

Public Curation as Civic Engagement: Naming Success in Participatory Curatorial Models

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Abstract

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Museology

In a 2002, *Mastering Community Engagement* was published by the American Alliance of Museums as a “call to action” through their Museums and Community Initiative to inspire more civic-minded museum practice, envisioning the museum as an active player in the community, a safe haven, and a center for dialogue and change. (AAM) The study noted that civic engagement “...occurs when museum and community intersect – on subtle and overt ways, over time, and as an accepted and natural way of doing business.” (AAM, 9) One method museums have used to facilitate civic engagement is public curation.

Although community–institution collaboration as a design process has been applied in the fields of social sciences, art, and the humanities, there is a deficit of knowledge about how to approach or measure the impact of this collaborative work in the museum industry, and the terminology or vernacular around this work is inconsistent and varied. Thus, this research attempts to articulate goals and potential indicators of success, which may be useful to museums that are exploring or assessing community collaboratives around exhibit development. The study uses qualitative research methods from the field of feminist methodology and the social sciences method of grounded theory. Semi-structured interviews and document analysis were used to

gather data from museum professionals at five different institutions utilizing public curation models, with the goal being to identify several guiding principles for this work and to lay the groundwork for a theory on public curation.

This research suggests four trends: 1) professionals who utilize these models define the scope of public curation as a publicized exhibit process that affects a community or communities; 2) public curation models allow for active, rather than passive visitor engagement; 3) museums in this study use evidence of community involvement as an indicator of success, and note community empowerment as an institutional benefit; 4) museums utilizing these models tend to also value community empowerment, and this type of institutional culture is a strong factor in a museum's decision to pursue public curation. The results of this study suggest that public curation models can assist museums looking to take on or continue building strong partnerships within their communities.

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Preface & Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Museums are increasingly called upon to reach out to their communities in new and thought-provoking ways. Communities are powerful assets to museums looking to reach new audiences and donor bases, and these community members hold a great amount of influence and power that museums are now noticing as vital to their institutional success (AAM, 2002). In 2002, a report by the American Alliance of Museums, entitled *Mastering Civic Engagement*, was published as a call to action by professionals intending to inspire more civic-minded museum practice, envisioning the museum as an active player in their community, a safe haven, and a center for dialogue and change. (AAM, 2002) In *Mastering Civic Engagement*, it was noted that museums looking to expand their civic role have realized that while their strategies are “community-oriented, they are not always civic-minded,” meaning that they are not fostering a mode of civic engagement that shares an authoritative voice with the community (AAM, 16). However, looking at non-traditional museum models, along with the inclusion of community members into museum planning, has highlighted some interesting opportunities within the field of museum exhibition (Hooper-Greenhill, 2006).

What are these opportunities and where are they manifesting within the museum structure? As museums move into politically charged arenas, and engage greater numbers of people, they are meeting increasingly diverse audiences who may be looking to make personal connections within and around the museum space with the information the institution is offering. It appears that these personal connections are first occurring within museum exhibits. In order to expand the stories we tell, and to advance the relevance and authenticity of the ways we

represent the cultures of present and past, museums are experimenting with different models of engaging communities through exhibit development.

Although the collaboration between community and institution on a design process has been applied in the fields of social sciences, art, and the humanities, there is a deficit of knowledge about how to approach or measure the impact of this collaborative work, and even the terminology or vernacular around this work is inconsistent and varied. Very little research has been done on the goals of these types of community collaboration, such as the impact on visitors, institutions and communities. This research attempts to articulate goals and potential indicators of success, which may be useful to museums that are exploring or assessing community collaboratives around exhibit development. While there are different models and terminologies used, this research has adopted a construct of public curation that draws from the fields of public humanities and participatory design, and will add to the larger museum discourse on civic engagement through museum exhibition. As museums explore these new territories of political change and social justice, it's possible that they will also redefine old paradigms of museum scholarship by exploring new methods of curation and civic engagement.

