Cultural Engagement to Mitigate Social Isolation
Project Retrospective

August 24, 2020

Michael Peter Edson
Dana Mitroff Silvers
and project participants

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1. Project Overview
### At a Glance

**Goal:** Help GLAMs* & performing arts organizations rapidly create new digital experiments to mitigate the effects of social isolation and serve the social, psychological, and educational needs of audience members during COVID-19.

**Rationale:** Across the USA, over 100,000 GLAM and performing arts orgs serve millions of individuals in their local communities, but often the organizations lack know-how and capacity to quickly develop and prototype audience-centered programs, especially when technology is involved.

**Approach:** 11-week project to catalyze product development through workshops, facilitation, coaching, knowledge-transfer, and peer-to-peer support.

**Outcomes:** Among participating organizations and cohort members, the project ...

- Advanced and accelerated the processes of creative development, experimentation, and project development
- Fostered new and heightened emphasis on social justice and DEAI (Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion) issues and activities
- Promoted greater confidence and clarity regarding audience needs and impact

* GLAM = Gallery, Library, Archive, Museum
Summary

In this initiative, supported by a rapid grant from the Aspen Tech Policy Hub, a cohort of ten museums, libraries, and performing arts organizations (see list on following slides) joined together to help each other accelerate the development of experimental digital programming to mitigate social isolation caused by the COVID-19 crisis. The scope of the project expanded to include the impact of racism and police violence when, on May 25, the day before our project kickoff meeting, George Floyd was killed by police officers in Minneapolis, Minnesota (home of five of our participants).

Participating organizations were based in eight states across the US and included museums and performing arts organizations, a major public library system, and a small non-profit that uses museum experiences to serve patients of dementia and their caregivers. Together these organizations serve over 4 million people a year.

Facilitators used design thinking and serious play methodologies to help participants understand the changing dynamics of community needs and improve their own thinking, practices, and project designs.
Participating Organizations

- **Arts & Minds, New York, New York** (plus Howes Studio), with Carolyn Halpin-Healy, Nellie Escalante, and Deborah Howes

- **Akron-Summit County Public Library System**, Akron, OH, with Jennifer Stencel

- **Center for Art and Public Exchange**, an initiative of the Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson, MS, with Monique Davis (Managing Director)

- **Georgia O'Keeffe Museum**, Santa Fe, NM, with Liz Neely, Shannon Bay (Program Manager, Adult and Community Engagement), and Katrina Latka (Curator of Education and Interpretation)

- **Lux Art Institute**, Encinitas, CA, with Andrew Utt and Claudia Cano

- **Mississippi Museum of Art**, Jackson, MS, with McKenzie Drake

- **Newark Museum of Art**, Newark, NJ, with Deborah Kasindorf and Silvia Flippini Fantoni

- **RED EYE Theater**, Minneapolis, MN, with Emily Gastineau, Jeffrey Wells, and Rachel Jendrzejewski

- **Weisman Art Museum**, Minneapolis, MN, with Katherine Covey and Susannah Schouweiler
Facilitators

Michael Peter Edson is a digital strategist at the forefront of digital transformation in the cultural sector. He was formerly the Director of Web and New Media Strategy at the Smithsonian Institution, the world’s largest museum and research complex, and he was co-founder, associate director, and head of digital for the newly emerging Museum for the United Nations-UN Live, a global institution dedicated to catalyzing bottom-up action towards the Sustainable Development Goals. [https://usingdata.com/about](https://usingdata.com/about)

Dana Mitroff Silvers is Principal + Founder of Designing Insights LLC, a San Francisco Bay Area-based innovation consultancy that develops, designs, and delivers remote and in-person design sprints, design thinking workshops, and design research for cultural institutions. Dana is a faculty member at the Museum Leadership Institute at Claremont Graduate University, and has coached dozens of workshops for the Stanford d.school. The former Head of Web at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Dana is widely recognized as one of the first people to introduce design thinking into the museum and arts sector. [https://designinginsights.com](https://designinginsights.com) and [http://designthinkingformusuems.net](http://designthinkingformusuems.net)
The Challenge

COVID-19 has presented GLAMs* and performing arts organizations with new, urgent demands to create services and programs that mitigate the effects of social isolation.

But while many organizations want to accelerate their digital programming during this time of social distancing and shuttered physical institutions, most are constrained by a lack of basic training, funding, and other forms of technical and creative support to respond at the speed and scale necessitated by COVID-19.

* GLAM = Gallery, Library, Archive, Museum
2. COVID-19 in America (Spring 2020)

The potential role and relevance of GLAMs and performing arts organizations
**Thesis:** COVID-19 is damaging Americans and their communities, not just medically and economically, but psychologically and emotionally as well.

Cultural organizations reach deeply into thousands of American communities and can ameliorate this harm — *if they choose to act.*
In the day-to-day work of running an organization it can be easy to lose touch with the appalling scope of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States.
Mental wellbeing — already recognized as a global crisis before the pandemic — has taken on a new degree of scale and urgency.

According to the National Center for Health Statistics...more than one in three American adults report symptoms of an anxiety disorder (up 4x since last year)

Kaiser Family Foundation released a tracking poll showing that for the first time, a majority of American adults — 53 percent — believes that the pandemic is taking a toll on their mental health.

This number climbs to 68 percent if you look solely at African-Americans.

36 percent of Americans report that coronavirus-related worry is interfering with their sleep. Eighteen percent say they’re more easily losing their tempers. Thirty-two percent say it has made them overeat or undereat.
“It’s not the melting of the ice-caps or the burning of the forests that seem to be the real apocalyptic scenario, but the slow atrophying of our moral imaginations; not the inferno itself, but the indifference of those of us who are not yet on fire.”

COVID-19 is both a medical and cultural phenomenon: it challenges the limits of community cohesion and sense making.
The psychology behind why some people won't wear masks

By Scottie Andrew, CNN

May 6, 2020

Americans are struggling to make sense of new and sometimes conflicting ideas about learning, civics, empathy, scientific reasoning, community life, and trust. Cultural institutions have a role to play.

