landscape-based storytelling, local people become the hosts, the extras, and the x-factor for a successful audience experience.

We began the project with research, both reading books and meeting many locals, and we found an incredibly active genealogy community in the area. Many African Americans are able to trace their history there because, for many decades, nearby Charleston was the largest port of entry for enslaved people. This active world of genealogical research held the promise of a storyline that many visitors could relate to while not eschewing the underlying brutality of the time period.

## Finding Characters

After dozens of emails to various genealogists trying to find the right family to focus on, Toni Carrier, the director of the Center for Family History for the International African American Museum (projected to open in spring 2022), told us, "You've got to talk with Darius Brown." Darius is a 22-year-old African American living in Beaufort in a small, Black community called Grays Hill.

Using DNA testing, ancestry.com, phone calls, archives, and many instant messages with Toni, Darius has found 3,000 of his relatives, 23 of whom served in the Civil War. In talking with him, we learned a fascinating mix of current events, family love, and connection to particular places that was, well, mystical. His story felt like something a broad range of audiences would enjoy, especially younger audiences who might not seek out a Reconstruction museum.

Working closely with a panel of experts, including Reconstruction historian Eric Foner, Walking Cinema's team was able to dig deeper into the experience of Darius' family members: where they resided, what hung in the balance for them, and how this concept of freedom was evolving in their minds during the Reconstruction era. We decided to focus our story on Darius' great-great-great grandfather, Isaiah Brown, who was a sergeant in the 33rd United States Colored Troops and one of the first freed people to enlist in the Union Army. Through Freedman's Bank cards, marching songs, diaries, early photography, deeds, and pension files, we were able to see the first moments of Reconstruction and Black civil rights from the vantage point of a freed person.

## Making It Local

We had a compelling, well-researched story, but to integrate it with the landscape and keep audiences engaged, we formed wider collaborations. First, we involved a number of local businesses in the production. So, in addition to seeing Union Army parade grounds, monuments, and historic churches, audiences go into an antique store, an old arsenal, and a marina to see artifacts and learn key story points.

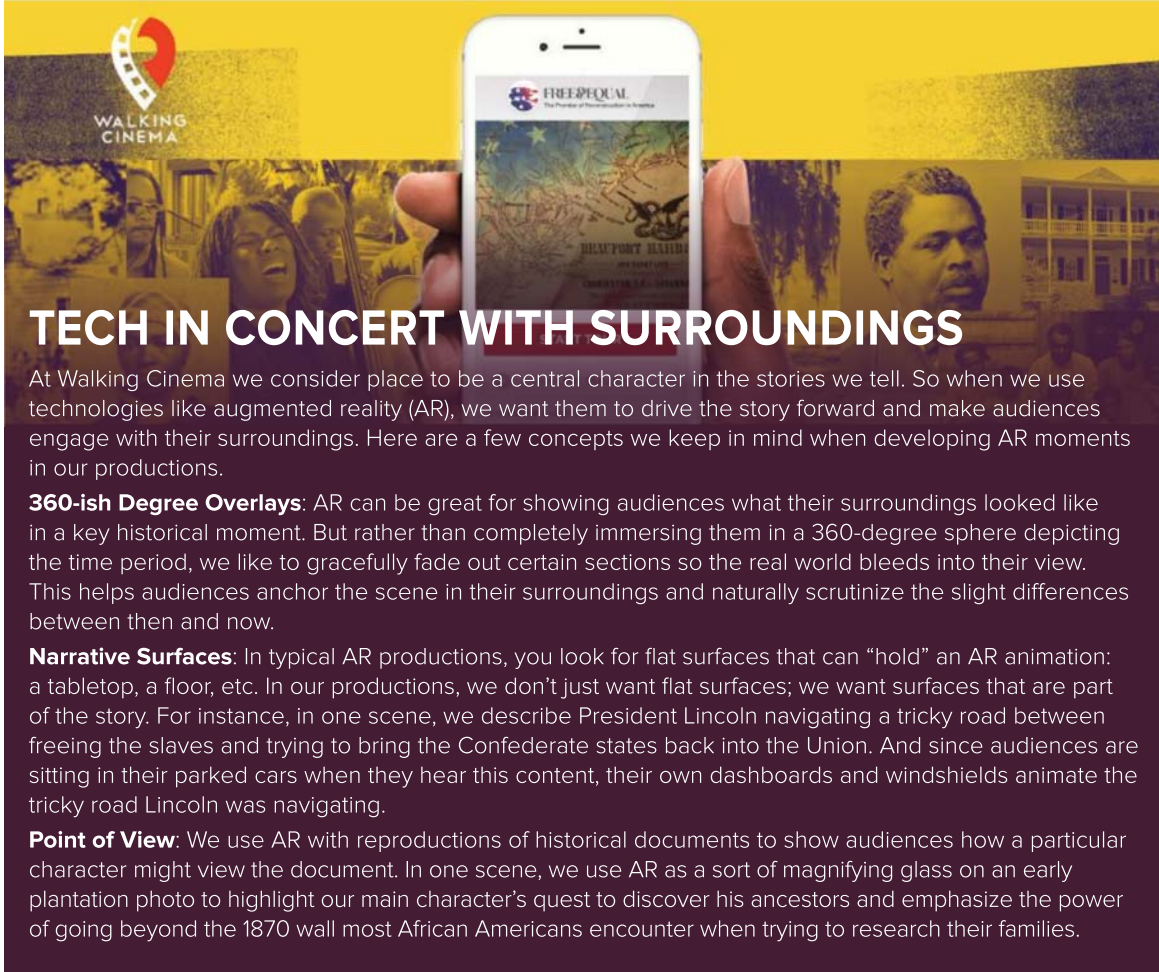
Often museums and historical sites are designed to be self-contained and set apart from the outside world. Yet in our audience testing we found that cultural tourists and students prefer hybrid experiences where they can shop, eat, and walk around while also being in the middle of a National Park experience. This helps seal the concept that history is all around us, not necessarily marked; you just need to know where to look.