Literature Review

The goal of this literature review is to identify and contextualize the intersecting concepts that can shape the future of civic-minded museology, looking primarily at museum authority, community representation, and theoretical models of inclusion. The five main sections will cover

the intersecting disciplines that inform civic-minded curatorial models. This work uses a definition of “public curation.”

“Public curation is... an umbrella term used to encompass ‘participatory design,’ ‘user-driven content,’ and the broad and creative range of ways public (or non-professional) audiences are increasingly and collaboratively involved in shaping museum products, processes, and experiences.” (Morrissey, p. 196)

Some of the concepts included in this research are new terms to the museum industry, and are critical to understanding the scope and purpose of this research. For the purpose of this study, these terms are defined as below.

- **Civic engagement:** “...occurs when museum and community intersect – on subtle and overt ways, over time, and as an accepted and natural way of doing business.” (AAM, 9)
- **Civic-minded:** concerned with civic interests, community well-being, or active in community affairs.
- **Community:** a social group of any size whose members reside in a specific locality, share government, and often have a common cultural and historical heritage.
- **Curation:** the act of leading or organizing a museum exhibit or program.
- **Curatorial authority:** the power of the curator to determine, adjudicate, or otherwise settle issues; the right to control the exhibit process.
- **Inclusion:** the act of overcoming barriers that cause people to feel excluded; making sure that people are connected socially, and in their broader community.
- **Public/s:** the people constituting a community, state, or nation.

These concepts are only a cursory glance into the wide range of terms and definitions that were encountered during this research process, but should help to orient the reader to the current conversations on public curation models.

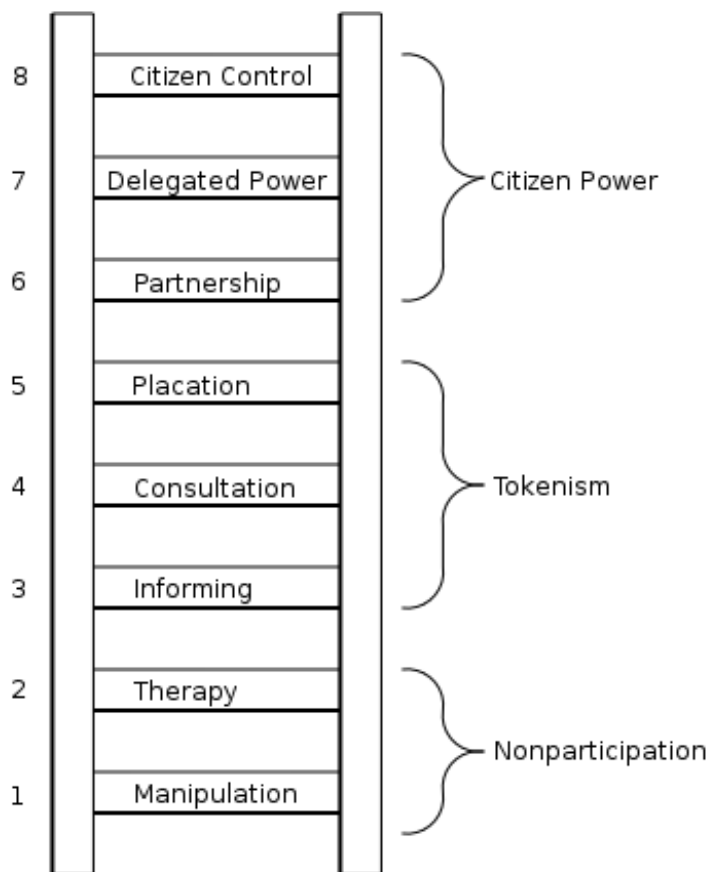
Inclusion and Authority

Object-centered learning is at the center of most conventional museums, and is based on the modern notion that “objects are meaningful - collecting and organizing them can be a means of making sense and gaining knowledge of the world” (Sutter, 205; Macdonald, 85). This type of knowledge appreciation is common in the museum industry, with museum professions discerning meaning and order to an arrangement of objects through exhibits and educational programs (85). However, this act, not unlike other forms of knowledge production in formal and informal learning institutions, can create a power dynamic in which object and concept representation are being decided by “people who know” and transferred to “people who do not know” (de Varine, 227).

