A Metric for Institutional Transformation in Museums

Empathy is one's ability to connect with others by relating to their personal experiences. It takes insight and a willingness to engage. The Empathetic Museum posits that cultural institutions can relate to their communities in the same way, and should align the work they do with the experiences, values, and needs of the communities they serve.

This assessment tool and associated resources can help organizations look within, and move towards a more empathetic future.

How to use the Maturity Model:

*Materials: Overview & Characteristic Definitions (2 pgs), Rubric (2 pgs)*

In the rubric, each characteristic is listed in the far left column. The columns to the right represent increasing levels of maturity in empathetic practice.

As you examine each characteristic, evaluate the level to which your institution embodies that characteristic and check the boxes that apply. Checked boxes identify your institution's current level of achievement, ranging from Regressive to Proactive. Unchecked boxes represent goals for your institution, and can inspire organizational change, the reallocation of resources, or whatever it takes to reach the highest level of empathy for all characteristics.

This model is designed to be flexible for institutions of varying size, location, and mission (with moderate & appropriate modification). If you have suggestions to make the tool more useful to your museum or to the field, please contact us at empatheticmuseum@gmail.com.

Key Terms:

*Anchor Institution*: A key institution of civil society, such as library system, university, health system, educational system. Museums should be and should view themselves as anchor institutions. (Lord and Blankenberg 2015)

*museums are not anchor institutions by default; this position requires community buy-in*

*Employment Equity*: Adherence to socially just guidelines for hiring in terms of race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, pay scale.

*Decolonization*: Deconstructing the Euro-centric, colonial origin of museums to reframe the way objects are presented, narratives constructed, and cultures privileged in interpretation, exhibition design, and educational programming.

*White Privilege*: "An invisible package of assets that [white people] can count on cashing in each day..." Conditions that are viewed by whites as "morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work that will allow them to be more like us." (McIntosh, 1990)


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**Civic Vision**

Civic vision is a matter of imagination and behavior. For museums to be 21st century civic leaders and relevant to the societies in which they reside (i.e. anchor institutions), their leaders must have the imagination (vision) to see their institutions in such a role: that they matter in their communities. Museums must behave as civic leaders, joining with other institutions of civil society to use their combined efforts to influence and shape (soft power) the quality of life in their community and the promotion of social justice in their municipalities.

*For more information:* A discussion of museums as agents of soft power can be found in Chapter 1 of “Museums, Cities, and Soft Power,” (2015) by Lord and Blankenberg (http://www.lord.ca/Pages/Cities-Museums-and-Soft-Power-Chapter1.pdf)

**Institutional Body Language**

A term coined by Gretchen Jennings and discussed frequently in her blog, Museum Commons. Analogous to personal body language, institutional body language refers to the powerful messages museums convey through unspoken and unwritten manifestations of their being: the design of their buildings, the content of their advertising, the behavior of front line staff to visitors, the demographics of their staff and boards, the choices they make in their collections, exhibitions, and programs. In the context of diversity and inclusion, museums’ body language often conveys the message that the museum is for the white, the wealthy, and the powerful. Such museums may have written diversity policies and goals, but the image presented to the public by the institution in its many manifestations speaks more loudly than written goals or mission statements. People of color and other marginalized communities get the message—this place is not really for or about us—and stay away.

*For more information:* Museum Commons blog posts
http://www.museumcommons.com/2013/06/the-empathetic-museum-institutional.html
http://www.museumcommons.com/2015/06/charleston-the-cultural-landscape.html
Inclusion article
https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B2mitjKPAu6yVk9HV0ZwRkRIT0E/view

**Community Resonance**

Just as an empathetic individual resonates with the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of another group or person, an empathetic museum is so connected with its community that it is keenly aware of its values, needs, and challenges. The best way to achieve this is through a board and staff that reflect the diversity of a community; advisory boards, collaborations, and partnerships also help a museum’s ability to be in touch with and responsive to its community.

*For more information:* Inclusion Blog (www.incluseum.com)
Joint statement from Museum Bloggers and Colleagues on Ferguson and Related Events

**Timeliness and Sustainability**

Because an Empathetic Museum is so connected to its community (see Community Resonance), it is able to assess and respond to particular events or crises that affect its community (and beyond) in a timely and sustainable way. For example, if a museum is aware of racial tension in its community because of the racial diversity of its staff and/or strong collaborative community relationships, it can be well informed about what programs, exhibits, social media and other initiatives it might take within its mission and vision to address this civic issue. And it is aware that one-off efforts are not effective. It maintains a continuous and sustained awareness of and collaborative spirit towards its community and its needs.

*For more information:* Elaine Gurian on Timeliness
http://www.egurian.com/omnium-gatherum/museum-issues/timeliness
Museum Commons blog
Inclusion article
https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B2mitjKPAu6yVk9HV0ZwRkRIT0E/view

**Performance Measures**

A museum working to develop the characteristics discussed above also incorporates them into its strategic planning. It creates tools to assess the level of achievement of each characteristic and its related goals. An Empathetic Museum commits resources to regular assessment, not only of its revenues and attendance, but also of its public and social impact.