We also engaged local talent. The poet laureate from Charleston, Marcus Amaker, helped write and voice the story and Gullah music, and Grammy-winning band Ranky Tanky performed traditional



The Free and Equal project is free and open to the public. See [freeandequalproject.com](http://freeandequalproject.com) for more information.

More on Walking Cinema's work is at [walkingcinema.org](http://walkingcinema.org).



## TECH IN CONCERT WITH SURROUNDINGS

At Walking Cinema we consider place to be a central character in the stories we tell. So when we use technologies like augmented reality (AR), we want them to drive the story forward and make audiences engage with their surroundings. Here are a few concepts we keep in mind when developing AR moments in our productions.

**360-ish Degree Overlays:** AR can be great for showing audiences what their surroundings looked like in a key historical moment. But rather than completely immersing them in a 360-degree sphere depicting the time period, we like to gracefully fade out certain sections so the real world bleeds into their view. This helps audiences anchor the scene in their surroundings and naturally scrutinize the slight differences between then and now.

**Narrative Surfaces:** In typical AR productions, you look for flat surfaces that can “hold” an AR animation: a tabletop, a floor, etc. In our productions, we don’t just want flat surfaces; we want surfaces that are part of the story. For instance, in one scene, we describe President Lincoln navigating a tricky road between freeing the slaves and trying to bring the Confederate states back into the Union. And since audiences are sitting in their parked cars when they hear this content, their own dashboards and windshields animate the tricky road Lincoln was navigating.

**Point of View:** We use AR with reproductions of historical documents to show audiences how a particular character might view the document. In one scene, we use AR as a sort of magnifying glass on an early plantation photo to highlight our main character’s quest to discover his ancestors and emphasize the power of going beyond the 1870 wall most African Americans encounter when trying to research their families.

songs for the project. We found a musicologist who gathered students and locals to create stunning renditions of hymns from the time period, giving us one of the few phrases we know Isaiah Brown actually said: “John Brown’s body lies a-moldering in the grave/But his soul goes marching on.”

We also worked very closely with NPS to create a mobile app that would tie into its evolving calendar of events and extend its current interpretive plan, which prior to this project was a website, park ranger-led tours, and interpretive signage.

### What Drives the Historical Narrative?

In the end, we developed a hybrid digital-analog experience that is significantly different from a typical audio guide. There are no numbers to press, only a route to drive. The text is sparse. The storytelling occurs through audio and direct experience. The model is not one of sites to see, names and dates to know, battles to be analyzed. It is more like a film to watch, but what you are watching is the world around you. When we use augmented reality in the app, it is in concert with the landscape, often highlighting components of the built environment you may not have noticed. (See “Tech in Concert with Surroundings” sidebar above.) The more you scrutinize, the deeper the storytelling.