This power dynamic between institution and community is well illustrated in Shelly Arnstein’s “ladder of citizen participation,” in which Arnstein (1969) argues the critical difference between “the empty ritual of participation and having the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process,” since participation without a redistribution of power only allows for a select group of stakeholders to benefit from the end product (p. 217). In order to create an environment for true citizen participation, those in power (“people who know”), should then redistribute their power to those who have been excluded so that they may be “deliberately included in the future” (Arnstein, p. 216). Arnstein splits the levels of citizen participation from nonparticipation at the bottom rung, tokenism (false participation) in the middle rungs, and

citizen power at the top rung in order to show the different levels of participation that exist within society (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: *Eight rungs on the ladder of citizen participation.*



Although there are several types of participatory models that uphold citizen power, Henry Sanoff's theory of participatory design explicitly calls out citizen participation as a more potent and efficient way to create and manage an environment, instead of citizens being "passive consumers." Sanoff describes participatory design as a engaged design process rooted in "trust, intimacy, and consensus," with the aim to change the practice of design to a more egalitarian model, and have an effect on the lives of the end-users (the community) (2008, p. 66).

Participatory design, which is commonly used by architects, urban, and environmental planners, utilizes community resources and better represents the social needs of the community through the incorporation of citizens in the decision-making process of design (Sanoff, 1990). Both participatory design, and the argument for citizen participation, bring to light the hierarchy of knowledge and authority that exists within society.

This hierarchy is addressed by feminist scholar bell hooks (1994) in her novel, *Teaching To Transgress*, in which she describes her theory of “engaged pedagogy,” which is the act of teaching in such a way that it empowers students instead of treating them as “passive consumers.” This sharing of power within the classroom echoes Sanoff’s theory of participatory design, identifying learners as active participants when knowledge is shared. In this theory, hooks also notes that when applied successfully, engaged pedagogy can promote social and political activism. (hooks, 1994) Engaged pedagogy is influenced largely by educator Paolo Friere’s (1968) term “critical consciousness,” coined in his work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to define education as a practice of freedom, rather than submission (de Varine, 227; hooks, 14). Freire’s insistence that education can only be liberatory when “everyone claims knowledge as a field in which we all labor” is a concept used both in civic-minded museology and in engaged pedagogy (de Varine, 227; hooks, 14).

Similar to the civic-minded museum value of community involvement, engaged pedagogy emphasizes well-being, student empowerment, and teacher commitment (hooks, 15). Engaged pedagogy as a theoretical model builds on shared authority between student and teacher, or in the case of museology, museum and community. According to hooks, teachers find that engaged pedagogy is difficult to accept, as exposing “certain truths and biases” may dissolve

the authority they once had, forcing them to observe their own limitations in training and knowledge (hooks, 30). This too is possible in museums, but observing and repairing limitations in current museum knowledge can further strengthen community partnerships and lead to the creation of new teaching methods and techniques (de Varine, 226).

Civic Engagement in Museums

It has been stated that museums matter “only to the extent that they are perceived to provide communities with coming of value beyond their mere existence,” thus serving the greater good of the public (Weil, p. 4-5). However, the definition of “public” is still subjective to museums, and many museums are criticized for a lack of social responsibility despite the diverse communities they serve (Korn, p. 255). In 2002, the American Alliance of Museums’ board of directors created the “Museums & Community Initiative (M&C)” in the hopes that a study on how museums handle civic engagement would inform future standards for the field. In *Mastering Civic Engagement* (2002), a summative analysis of M&C, AAM professionals suggested that community members felt the museums in their area were “talking the talk but not walking the walk” (AAM, 3). This outcome is revisited throughout this work and in other pieces of literature, identifying that there is a lack of evaluation and critique on civic engagement, as well as a broad definition for “civic engagement” (AAM, 2002; Coxall, 2006; Igoe and Roosa, 2002; Borun, et al, 2011).