Unmasked protesters in Michigan try to enter the state's House of Representatives chamber but are blocked by masked Michigan State Police.
GLAMs and performing arts organizations support vital and relevant community functions, serving hundreds of millions of Americans a year.

Museums Are Community Anchors
- In determining America’s Best Cities, Bloomberg Business Week placed the greatest weight on “leisure amenities (including density of museums), followed by educational metrics and economic metrics...then crime and air quality.”[7]
- Money Magazine's annual 'Best Places to Live' survey incorporates the concentration of accredited museums.[8]

People Love Museums
- More people visited an art museum, science center, historic house or site, zoo, or aquarium in 2018 than attended a professional sporting event.[9]
- Museums receive millions of online visits to their websites each year.[10]
- Museum websites serve a diverse online community, including teachers, parents, and students (including those students who are home-schooled).
- Museum volunteers contribute a million hours of service every week.[11]
- Support for museums is robust regardless of political persuasion. 96% of Americans would approve of lawmakers who acted to support museums. The number is consistently high for respondents who consider themselves politically liberal (97%), moderate (95%), or conservative (93%).[12]

Museums Serve the Public
- Many museums offer programs tailored to veterans and military families. In 2019 more than 2,000 museums in all 50 states participated in the 100th year of the Blue Star Museums program, offering free summer admission to all active-duty and reserve personnel and their families.[13] In the past five years more than 4 million active duty members and their families have participated in the Blue Star Museums program, which is, on average, more than 800,000 visitors per year, and many other museums offer military discounts or free admission throughout the year.
- Museums also provide many social services, including programs for children on the autism spectrum, English as a Second Language classes, and programs for adults with Alzheimer’s or other cognitive impairments.[14]

Museums Are Trusted
- The American public considers museums the most trustworthy source of information in America, rated higher than local papers, nonprofit researchers, the U.S. government, and academic researchers.[23]
- Museums preserve and protect more than a billion objects.[24]
- Museums are considered a more reliable source of historical information than books, teachers or even personal accounts by relatives.[25]
There were 1.5 billion in-person visits to public libraries across the United States [2012]

More than 92.6 million people attended the 4.0 million programs at public libraries.

Over 2.2 billion materials were circulated

There were 271,146 public access computers in public libraries

There were 340.5 million use sessions of public access computers

Libraries across the US are a trusted and critical resource for community services and recreation.

Most Americans view public libraries as important parts of their communities, with a majority reporting that libraries have the resources they need and play at least some role in helping them decide what information they can trust. When asked to think about the things that libraries could do in the future, notable numbers of Americans respond in a way that can be boiled down to one phrase: “Yes, please.”
The performing arts are part of community life for more than 100m Americans in a given year.

1) In 2017, 53.8 percent of U.S. adults (up from 50.2 percent in 2012), or 132.3 million people, attended a visual or performing arts activity at least once in the past 12 months. Live Performing Arts—43.4 percent of U.S. adults (up from 40.2 percent in 2012), or 106.8 million people, attended at least one of the activities listed directly below.

### Number and percent of U.S. adults attending performing arts events: 2017

(M = millions of adults)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event Type</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor performing arts festivals</td>
<td>58.5 M</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical plays</td>
<td>40.2 M</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Other&quot; performing arts events</td>
<td>36.4 M</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-musical plays</td>
<td>22.9 M</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classical music</td>
<td>21.0 M</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jazz music</td>
<td>21.1 M</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance performances other than ballet</td>
<td>15.2 M</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin, Spanish, or salsa music</td>
<td>14.3 M</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballet</td>
<td>7.6 M</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opera</td>
<td>5.3 M</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*"Other" refers to types of performing arts not listed in other SPPA question-items.*
What will our new normal feel like? Hints are beginning to emerge

For all the attention to the science and politics of the coronavirus, another factor may be just as important in shaping life under the pandemic: the ways that people will change in response to it.

Changes in how we think, behave and relate to one another — some deliberate but many made unconsciously, some temporary but others potentially permanent — are already coming to define our new normal.

"Culture" (the cultural life of the community) has been absent from political and economic decision-making about the COVID-19 and our progress towards a new normal.
Most GLAMs and performing arts organizations in the US have been devastated financially, and 30% of US museums could fail outright...just at the moment when they are needed the most.

The gravity of the situation varies by country, depending on how much museums rely on ticket sales and tourism, and how much government funding they receive. Museums in the United States which survive from earned income and philanthropy are more vulnerable than government-subsidized European institutions. The American Alliance of Museums reported to Congress in March that as many as 30 percent of museums could fail in the crisis, if there was no immediate intervention.
3. Process and Execution
Hypothesis

GLAM and performing arts institutions can play a crucial role in coping, sense making, developing resilience, and catalyzing dialogue about the “new normal” in communities throughout the USA.

Our working hypothesis, based on our recent pro bono work and advocacy for GLAM institutions since the COVID-19 outbreaks, indicates that GLAM leaders need short-term facilitation and support to transition from a current, and highly understandable, "deer in the headlights" stance to positions in which GLAM leaders are confident in their strategic environment and are able to develop and implement novel plans and programs to reduce the effects of social isolation with, by, and for their communities.
Approach

1. Assemble a diverse group of motivated GLAM and performing arts practitioners and leaders.
2. Facilitate a strategic assessment and design process with the group, using as much peer-to-peer interaction as possible so that leaders can learn from each other and gain confidence in what they are seeing, feeling, and thinking.
3. Use the LEGO Serious Play® methodology and design thinking framework to encourage sense-making and an audience-centered mindset among participants.
4. Ease participants from focusing on the here-and-now, to focusing on short-term plans and goals (2-3 weeks in the future), to focusing on medium-term objectives (2-3 months in the future).
5. Help move participants and their partners towards the development of several lightweight (easy and fast to produce, low cost, not much infrastructure) experiments, rather than "heavy" projects with high overhead.
6. Leverage existing know-how and technology through partnerships, collaboration, and pro bono assistance from current community members.
**Timeline 2020**