A potential pitfall in interpreting cultural sites is being too broad and expansive—offering information from all aspects of the time period, becoming more encyclopedic than engaging. In our model, the storyline of the mobile component zooms in on one historical character and his current-day descendent. But as these characters move through time and space, they prompt larger questions and introduce us to other characters.

Audiences can then dig deeper into these larger questions and characters using the project’s website and the app’s resources section. Thus, we hope the mobile experience inspires audiences to continue learning about the story both on their own and, eventually, in a brick-and-mortar museum the project’s founders are planning.

As one college student told us, “I’d do tours like this in a heartbeat....You’re not sitting and reading a book; you’re going out and doing something. Our generation...needs to have constant sensory input.”

**Michael Epstein** is the writer/director at Walking Cinema, an award-winning production studio that works with museum and media partners to develop stories that change how we look at the world around us.



# Revisiting a powerful

# MUSEUMS ADVOCACY DAY 2021

On February 22–23, in our first-ever virtual Museums Advocacy Day, **631 museum advocates** joined us and participated in **409 virtual meetings** with Congressional offices, making our voices heard across the country!

We heard from a congressional chief of staff, federal agency leaders, and partner policy experts about the unique value of museums and the importance—now more than ever—of advocating for museums and the federal programs that support them. We shared critical information with congressional offices about key legislative priorities, including the dire impact of the pandemic on museums and the essential ways museums are continuing to serve their communities. **Thank you** to all of our 2021 supporters, partners, and advocates who helped make Museums Advocacy Day 2021 a unique and powerful event, and for continuing to advocate for museums in the year ahead.



United States Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) meets with New York museum advocates on February 23.



AAM and New York museum advocates present U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) with the AAM Congressional Award.



South Dakota advocates meet virtually with Congressman Dusty Johnson (R-SD) during Museums Advocacy Day 2021.



« Kimberly Rudolph, Chief of Staff, Rep. André D. Carson (D-IN), speaks to museum advocates on February 22 about Making the Case for Museums with members of Congress and their staffs.



Vedet Coleman-Robinson, Executive Director, Association of African American Museums, shared tips for engaging with legislators with museum advocates. »



« Bonnie Styles, Executive Director of the Association of Science Museum Directors, shared an advocacy reminder: share with your legislators your personal stories, including the impacts of the pandemic.



« John Dichtl, President and CEO of the American Association for State and Local History, speaking on "Historic Preservation Funding and America 250."



Christofer Nelson, President and CEO of the Association of Science and Technology Centers, shares quick tips on making advocacy a habit and forming long-term relationships that can help.

Read more about Museums Advocacy Day 2021, including the program, issue briefs, updated facts about museums, and more, in the robust **Advocate Handbook**. » Download your copy here: [bit.ly/2021-advocate-handbook](https://bit.ly/2021-advocate-handbook)



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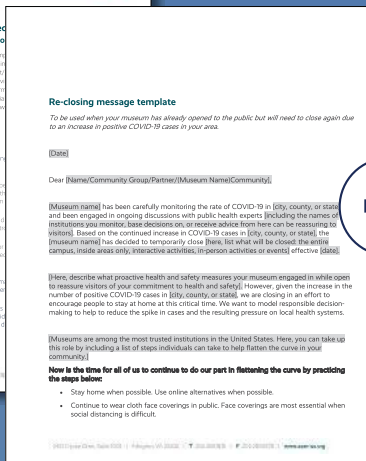
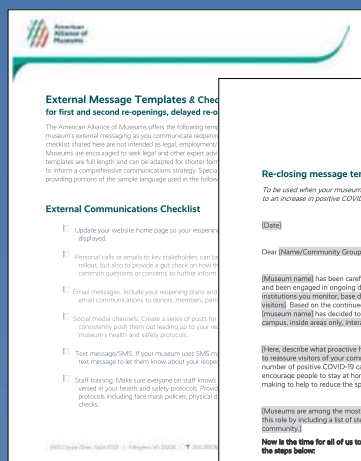
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American Alliance of Museums

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To the dream.

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Private need. Sculpt it into  
The image of your most public self.  
Lift up your hearts  
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For new beginnings.  
Do not be wedded forever  
To fear, yoked eternally  
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Excerpted from "On the Pulse of Morning" by Maya Angelou

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