In study preceding *Mastering Civic Engagement*, two professionals working with AAM’s M&C initiative conducted a study gathering citizen feedback on community-museum relations. Participants took part in facilitated conversations about the role of the community in museums, and were asked to describe what they felt was a community-centered museum. Overwhelmingly,

they responded in favor of a museum that shared the authority of creating events, exhibits, and programs with the community (Igoe and Roosa, 2002). Additionally, participants described this type of museum as “exceeding the public’s expectations,” “creating bonds of trust,” and “thought-provoking” (19). Another study on civic engagement from the Bridges Conference (2011) found similar recommendations and ideas that highlighted community participation and effective communication, noting that while these suggestions seem straightforward, implementation requires effort and museums must be consistent with their approach, i.e., they must adopt these changes into their institutional framework permanently (Borun, et al, 40). This change in ethos can be as simple as defining who a museum’s community in order to avoid exclusion.

To avoid exclusion, some communities have been calling for museums to practice inclusion, which is defined by Coxall (2006) as recognizing and consulting with communities as well as mainstreaming diversity awareness. A study by Mieri (2010) on the Latino Virtual Gallery and Bracero Program found that the diversity that is present in Latino communities was often misrepresented in museums due to a focus on existing collections rather than community involvement. Mieri also notes that including community members in the decision-making process created an exhibit that more accurately reflected the perspectives of the producers of knowledge themselves (Mieri, 216). Likewise, an initiative mentioned by Coxall by London museologists, *Holding Up The Mirror* , found that “we [museums] need to be aware that we bring our own prejudices and judgments to ways in which we interpret and present objects and the stories they tell” (Coxall, 148). By encouraging attitudes of social inclusion and motions towards global accessibility, museums may begin to develop systematic measures by which to assess

equity issues and issues of mis-representation, while sending a message to communities that their needs and interests are worthwhile to the institution (Sullivan, 257).

Participatory Curatorial Models

Per Simon (2010), there are “three main reasons that cultural institutions engage in co-creative (i.e., participatory) projects:

1. To give voice and be responsive to the needs and interest of local community members
2. To provide a place for community engagement and dialogue
3. To help participants develop skills that will support their own individual and community goals,”

Simon states that in addition to these motives, the institutional culture of these types of museums is one that allows the directors and coordinators of these projects to “...see their institutions as community-based organizations in service to the needs of visitors, rather than as providers of services the institution perceives as valuable.” (Simon, 2010, p. 263-4) Although this dynamic redistribution of authority within the curatorial process might be viewed by some as controversial, or radical, several models of participatory curation within the industry have shown interesting results.

Community Curation

Institutions employing “community curation” can range from the type of curation model used by museums that address the needs of a local culture, to low-key gallery exhibits that are organized by a group of community members. For the New York Chinatown History Project (NYCHP), community curation can be described as a “dialogue” between “academic historians

and people with lived experience... [and] the established exclusionary narrative and the individual story that challenges it” (Tchen, Sevchenko, 2011, p. 85). The embracing of multiple perspectives is used in community galleries as well, where “outside participants manage all aspects of content development, exhibit design, and fabrication themselves” (Simon, 2010, p. 295). These community galleries can be organized by cultural institutions that provide minimal staff support in a “hands off approach,” while at the same time, lending authority to these alternative narratives and drawing attention to critical social issues (Simon, 2010, p. 297) (Schwartz, Adair, 2011, p. 112).

Ecomuseology

Although the prefix suggests that the ecomuseum model is primarily dedicated to the conservation of a natural environment, ‘eco’ in this case is derived from Greek, oikos, meaning a living space or habitat (Davis, 3). The ecomuseum evolved in France during the 1970s, as a term developed by museologists Hugues de Varine and Georges Henri Rivi re to describe a museum focused on the “essence of place,” a far cry from the rigid structures of French museums at the time (Davis, 54). Ecomuseums, also called “new museums,” or “community museums,” reflect the holistic principles of eco-social conservation that are often used to support sustainable practices (de Varine, 226). Community and society, de Varine states, are at the very core of ecomuseology, and are kept in close proximity in order to recognize, respect, and use cultural heritage (226). The concepts of territory and proximity are recurring themes in ecomuseology, as indications of both “the geographical limits of the ecomuseum but also [as a connotation] ... of the subjects and communities with which the museum engages” (Davis, 4). This embrace of both physical and cultural systems results in what both de Varine and Davis claim is an open-ended,

flexible museum model, that places its community as a key point by which it defines all subsequent activities (de Varine, 228, Davis, 4).