- **March 27 - April 4**: Concept and proposal development; participant recruitment
- **April 30**: Project selected to receive funding
- **May 5 - 22**: Participant input and high-level design *
- **May 25**: Killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis
- **May 26**: Kickoff workshop (LEGO Serious Play)
- **May 5 - 22**: Participant input and high-level design *
- **June 2**: Design thinking workshop
- **June 8 - July 28**: Weekly meetings
- **July 28 - August 14**: Wrap-up and retrospective review

* Participant input was gathered through questionnaires and discussions: Questions included such prompts as, “Who are you, what are your needs, what do you want to get out of this?”
Approach and Mindset

Short meetings with low cognitive complexity and hands-on interactions
We tried to keep meetings simple, short, and orderly to avoid putting too many demands on people’s time or cognitive processing power, reasoning that participants were likely to be under tremendous stress. Cognitive overload undermines one's ability to engage in creative thinking and problem solving. In addition, we provided structured time for thinking, feeling, and playing.

Facilitation, sense making, and coaching — not “consulting” and “expertise”
We embraced the notion that participants are the experts in their own capabilities, missions, communities, and we are here as coaches and guides, not experts or consultants. We felt that space was needed for sense making in today’s chaotic and unfamiliar environment.

Think Big, Start Small, Move Fast
This approach and mindset was infused throughout the project, and encouraged learning through experimentation — with audiences — in a time of complexity and instability.
Methods and Tools

**LEGO Serious Play®**
Utilizing the LEGO Serious Play® methodology gave participants a new environment in which they could explore what they know and bring deep, new knowledge to the surface.

**Design thinking, applied improv, and storytelling tools**
Incorporating methods from human-centered design, the practice of applied improvisation, and storytelling helped participants maintain a user-centered focus and to move quickly from thinking to doing and experimenting.

**Google Jam Board**
Google Jam Board, a virtual whiteboard tool, supported fluid, almost tactile collaboration and sharing despite the sensory isolation of virtual meetings.

**Mindful use of Zoom**
Zoom video meetings were kept short and on time, with clearly defined periods for both interaction and private reflection. Liberal use of warm-ups, check-ins, and warm-downs borrowed from improvisational theater helped build connection among participants.
Killing of George Floyd

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

On May 25, 2020, George Floyd, a 46-year-old black American man, was killed in Minneapolis, Minnesota, during an arrest for allegedly using a counterfeit bill.[1] Derek Chauvin, a white police officer, knelt on Floyd’s neck for almost eight minutes[2] while Floyd was handcuffed and lying face down, begging for his life and repeatedly saying “I can’t breathe”. [3][4][5] Officers J. Alexander Kueng and Thomas Lane further restrained Floyd, while officer Tou Thao prevented bystanders from intervening.[6][7][8][24] During the final two minutes,[8] Floyd was motionless and had no pulse[9][10] while Chauvin ignored onlookers’ pleas to remove his knee, which he did not do until medics told him to.[11][12][30]

The following day, after videos made by witnesses and security cameras became public,[12][13][14] all four officers were fired. Two autopsies found Floyd’s death to be a homicide.[15] Chauvin was initially charged with third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter,[16][17] to which he was later added second-degree murder. The three other officers were charged with aiding and abetting second-degree murder.[14][18][10]

Floyd’s death triggered subsequent protests against police brutality, police racism, and lack of police accountability.[15] In early June, the Minneapolis City Council took action to ban chokeholds and require police officers to intervene against the use of excessive force by other officers, and voted an intent to restructure the police department as a “new community-based system of public safety.”[20][21] The Minneapolis Police Chief cancelled contract negotiations with the police union and announced plans to bring in outside experts to examine how the union contract can be restructured to provide transparency and “flexibility for true reform.”[22]
The killing of George Floyd, and subsequent change in the consciousness of people around the world, redefined the scope of this project and the perceived potential of this moment in the eyes of all participants.

Two of our participating organizations, The Weisman Art Museum and RED EYE Theater, are based in Minneapolis, where George Floyd was killed.
High-Level Design

- Begin with LEGO Serious Play® workshop to get to know each other and the big picture
- Move to design thinking as a transition from reflection to action
- Hold weekly sessions (alternating between small groups and full-group sessions) with facilitated activities and mini-workshops to provide support, encourage reflection, foster collaboration, deepen thinking, and move participants towards launch
- Pass approx. $600 in granted funds to each participating org as an honorarium, and to support small experiments
- Host final presentations to stimulate reflection and self-awareness, share knowledge, and celebrate!
Scenes from small groups sessions + workshops
Laughter and play helped to support a flexible and bold mindset within the group. Playful and courageous thinking were an integral part of the overall project goals.

Check-in’s

- “I’m ___ and I’m checking in.”
- “I’m feeling ______” + a physical gesture that we all copy
- Call on someone else (hand on head to indicate who has spoken)
The *think big, start small, move fast* approach came from Mike’s experience as a digital strategist. *Strategy is the wrong way to solve most problems.*

I love strategy, you *need* strategy, but strategy is overrated.

Most strategies fail.

Strategy is not as important as what you choose to work on, or how you choose to work.

*Let me explain...*
The design thinking framework came from Dana’s experience as a design thinking strategist who has worked with museums across the US.

**Mindsets**
- Bias to Action
- Iterate + Experiment
- Embrace uncertainty

**How Might We?**

**How Might We activity**
- Write HMW’s (solo, 5 minutes)
- Share and discuss (5 minutes)
- Pick 2 that you want to brainstorm against (5 minutes)
- **Note: use a timer on your phone**

10 minutes in break-out room
Participants were shipped a set of LEGO Serious Play bricks if they couldn’t scrounge their own.

