Section 3
Program Development
Blueprint

Program Development Blueprint

This guide to program development evolved out of conversations among Urban Network members, a group of seasoned museum practitioners who plan and implement innovative programs that build relationships between diverse communities and museums. In talking about what we do in our work, we took a step back to reflect upon our practice and break apart the steps we take, sometimes instinctively, to plan and implement these programs. By comparing stories, analyzing our practices, and sharing our own lessons learned from successes and failures, we came up with the following guidelines for building programs that engage diverse communities.

While each new initiative we plan may be unique to us, surveying the field to learn what others have done with a similar challenge can be a useful and enlightening way to begin. Scanning the local cultural scene to see what other institutions have tried in our own cities and towns can be especially instructive. Don't be afraid to pick up the phone. Our experience in Urban Network has taught us how much we can learn from one another and how eager we all are to talk about our experiences.

We recognize that each program or initiative exists within the larger context of our institutions' ongoing commitment to increasing access to museum learning. Each program, whether catalyzed by a single exhibition or organized as a long-term initiative, advances our institution's efforts to provide better service to an increasingly diverse public.

Among a museum's many constituents and stakeholders, each new program will have its own set of initial allies and those who are hesitant and need to be cultivated. Much of our conversation focused around gaining support and building relationships both within our institutions and within our neighboring communities.

This blueprint is organized by the questions we ask ourselves when planning new initiatives and the kinds of information we seek when attempting to answer these questions in our own practice. The colored pages provide reference tools to help you envision a program and how it can impact your institution's goals towards civic engagement, build healthy partnerships and advisory committees, and take practical steps to collaborative program development.

Context for Program Planning

When we set out to help museums "embrace communities," we are trying to bring about change in "who forms, informs, and benefits from" these influential institutions (Jolly 2002). There are several preliminary steps that can help to define the task and set the context for program development:

Figure 1

Questions to Ask About Key Relationships When Planning a New Civic Engagement Program

P Primary Relationships	**S** Secondary Relationships
1 Program Participants to Program	**4 Institution to External Stakeholders**

P Primary Relationships

1 Program Participants to Program

- Who are the target audiences that will benefit?
- What are the program goals?
- How will the program fulfill the participants' needs?
- How should the participants be involved in the program development and implementation?
- How will the participants learn about the program?
- What will motivate them to participate?
- What will bring them back again and again?
- What are the checkpoints to examine program progress and any necessary adjustments?

2 Institution to Program

- How does this program fit within the museum's mission, goals, and priorities?
- How will you involve colleagues in the development of the program? How will they benefit?
- Which colleagues will be involved in implementing the program and how will they be involved in planning?
- How can the lessons learned from this program inform practice throughout the museum?
- To what extent is the museum committed to sustaining the impact of this program?

3 External Stakeholders to Program
(External stakeholders include collaborators, cooperators, partners, funders, government, etc.)

- Which external stakeholders will the program impact?
- How will they be involved in program planning and implementation?
- How will the program address their needs and expectations?

S Secondary Relationships

4 Institution to External Stakeholders

- What is the desired impact of this program or initiative on the long-term relationship between the institution and the external stakeholders?
- Can the benefits of this experience be leveraged to make gains in other areas?
- How will the program components and results be communicated?

5 Institution to Program Participants

- What are the goals for the museum with this audience beyond this program or initiative?
- Can the museum parlay a positive experience into a more sustained benefit for the institution? If so, how?
- Who needs to be involved in the planning and/or communication loop to make this happen?

6 Program Participants to External Stakeholders

- What are the external stakeholders' goals for building relationships with program participants through this initiative?
- How are these addressed in the program planning?

- Define what you are trying to change—who, what, where, and why. For example, are your visitors reflective of your surrounding communities? If not, why not? Has your institution recently made an assessment of its commitment to civic engagement as it strives to serve its mission and goals?

- Conduct a review of the field—who else has done anything similar, locally, nationally, or internationally? What does the literature say about viable strategies, what do we know from the research base about what works for whom and under what conditions? What is salient for you to consider as you plan, what is transferable to your situation, what are the potential pitfalls based on others' experience?