LEGO Serious Play was used to explore complex changes in community needs and delve deeply into the concepts of institutional identity, purpose, and relevance.
An on-screen timer was used throughout the process to ensure everyone had time to speak and everyone could compose their thoughts according to the time available.

With so much going on in people’s lives we felt it was important to keep meetings short, predictable, and orderly.
Google Jam Boards provided an important, almost tactile link between design thinking concepts and hands-on collaboration within the group.
4. Observations and Outcomes

Project facilitators’ perspectives
1. **Individual experience of participants**

1. Participants and facilitators had originally imagined transactional teaching and learning activities for this project, such as imparting technical tips and best practices. However, it quickly became evident that because of the complexity of the environment and issues involved, a softer, deeper, and more broadly exploratory process was required.

2. A limited amount of time and energy was available for new things and “innovation” as participants and communities were likely to be under stress, juggling many simultaneous challenges, including:
   - BLM, political climate, financial crisis, layoffs and furloughs, school closings, family care challenges, new tools to learn and navigate, communication challenges
   - Widespread financial stress: one participant’s organization furloughed 90% of staff during the project, others had large layoffs
   - Minneapolis participants experienced riots and tragedy in their community after the killing of George Floyd
   - Digital fatigue was felt to be rampant, both among participants and their communities
2. Facilitation and leadership

1. Because of the background hum of stress and cognitive strain in everyone’s lives, it was important to keep communication, meetings, and homework as simple, light, and predictable as possible. We tried to keep the cognitive complexity of our meetings to a minimum (or, more accurately, we chose to be very careful about where we chose to invest participants’ cognitive resources).

2. Because there was so much change happening in everyone’s lives, every week, it was important for us, the facilitators, to stay flexible and not over-design the project. Generally, we met weekly to discuss progress and adjust course within the overarching goals of the project, based on what we heard and observed from participants.
3. LEGO Serious Play® and design thinking complemented each other well and provided a valuable framework for thinking, sense-making, and creating in the current period of uncertainty.

The strength of LEGO Serious Play® lay in its ability to expose and develop a broad landscape of ideas — even those that were not well understood by the participants. The strength of design thinking lay in its ability to guide participants towards creating usable products through a process of observation, empathy, and experimentation. Together, both methodologies gave us a way to understand problems (and systems) more deeply and move that understanding towards things that can be used and experienced by people to create value.

Both methodologies also provided a welcome departure from the tedium of standard Zoom meetings and business processes for all involved.
3. Organizations and change

1. Because of cognitive overload and uncertainty in general, this was not a great time for sweeping strategic change. Organizations are more likely to be adjusting priorities within existing strategy than re-thinking scope or tactics entirely.

2. While we encouraged experimentation and simplicity, some participants reported that “nimble” (though not a term we used) and “fast” aren’t any easier than the old ways of working if you haven’t practiced them before: nimble and fast are a skillset in-and-of themselves.

3. Organizational culture doesn’t magically change (for the better) in a crisis; we found that several participants encountered painfully familiar bureaucratic roadblocks, obstacles, and risk-averse mindsets despite the general acknowledgement that change and risk-taking were necessary at the current time.
4. Most cultural practitioners don’t have the agency and decision/budgetary authority to implement new programs or drive change on their own. However, during the course of the project several participants realized that they could move ideas quickly forward by “hacking” programs that already had managerial approval. (This is the classic “work within your sphere of influence” advice from management science.)

5. “Think big, start small, move fast” seems to be a valuable framework for creating value in collaboration with audiences during periods of uncertainty and change. This approach emphasizes tactical experimentation — short term experiments aligned with long-term goals, and a healthy balance of planning and doing. See Think Big, Start Small, Move Fast by co-facilitator Michael Peter Edson (slides, lecture)
Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, Inclusion and social justice issues were paramount in the thinking of project participants even before the killing of George Floyd, but the killing of Mr. Floyd brought the urgency of those concerns — and the desire to address them through our institutions and organizations — to the forefront.

Working with communities on DEAI and social justice issues does not come naturally to most GLAM, cultural, and performing arts organizations, though many organizations wish to be relevant and the need for them to take action is urgent and real.

The GLAM and performing arts professional community will need to work very hard to support and sustain DEAI and social justice work over the long haul as the learning curve will be long and mistakes and missteps will be inevitable.
New initiatives and thinking at 8 organizations

These are described in greater detail in the following section, Participant Presentations

- **Arts & Minds** — home service programming for patients with dementia and their caregivers; increased capacity and transition to online/at home; new line of service for Spanish-speaking community

- **Akron-Summit County Public Library System** — prototyping ways to move to collaborative programming across the system branches and with the teen community

- **Center for Art and Public Exchange / Mississippi Museum of Art** — navigating uncertainty and finding opportunities to hack existing programs to elevate discourse on social justice.

- **Georgia O'Keeffe Museum** — pivot to Spanish-language videos for local audiences (community and schools)
New initiatives and thinking (continued)

- **Lux Art Institute** — deeper thinking about access and agility/speed while launching Augmented Reality tour; garden/grounds tour (under development); at-home summer camps

- **Newark Museum of Art** — pivot to digital and outdoor experiences, social justice, local/community programs

- **RED EYE Theater** — focus on core identity and responsiveness during/after the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis (where RED EYE is based, along with the Weisman Art Museum); strategic direction and vision/service models

- **Weisman Art Museum** — charting a new course after George Floyd was killed; emphasis on DEAI; exploration of online models to empower student and local activists; co-creation of upcoming exhibitions with community leaders
Outcomes

Personal outcomes for participants

- Widespread adoption of audience-focused design thinking and serious play methodologies
- Increased individual and organizational confidence
- Faster processes for creative development, experimentation, and project development
- Fostered new and heightened emphasis on social justice and DEAI issues and activities
- Promoted greater confidence and clarity regarding audience needs and impact
5. Participant Presentations

- Arts & Minds
- Akron-Summit County Public Library System,
- Center for Art and Public Exchange / Mississippi Museum of Art
- Georgia O'Keeffe Museum
- Lux Art Institute
- Newark Museum of Art
- RED EYE Theater
- Weisman Art Museum
This section features short, final presentations from each participating organization.