- Identify your "theory of change" or framework for action. What's your causal model: if I do *(a)*, then I think *(b)* will happen and *(c)* will be different as a result? (For example, cutting admission price and advertising in lower-income communities will increase numbers of visitors from those communities.) Will you involve the powers-that-be at the outset and try to change policy and the way the institution does business? Or will you "just do it" and demonstrate from the bottom up that things can be done differently?

The questions in Figure 1 focus on relationships between different groups of people inside and outside the museum. The questions may help you to identify "who forms, informs, and benefits," to describe the landscape as you begin, and to see the mountains (or hills!) you may have to move to achieve your results.

Institutional Self-Assessment

? How could this initiative further the goals and mission of the institution?

No matter how creative and inventive the idea, implementing it requires the commitment of a broad range of constituents inside and outside of the museum. To earn support, the program must clearly help the museum fulfill its mission and priorities and it must address a genuine need in the community.

When identifying allies, think about internal constituencies such as museum management, trustees or board members, colleagues, volunteer groups, and content specialists within the museum. Also, consider external constituents such as community organizations, funders, the media, arts and cultural organizations, political leaders, and other potential collaborators. While planning your program, think about how and when to include each of the stakeholders and how you will communicate with them throughout the program cycle (Rand 2001).

? How do you build momentum behind a program within the museum?

When making a case to gain support for a program within the museum, it may be helpful to present the program in terms of costs versus benefits. All programs,

Figure 2   Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats Example

SWOT Example

Strengths (internal)	Opportunities (external)
• Staff expertise	• Upcoming exhibition/program
• Collections/exhibitions	• Interested public
• Funding	• Enthusiastic funder
	• Supportive local government

Weaknesses (internal)	Threats (external)
• Lack of diversity within the institution	• Negative perception of the institution
• Lack of institutional commitment	• Language/cultural barriers
• Lack of diversity within the collections	• Competition
• Lack of experience/knowledge	• Physical and intellectual inaccessibility

Figure 3   **Factors to Consider in Developing Audience Advisory Groups**

• What is the role of the group? Should it be project-specific or ongoing?

• What department should lead the effort? Will it have interdepartmental implications?

• How much staff time will be needed to maintain the group? How much is available?

• Who will oversee the group? What criteria should be considered in choosing the museum representative? This selection carries significance, e.g., key staff leader with interdepartmental authority or line staff person, person of similar descent or not.

• Who will identify and select the members of the group?

• How often will the group meet? (quarterly, monthly)

• What will the group discuss? Who will set the agenda?

even those that are completely funded with grant money, require an institutional investment of staff, management time, and institutional resources—all resources that would be devoted to *this* initiative and *not* something else. The benefit to the museum is measured by how well the initiative fulfills the museum's mission, goals and priorities, and the needs of the community. To build internal support, consider how different museum departments or functions will benefit from the program. Articulating and understanding the costs and benefits of a program helps to initiate conversations that build support for it and to anticipate objections. Also, it helps the museum and its collaborators to consider their commitment to sustaining the impact of the program over time.

? **How would this program fit within the broader context of the museum's past and present initiatives?**

Does it dovetail with another initiative? Build on prior experience? Can it be leveraged into a larger initiative? Can it serve as a model for working with other communities? Or is it a first-time effort in a brand new field? One decision an institution may face, especially in tight economic times, is breadth or depth. How many relationships can the museum afford to sustain at one time? Should it continue to maintain an ongoing relationship with one community, or reach out to build new relationships with other communities? The overall context of a strategic plan can help inform these decisions.

? **How do you organize a self-assessment inquiry?**

Once the idea is formulated and reasonably supported, many museums find it useful to organize a self-assessment inquiry through a SWOT analysis. SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. In general, strengths and weaknesses assess internal museum factors, while opportunities and threats look at external factors that may impact the success of the initiative. The SWOT analysis helps to determine whether the proposed program is a good fit for the institution and to identify areas to address during program planning.

Some museums have found that conducting a SWOT analysis in a meeting with all the museum departments who would be involved in executing the program is an effective strategy to strengthen the program concept, build relationships within the museum, and gain support from key department staff and management. See Figure 2 for an example of the types of information that might be considered in the different categories of a SWOT analysis.

Audience Assessment

"If you build it, they will come" might attract the ghosts of dead baseball players in the movies, but it does not work well for engaging new audiences in museums. Once the museum identifies which audience it wishes to reach with an initiative, the next step is to identify the assets within that community that could contribute

to the initiative and the motivating factors for this audience to participate. The best way to learn this is from the target audiences themselves.

? How do you learn about the community?

When researching a potential audience, recognize that every community is diverse and talk with as many people representing different perspectives as you can. Ask for their advice about which organizations you might partner or collaborate with on initiatives. Meet the representatives of these organizations and, most importantly, listen.

As museums we need to recognize that we can be viewed by the community as very "mysterious" places. Consider what can be done to demystify the museum and make it more accessible to a broader community. In addition to preparing your own questions, try to anticipate the community's questions and be prepared for an open, honest exchange of ideas and information. Forming an advisory committee might be helpful (see Figure 3). The Oakland Museum's case study in this book offers a good illustration of the important role an advisory committee can play in influencing the museum's programming and collections.

What is your history with this audience? ?

If your museum has been around for a while, chances are there is a history with the audience you are researching. Always begin by asking around the museum to see whether anyone, in any of the departments, is currently working with this community or knows of a prior relationship between the museum and this community. If you do uncover something, try to find out all you can about it, especially whether it was a positive or negative experience. Colleagues with long institutional memories are very valuable. Identify whom museum colleagues already know from that community and try to build upon existing relationships.

? How does this initiative benefit the community?

We find that looking at communities that are traditionally "underserved" through the lens of what exists instead of what does not can open the doors to whole new worlds of possibility. Every community has assets—community, civic, religious, cultural, social service, arts, or sports organizations; the traditions, languages, and histories of the people and groups who were born or immigrated there; schools, colleges, trade schools, and other places of formal learning; parks, playgrounds, libraries, zoos, historical societies, or museums; elders and other local wise people; community events and celebrations (Kretzmann et. al. 1997). Each asset represents an opportunity for the museum to learn from the community and to understand how it can offer something that the community needs. It is a community's assets, not its needs or deficits, that illuminate gateways for the museum to engage with that community.

? How do you know if you're working with the right community partner?

Just as a program has to make sense for the museum, it needs to fulfill the mission of partner organizations too. A SWOT analysis from the community partner's perspective can provide useful information. Pinpointing and articulating program objectives and sharing information about costs and budgets helps to assure that everyone is on the same page and in clear agreement about intended outcomes. The initiative will provide reciprocal benefit to each of the right community partners.

It is important to note that there are varying levels of participation by community organizations (see Figure 4). They range from serving as advisors, to cooperating to support a program, to coordinating efforts between institutions, to full collaboration and partnership requiring a deep commitment and a certain level of risk from the community. It is important to match the level of involvement by the community organization with the degree it can commit resources to the endeavor.

Relationship Building

? How do you begin a relationship with community partners?

Treat every relationship with respect and dignify everyone with the kind of care you would give if meeting your new in-laws for the first time. Recognize that you may be coming from very different cultures, literally and figuratively, with different norms, values, and ways of doing things. You may need to become anthropologists in each others' lands.

There are no short-term, quick-fix relationships of convenience. Communities have long memories and being dismissive or treating someone disrespectfully can bring long-term negative consequences and hamper the museum's future initiatives to connect with this community.

Sample Agenda for an Initial Planning Meeting with Community Partner Organizations

Part I: Assessment
- What are the commonalities between our organizations' missions?
- What values do we share?
- What goals do we share?
- What are our differences?
- How does each organization prioritize these shared goals?
- What challenges do we each face now?