The presentations were developed with design thinking, serious play, and storytelling* methodologies.

* The Story Spine was developed by Kenn Adams, playwright and artistic director of the Synergy Theater.
Arts & Minds

Carolyn Halpin-Healy
Co-Founder and Executive Director

Nellie Escalante
Senior Program Coordinator and Teaching Artist

Deborah Howes
President, Howes Studio

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Your assumptions going into the project

● Dementia caregiving is "high touch." Familiarity and frequent contact are important.
● Art is intellectually and emotionally stimulating, thought provoking, elevating and inspiring — Arts & Minds can deliver this every day at 2pm.
● Regular participation reduces apathy, agitation and depression — Arts & Minds can help maintain familiar routine and provide an outlet for expression and creativity.
● This crisis will end — Arts & Minds will resume in museums if we can retain our teaching artists and participants through this crisis.
● We assumed that an Aspen Tech Hub project would be a place to discover concrete technical tools and solutions - we discovered much more...
Your biggest challenges

- Maintaining communication with our participants
- Continuing supportive registration process
- Supporting team of displaced museum workers
- Prioritizing projects
- Finding new and efficient ways of working with core team - reshaping communications
Your biggest learnings or surprises

- We are uniting families globally!
- Older adult participants were able to transition to an online platform
- Our amazing teaching team of talented, diverse, compassionate educators need paying jobs and we have the right and responsibility to advocate for them.
- It is appropriate to ask for significant funding as we grow and change.
Your current thinking

- Dementia is a social justice issue.
- Our long-standing commitment to diversity, equity, access and inclusion is well placed.
- Online programming has increased access for people unable to visit museums, whether because of geography distance, physical disability or other barriers.
- What started as an emergency response will become central to what we do from now on and Arts & Minds will maintain programs online even after museums reopen.
- Online training is the key to sharing the work.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Story Spine...</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Our organization is ...</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>When we started this project, we thought ...</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>But then ...</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>And because of that we ...</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Until finally ...</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>And now we think ...</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Akron-Summit County Public Library System

Jennifer Stencil

Richfield Library Branch Manager and Teen Librarian
Your assumptions going into the project

I assumed that our service population, our audience, would be hungry for virtual programming.

I feared that our silence would be devastating, that we would not be “top-of-mind,” we would lose our footing on being a well-thought-of Third Place of Richfield.

#Placemaking
Your biggest challenges

Many feel uncomfortable with this new normal. There is no “How-to” for this disruption. However, others—mostly front line staff—are more curious and open to unexplored possibilities the changes are causing. The disruption isn’t frightening but exciting. #HeretherebeDragons

Communication slowed at a time when staff actually needed more. #RadioSilenceScary

We are a system dispersed in 20 locations across a county. How a community “uses” their local library differs from place to place. It was obvious before, now even more so. #PatronPriorities #StaffingLevels

ASCPL just finished a Strategic Plan and Marketing Plan. Is Strategic Plan still relevant to follow right now?

Levy is in near future (close to end of levy cycle). PLF (Public Library Fund) is down.

Being closed, we were not seeing and hearing the public to know what has changed, what they needed. #ethnography #UX #trends

My challenge: to create virtual experiences that are creative/different, needed, engaging, participatory and, as a Teen librarian, #GoBeyondVirtualStoryTime
Your biggest learnings or surprises

COVID created a disconnect between frontline and behind closed doors/working from home staff. There has been a change in patron needs, and how they “use” and need us. One has got to experience it to believe it. Also, two mindsets, two camps: Great Reset vs. Back to Normal.

“Just program like you normally do, only virtually.” Not understanding skills & equipment needed to do virtual programs. #Zoom #Youtube #Twitch #Discord #FBLive #IGTV #TicTok #lightring #tripod #microphone #script #Hoursofediting

Our population is in crisis mode and is worried about other things- mostly: school, employment, and rent/mortgage. They were (and still are) not looking for online storytimes (a staple), crafts, or anything else... They needed, and still do, other things from us, but not these things. #BottomofMaslowHeirarchy #ToxicStress #FilingUnemployment #NoDeviceorInternet #BehindinLearning

Teen and Senior population are lonely. Miss face to face interactions with others.
Your current thinking

Who is even our service population right now and what do they need? And will our “before” Service Population return? #AspenStudyReimaginingLibrary

We are to do virtual programming and public is still in crisis mode. What is best use of time, energy and resources? Is this right?

How to launch my “vision” of new teen *virtual* services/ programs when learning curve of technology needed is steep, we’re open to public and short staffed, with normal job duties/ expectations?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Our organization is ..</strong></th>
<th>The Richfield Branch Library is made up of Jen Stencel (manager and teen librarian) and 6 staff who love to challenge assumptions and redefine what libraries (and the library profession) could be and do for the community.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **When we started this project, we thought ...** | Since we at the Richfield Library were embracing the Great Reset, we thought others in the org. were too. We thought we could take advantage of the pause (the closed doors), and use the opportunity to really focus, uninterrupted, on creating really good, new work. We hoped that the organization would prioritize what is/was essential and look at what services we are/were running that were only “running’ us thin.  

By working with Aspen and the selected group of creative org/individuals, that we would surely learn from, be inspired by and STEAL great ideas. By August, I would be ready to launch new initiatives because of. |
| **But then ...** | Something like 90% of the entire ASCPL staff was furloughed. Further, because many of the innovative and creative librarians* who had the same Great Reset mindset were gone, steam for such new/forward thinking/different work stopped. I was left to represent the branch. |
And because of that we...
..the organization followed a “go back to normal”- plan, especially with programming. Managers needed to communicate “what was happening” with administrators. Managers, and half the staff, returned to work in preparation to open, while all administration continued to work from home. In preparation to open, managers monitored what was happening in other library systems that had been open (limited) to the public. We gathered that those libraries were hearing new and different needs from public, and adjusted accordingly.