Part II: Exploration and Planning
- Suggest a specific potential program or collaborative initiative.
- Listen to responses and concerns, gauge interest/enthusiasm.
- Emphasize that the idea is at an early stage and needs their input.
- Brainstorm together about how to develop the idea (or brainstorm about other possible collaborations given the information yielded in Part I and then develop the best one).

Figure 4

Levels of Engagement

Cooperation is characterized by informal relationships that exist without any commonly defined mission, structure, or planning effort. Information is shared as needed, and authority is retained by each organization so there is virtually no risk. Resources are separate, as are rewards.

Coordination is characterized by more formal relationships and understanding of compatible missions. Some planning and division of roles are required, and communication channels are established. Authority still rests with the individual organizations, but there is some increased risk to all participants. Resources are available to participants and rewards are mutually acknowledged.

Collaboration connotes a more durable and pervasive relationship. Collaborations bring previously separate organizations into a new structure with full commitment to a common mission. Such relationships require comprehensive planning and well-defined communication channels operating on many levels. Authority is determined by the collaborative structure. Risk is much greater because each member of the collaboration contributes its own resources and reputation. Resources are pooled or jointly secured, and the products are shared.

(These definitions have been adapted from *Collaboration: What Makes it Work,* published by the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, 1992, St. Paul, Minn.)

Figure 5

Twelve Ingredients for Building Healthy Partnerships

These principles apply whether collaborating on a single exhibit or developing a long-term program.
- Put time and energy into building trust.
- Set specific and clear expectations.
- Define what roles each partner will play.
- Define each partner's responsibilities.
- Develop and agree upon a clear decision-making process.
- Establish mutually agreeable avenues of communication.
- Set up critical review points to discuss intermediate progress.
- Be willing to adapt or revisit programs, procedures or policies so that the museum can better meet the needs of the community and truly collaborate.
- Discuss who will handle money.
- Determine who will be responsible for documenting the program and how it will be done.
- Agree upon goals and methods for evaluating whether goals are achieved.
- Determine whether aspects of the agreement need to be solidified in writing and don't be afraid to do so.

? How do you make sure the relationship is balanced?

Be aware that some partnerships are not created equal. The museum may be an imposing and seemingly "rich" institution that was established to reflect and sustain the dominant culture, while the community partner may be operating on a shoestring budget and committed to change in the social order.

Sometimes it helps to acknowledge the imbalance, sometimes it's best left unspoken. Either way, recognizing what each stands to gain from the connection can make it easier to define a shared agenda and to affirm the reciprocal nature of the relationship. Building trust begins with attentive listening, being open to change, responding, and being honest and straightforward. It is very important to take feedback and constructive criticism very seriously (with some degree of humor) by viewing them as opportunities for assessing museum procedures or policies that might create obstacles. If a partner's suggestions cannot be addressed, explaining why will help to build the partner's understanding of the museum. To avoid misleading community partners, museum representatives should tell community partners at the outset the extent that the museum is committed to sustaining the program.

In addition to defining the parameters of the project and the partnership agreement, it is useful to discuss and understand each organization's limitations. A discussion about priorities often helps to clarify some of these issues. Sometimes partners may share their top two or three priorities, but assign different values to them. It is important to understand what is in each partner's interest and what would be a "deal-breaker" for each.

Also consider how each organization will address or serve the increased interest or requests from the community generated through this program. An institutional mechanism or commitment needs to be in place to respond to these requests in order to build the relationship that is so needed for sustaining networks and collaborations (see Figure 5).

? How can your community partners help you build relationships with community members?

Community partners that already have relationships with and the trust of the target audience can be helpful in delivering the marketing message to the target audience and in providing "safe" avenues of access for community members to the museum. The Science Museum of Minnesota's case study in this book is an excellent example of partnerships set up expressly for this purpose. Assessing marketing and outreach strategies with the community partners early and often can help direct marketing resources to the most fruitful avenues.

Step 1

Define the educational philosophy or rationale for the program.