We (at all levels) may know about social media, but the many who do not work with it are not aware of the amount of skill needed to create successful and engaging virtual programming. We were learning that it is very time consuming to do virtual programs. #iMovieCrashCourses

Until finally...
All frontline staff came back and normal hours returned. Some Managers, who are also teen librarians, realized that we must do work together. We hear and feel that the communities NEEDs something different and has nothing to do with “before”. #Obsolete #NoTimetoWasteAnymore
We also realized that we are not trained or prepared to transfer programs to online. We may have the ideas, but the execution is actually quite difficult. This requires new skills that many of us do NOT have.

And now we think...
if we must program, “collaborative programming” over individual-location programming has to be the way. With full-force of the creatives back, we are pushing for experimenting. How? Pull our limited resources (skills, funds, time, staffing) to create a few GREAT programs, over the quota expected by ea librarian, per quarter. Especially if we are all learning the technology.
Center for Art and Public Exchange / Mississippi Museum of Art
Our assumptions going into the project

Art has the power to change people.

Covid-19 haulted in-person programs that promote social engagement

Technology can help mitigate feelings of isolation caused by Covid-19
A coordinated and prompt response to the brutal murder of George Floyd

Becoming digital program leaders

Changes institutionally: Four new hires since March (all in leadership), Monique's role expanding, a rebranding launch, changes to the budget

Our biggest challenges
Changing our thinking habits

Believe that when you put good into the world, good will come out.

Human-centered design through empathy as a starting place for true change.

What does courage mean?

Recognizing social patterns in the mundane as a starting place for conversation.

Inspiration can come from the ordinary!

Staff and network appreciation!

We've found so much joy in working with each other and finding great networks in fellow thought-partners. We appreciate y'all!
Our current thinking

Art has the power to change people.

Courage has the power to question perceptions of what is 'normal.'

Think big, start small, move FAST!
Our organization is... Committed to deep engagement with art, artists, and visitors

When we started this project, we thought... We would learn tips and tricks to mitigate social isolation through technological innovation

But then... Adapted to new institutional changes, coordinated a response to the murder of George Floyd, and gave space for protestors

And because of that we... Identified what it means to be courageous as Museum leaders, questioned our habits, and worked smarter as colleagues

Until finally... We know that inspiration can come from the ordinary and can challenge our ideas of what is 'normal.'

Now we think... That art has the power to change lives, and to be most effective, we need to meet people where they are and grow with them.
Georgia O’Keeffe Museum

Tony Vaccaro
*Georgia O’Keeffe with the Cheese*, 1960 Gelatin silver print, 14 5/8 x 18 3/8 inches Georgia O’Keeffe Museum, Museum Purchase, 2007.3.27

Liz Neely, Curator of Digital Experience
Katrina Latka, Curator of Education and Interpretation
Shannon Bay, Program Manager, Adult and Community Engagement

Georgia O’Keeffe, *Pelvis IV*, 1944
Oil on masonite, 36 1/16 x 40 3/8 inches
Georgia O’Keeffe Museum, Gift of the Burnett Foundation, 1997.6.1

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Your assumptions going into the project

As our museum was quickly adapting to assess and meet the needs of our community and audiences without our physical galleries, this project seemed like an excellent place to learn from and discuss strategies from a wide range of organization types and talented individuals. This played out more than we could have imagined!

Maria Chabot
Georgia O’Keeffe Writing
Daily Letter to Alfred Stieglitz,
Ghost Ranch House Patio, 1944
Your biggest challenges

Though the cohort’s process wrestled with operating in times of uncertainty, it was difficult to select a productive way forward within the multiple layers of issues: the health crisis, the financial crisis, the wreckoning of white supremacist culture, staff layoffs, personal struggles, etc. Uncertainties surrounding the upcoming school year has been a particular challenge surrounding our project choice.

Navigating these large issues became an important topic of the cohort and lead facilitators in a valuable way.
Your biggest learnings or surprises

- Working with an outside person during these difficult times takes longer than usual with the inability to meet in person.
- Our museum has more work to do with engaging with Spanish-speaking artists and teachers and growing this network.
- It was interesting to hear the different challenges from the cohort — how they are coping with responses so distinct from state to state.

A team at the O’Keeffe shows their sketches from a brainstorm session surrounding ideas for how to assess and meet the needs of local audiences. Since the start of this grant, we have incorporated some of these techniques into our meetings regularly.
Your current thinking

- Developing relationships across the GLAM field helps build context, support each other, and learn something
- Flexibility and adaptability keep us going
- Design Thinking framework has been incorporated into regular work process
- Mike’s ‘Think big. Start small. Move Fast.’ is helpful for adaptability
- Looking forward to learning how our project is received and how we can build upon these effort through this learning

Alicia Sandoval will do four Spanish language artist videos
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Our organization is ...</th>
<th>... Committed to help using the art and life of Georgia O’Keeffe to inspire.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When we started this project, we thought ...</td>
<td>It would be really valuable to have conversations with professionals from a diverse set of organizations across the country with highly skilled facilitators so that we could get better at serving our community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But then ...</td>
<td>Liz brought a persona to the cohort that the O’Keeffe Museum already knew how to serve - instead of moving forward with content for that person (since we have that content!), a staff team (#teampivot!) imagined and designed solutions for 4 local community personas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And because of that we ...</td>
<td>The staff team voted on our favorite idea, which was Spanish-language video. This not only helps us pilot how to serve the needs of Spanish speakers, but helps inform a more comprehensive Spanish-language offering. Alicia Sandoval was commissioned to make 4 artist-led Spanish videos. Alicia is from Santa Fe, was a participant in the museum’s signature Arts and Leadership program for 3 years and then was a college intern in that same program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Until finally ...</td>
<td>We began work on 4 Spanish-language video that will be part of our 4th-grade curriculum to be used in the local school system and accessible across the country!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And now we think ...</td>
<td>We hope teachers and families will find this useful and see this a pilot to learn from our efforts for a more comprehensive Spanish offering. Think big. Start small. Move fast.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lux Art Institute
Your assumptions going into the project