Step 2

Set specific goals in terms of:
- Audience numbers
- Timelines
- Demographics
- Learning outcomes
- Products, i.e., curriculum, exhibition, Web site, etc.

Step 3

Describe exactly what the program is in 50 to 100 words. State the purpose of the program and answer "we do what, for whom, and for what outcome/benefit?"

Step 4

Define program specifics, such as:
- Where it takes place
- When it takes place
- Who does it and what they do
- How resources will be shared

Step 5

Inventory resources, including:
- Museum staff expertise (curatorial/ research content, education, and administrative)
- Teaching materials
- Budget for the program
- Staff expertise and resources for each partner organization
- Spaces and equipment
- Current and potential funding sources
- Additional staff, teaching materials, or other resources and funding needed to fill in gaps in existing resources

Step 6

Work with community collaborators/ partners to:
- Research community to identify and recruit advisors, collaborators, or partners.
- Clarify roles and responsibilities for community involvement based on available resources and shared goals and priorities.
- Establish process for timely communications and decision-making.

- Consider forming an advisory committee to help support the endeavor.

Step 7

Market the program.
- Solicit feedback from representatives of the targeted community regarding marketing strategies, messages, and materials.
- Name the program.
- Choose a variety of marketing and media strategies.
- Create visually attractive materials (postcards, posters, etc.) that community members will want to distribute to their constituents.
- Determine program fee (if there is one) that will match the "perceived value" of the program by the target audience.

Step 8

Determine documentation strategies.
- Who is responsible?
- What methods will be used?
- How will the documentation be used?
- Are additional funds required?

Step 9

Set a formative evaluation strategy.
- What are the critical checking-in points? Determine when and how often the program should be evaluated.
- How will the program be assessed? By whom?
- How will results be communicated to each set of stakeholders?
- What method and cycle will be used for making changes to improve the program?

Step 10

Set a summative evaluation strategy.
- How will the program be evaluated at its completion and by whom?
- How will progress towards goals be measured?
- How will the impact on each of the relationships in the program evaluation rubric be measured?
- How will results be communicated to stakeholders?

Program Development

Successful program development depends on having a good idea about what it is you want to do and have to offer. What is special about your museum that is worth sharing with others, and what is special about your potential partners that they can bring to the museum? What new product or value comes from joining your resources and areas of expertise? What is your shared vision of what will change for the museum and what will change for your partner? The ten steps outlined in Figure 6 may provide museums and communities with some guide posts for developing collaborative programs.

Sustaining Institutional Commitment of All Partners

Program development decisions and rationale will flow more readily once you have gained the commitment and clarity of purpose from self- and audience assessments. To the extent possible, all the collaborators should provide input and agree upon the program specifics, such as where and when it takes place, and exactly who does what. The museum will be rewarded if it can be flexible to meet internal and external partner and community needs. Making sure that everyone's expenses are acknowledged and covered by the budget also helps keep things running smoothly.

Creating checkpoints and feedback cycles within the project allows participants and all stakeholders to continually assess and improve the program. When planning, be sure to include time and resources for appropriate documentation. These feedback cycles—and the quality of the documentation fed into them—are important not only to fine-tune program strategies but also to acknowledge success. Success is something that can be and should be celebrated even when it is not complete.

By setting program goals and planning with collaborators, program planners lay the groundwork for evaluation. In addition to measuring progress towards quantitative goals, discuss which relationships will be most important to evaluate and how you will do it.

Operational Tips

Sometimes, even when all the groundwork is laid in terms of relationship building and planning, things happen within organizations or the environment that hamper progress or prevent synchronicity. Changes in key personnel, policy shifts that affect budget or mission priority, or mismatches in personality can threaten to derail good initiatives. While these circumstances are often unavoidable, try to maintain enough flexibility within the project so that you can discuss alternatives and change what you're doing. Being open to change is critical when working within a larger dynamic community. What can at first be perceived as unexpected crises can turn into new opportunities that often yield even better results. Strong partnerships built on a foundation of trust and respect are more likely to weather these challenges.

Works Cited

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Participants