- Create systems for mitigating effects of COVID
- Develop a process that would help our team better experiment or prepare for changes
- Create a process to reach out to our audience during COVID
Your biggest challenges

- Be More Flexible
- Prioritizing Time
- Problem Solving
Your biggest learnings or surprises

- Need to be *even more* Flexible
- Physical and Virtual Audiences are different
- Collaborating to solve common problems
- Access is a Top Priority
- Shifting to New Audiences opens up New needs (Spanish programs)
**Your current thinking**

Quick and Simple = Difficult and Complicated


Keep projects small with goals broad

Mission driven is essential

Access for all – Reduce Barriers
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Our organization is ...</th>
<th>Lux Art Institute. (Our mission is to engage people in the creative process.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When we started this project, we thought ...</td>
<td>We needed advice and tools to communicate with and serve our current audience. We thought we’d be able to respond to new issues that COVID is creating with our audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But then ...</td>
<td>The world came to a reckoning (and still is) and we recognized that 1. Our audience was changing and 2. We needed to address marginalized communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And because of that we ...</td>
<td>... adjusted our priorities to respond to the new audience. ... created a new system for prioritizing -experimental- project management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Until finally ...</td>
<td>... we decided that we would use our organizational priorities to drive our focus areas, making adjustments to respond to our changing audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And now we think ...</td>
<td>... that while complicated, we can still achieve our goals through persistence, prioritization, and adaptation (flexibility).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Newark Museum of Art

Deborah Kasindorf
Vice President/Deputy Director
External Affairs

Silvia Filippini Fantoni,
Deputy Director Learning and Engagement

© Newark Museum of Art; All materials approved for use in the compilation work "Cultural Engagement to Mitigate Social Isolation" August 2020
Your assumptions going into the project

Focus on defining the post-COVID-19 onsite experience
Your biggest challenges

Reality keeps on changing (COVID-19 response slow, social justice issues, etc.)
Your biggest learnings or surprises

● Short-term plans
● Need to be agile
● Less diverse and older audience
● How to account for FB and IG audiences?
Your current thinking

- Focus on our digital and outdoor experiences
- Change our approach to digital programs
- Consider how to monetize certain experiences
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Our organization is ...</th>
<th>The Newark Museum of Art</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When we started this project, we thought ...</td>
<td>that the main focus was going to be on defining the post-COVID-19 onsite experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But then ...</td>
<td>The pandemic continued to spread and other issues related to social justice emerged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And because of that we ...</td>
<td>We turned away from the need of redefining the onsite experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Until finally ...</td>
<td>and focused on developing programs that were relevant to what was going on (Juneteenth event, 2 Community Days)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And now we think ...</td>
<td>That in the next 6 months we need to focus on outdoor and digital programs and think of ways in which we can attract a younger and more diverse audience through these programs while continuing to explore revenue opportunities in this new world</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RED EYE Theater
Your assumptions going into the project

We weren’t sure what to expect. We were surprised and honored to be asked to join this cohort as what felt like perhaps a little “step-sibling” as a small performing arts org. We had an assumption that this was going to be an opportunity to develop some new ideas around creating programming as the global pandemic made it nearly impossible for performance makers to rehearse and perform in the usual ways. In April, we thought we might develop and launch a new digital program series by the end of the summer...
Your biggest challenges

- The impact of the intense, necessary, and rapidly evolving response to the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police on our priorities as individuals and as a small arts org.
- The nature of our relatively young collaborative leadership structure on our ability to make decisions and develop thoughtful responses in timely ways.
- Funding; balancing cost risks of new programming against a very uncertain fundraising (individual, foundation, government, corporate) landscape.
- The impact on artistic practice: Most artists we know are struggling to produce new work right now, not only because of the lack of platforms/opportunities but because this new situation is confusing, and creative process takes time to adapt!
How clear it became that we are really an artist centered organization, almost an “artist service” org, rather than audience being our main focus and constituency. Or perhaps another way to look at this is that artists are our audience.

The idea that we can be nimble because we are small is not so true. Collaborative leadership creates its own type of slow downs and inefficiencies (which are not inherently negative). We don’t deal with a lot of bureaucracy and red tape, but we do have work to do in aligning our perspectives and clarifying our decision-making structures.
Your current thinking

This really opened a door for some critical thinking and conversations in our leadership team around how we create new programming, how we agree on an organizational perspective or programmatic framing, and our assumptions about what performance makers need at this time. The pace at which we work has also become a central topic for our org—how fast do we want to work? How quick must our response time be? When are we choosing our pace and when is it dictated by external forces, the market, funders, etc? How are our relationships to time and work symptoms of whiteness, capitalism, individualism, and sexism?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Our organization is ...</strong></th>
<th>The Red Eye Theater, a multidisciplinary performance incubator led by a horizontal collective of seven artists.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>When we started this project, we thought ...</strong></td>
<td>We would develop some ideas for new programming built around the challenges and parameters of pandemic life, and hopefully emerge as a thought leader in new forms of programming and ethical relationships with artists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>But then ...</strong></td>
<td>George Floyd was murdered by Minneapolis police on the corner of 38th and Chicago Ave and we moved into an intensive period of especially deep grief, protest, fear, and rage at the deeply racist systems embedded into the fabric of our city and culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>And because of that we ...</strong></td>
<td>Turned our attention to more pressing needs in our city and did Red Eye work in the cracks as our individual energies and schedules would allow. Organizationally we prioritized time-sensitive and administrative tasks of submitting grants, finishing our new strategic plan, furthering our EDI process, and moving toward finalizing the lease terms of our new space. We noticed a waning in our group energy and ability to show up fully.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Until finally ...

We had a meeting devoted to reflecting on the past year, our desires and capacity for the upcoming year, and looking at what is working/not working in the functioning of our leadership model. We decided to take the first week of August off from all Red Eye duties, communication, and non-urgent responsibilities, and have shorter and fewer meetings for the remainder of the summer. We did this with the idea that the Red Eye will not end if we we take care of ourselves, and trusting that a scaling down for the rest of summer will allow us to return in the fall with new perspective and renewed energy.

### And now we think ...

That the pandemic, the uprising around racial equality, and the hyper-partisan political environment we exist in have and will continue to change all of the structures we exist within and rely upon in dramatic and unpredictable ways, and therefore our usual tools and ways of doing will not suffice. A big question and challenge for Red Eye moving forward is how we navigate the sometimes conflicting tasks of slowing down and being thoughtful, intentional, and sustainable while also taking action, pushing forward, and continuing to program, fund, and produce new performance.
Weisman Art Museum

Participants: Katherine Covey, Director of Programs and Student Engagement and Susannah Schouweiler, Director of Marketing and Communications

Building design by Frank Gehry, situated on the University of Minnesota Twin Cities campus. Photo courtesy of the Weisman.

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Your assumptions going into the project

When we began this project, our biggest concerns were COVID (and the accompanying push to transform a season of live programs into engaging digital content) and the retirement of the Weisman’s director of 40 years. We assumed we would be getting our ducks in a row for this new chapter in the museum’s life.
Your biggest challenges

While we all know the work of DEAI* is vital to the ongoing relevance and service of our institutions, none of us anticipated the acceleration of that work required given the murder of George Floyd this summer. As a result of the pandemic, the Weisman’s team has also needed to move quickly to chart a new course -- and find requisite funding for that new direction.

* Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, Inclusion
Your biggest learnings or surprises

We knew we’d need to think creatively to move the museum experience online; we didn’t anticipate the widespread digital fatigue - for both visitors and staff - under a reality where all our interactions are happening online. Happily, we also discovered we, as a team, are more nimble than we’d thought - we *can* move quickly to change course and rise to the challenge of changing circumstances.
The work of the museum needs to be in service of our communities. We are, first, about taking care of people, rather than objects. We’re analyzing our current operations and programs with an active ear and eye to what our community expresses they need from us right now. The museum’s programs will be effective insofar as they are created with, rather than for, the people for whom they’re intended. Transparency is the only way forward. We have heavy work ahead of us, but this need not be joyless. The museum experience doesn’t need to be spinach. We need a moment’s respite and relief as much or more than we do education and edification right now.
**Story Spine...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Our organization is ...</strong></th>
<th>Weisman Art Museum, a teaching museum on the University of Minnesota Twin Cities campus and an integral part of life on college for students and faculty, as well as a cultural destination serving the surrounding community.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>When we started this project, we thought ...</strong></td>
<td>Our biggest concerns were COVID (and the accompanying push to transform a season of live programs into engaging digital content) and the retirement of the Weisman’s director of 40 years. We assumed we would be getting our ducks in a row for this new chapter in the museum’s life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>But then ...</strong></td>
<td>George Floyd was murdered at a Minneapolis corner store by police, and our communities erupted in protest. Museums have been accountable for their racist histories and practices in a more public, more uncompromising way by individuals than we have experienced before. Money is also tighter than ever for our programs and partnerships. And digital fatigue is rampant. Digital content isn’t going the be the solution to the problem of museum irrelevance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Story Spine</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>And because of that we ...</strong></td>
<td>Put the work of DEAI in the foreground of our planning. We prioritized the creation of concrete action steps that will allow our communities to hold us accountable. We reallocated resources to those initiatives, and moved more quickly to change course than we would have thought possible before. We're prioritizing the creation of digital content that truly fills a need, rather than merely putting a bunch of stuff online.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Until finally ...</strong></td>
<td>We committed to the idea that the work of the museum needs to be rooted in service to our communities. We must, first, be about taking care of people, rather than objects. We're analyzing our current operations and programs with an active ear and eye to what our community expresses they need from us right now, recognizing that our programs will be only effective insofar as they are created with, rather than for, the people for whom they're intended.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>And now we think ...</strong></td>
<td>Transparency is the only way forward. We have heavy work ahead of us, but this need not be joyless. The museum experience doesn't need to be spinach. We need a moment's respite and relief as much or more than we do education and edification right now.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. Moving Forward
Design Principles PDF

Download at: https://tinyurl.com/aspen-tech-cultural

Drawing from what we learned in this project and our own work guiding teams through strategy and design processes, we have created a free PDF guidebook that highlights six easy design principles you can use to help your team think and work with greater clarity and confidence in a time of rapid change.

1. Start with capturing assumptions
2. Incorporate physical and mental warm-ups
3. Make time and space for reflection
4. Don't try to serve “everyone,” especially in a time of crisis
5. Foster collegiality, connection, and a sense of community
6. Build to think
Moving Forward

This project was conceived as a rapid-response initiative, but long-term work, with greater intensity and at greater scale, is necessary to help GLAMs and performing arts organizations create significant change and impact in American communities.

We look forward to developing the techniques and methodologies used in this project further, and to working with funders and partners to scale up participation to include more, and more diverse, participants and communities in the United States and globally.

Michael Peter Edson and Dana Mitroff Silvers
August 21, 2020
... My deepest thanks for your creativity, discipline and abiding support over these last few months. The structure you created provided an excellent framework for Arts & Minds to develop our idea for sharing our work more broadly. You put together a cohort of wonderful people, all working in earnest to serve their communities, and it was very moving for us to be part of this project during the time of social isolation. Our thinking has advanced, and we've made some wonderful connections thanks to you.

— Project participant Carolyn Halpin Healy, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Arts & Minds