New Museology

Many of these ideals that surround the ecomuseum model have been linked with changes in museum philosophy and the manifestation of new museology (Davis, 54). Closely tied to the postmodernist philosophies of the 1960s and 70s, new museology attempted to both revitalize the educational role of museums while also dismissing the elitist nature of old museology (55). Davis quotes Peter Vergo (1991) in stating that “old museology... is too much about museum methods and too little about the purposes of museums” (55). However, both Davis (1999) and de Varine (1988) make a valid point that new museology as a movement and the ecomuseum model are not the same, as the latter is a response to societal needs for greater authority and community voice in museums (Davis, 56). Still, new museology has significantly informed the ecomuseum model as the movement puts considerable value on community involvement (57). Community voice is a strong indicator of a successful ecomuseum, as it signifies a local identity (local to the ecomuseum) and active co-operation between museum staff and community members (Davis, 224). This local identity is important to the continued existence of the ecomuseum, and through sharing authority ecomuseums are more likely to maintain a strong tie to their community.

Crowd Curation

The term “crowd curation” is best exemplified by the Brooklyn Museum’s curation process for *Click! A Crowd-Curated Exhibition* (2008). This curatorial model focuses mainly on “crowd-based decision-making,” by creating an online exhibition platform that relinquished

curatorial control to anyone with the means to access the data (Simon, 2010, p. 118). *Click!* was comprised of a call for submission to the general public centered around the theme, “the changing face of Brooklyn,” followed by the opening of an online voting platform that allowed the public to judge photographs on a sliding scale (Simon, 2010, p. 118). Photos with the highest scores were then displayed relative to their ranking, and an online forum was opened to allow visitors the opportunity to discuss the artwork, allowing citizens to continue re-defining the artwork and exhibit framework (Simon, 2010, p. 119).

Museums outside the Museum.

Although many museums are creating participatory curation platforms within their own museum, there are institutions who have decided to take the museum exhibit out of the museum – literally – by creating pop-ups, mobile, and open-source museum exhibits. These types of curatorial models bring the museum exhibit “outside” by either bringing the exhibit to the public rather than visa versa (mobile models), allowing visitors to contribute exhibit content as they arrive (additive models), or a combination of the two (Simon, 2010, p. 204). Traveling exhibit platforms like the Mobile Arts Platform, the Black History 101 Mobile Museum, and the San Francisco Mobile Museum all rely on both community-sourced content and a high level of public accessibility to function (Foucalt, Treggiari, 2014, About) (el-Hakim, 2014, Exhibits) (Mortati, 2014). Instead of community members traveling to and paying for a museum visit, Mobile museum models create informal museum environments that allow for citizen participation to happen within their own community (Foucalt, Treggiari, 2014, About).

Pop-up museums such as the Santa Cruz Museum’s pop-up model, the Pop-Up Museum of Queer History, and the Denver Community Museum take this experience one step further, by

creating a space where visitors can alternate between functioning as an exhibit participant and co-curator, and then moving to an audience standpoint again (Simon, 2010, p. 204). Says Jaime Kopke (2010) on the Denver Community Museum, the exhibits not only functioned as something to view and read, but “...included something that you could touch, take, or most importantly leave behind” (Simon, p. 205) In exhibit models where content is either outside of the traditional museum space, or is being created as visitors come to the exhibit, participants in these types of models often “feel a high level of ownership and pride when their participation is tied to the project’s success,” resulting in a shared experience between the participant and the museum (Simon, 2010, p. 207).

Summary

This review suggests that while museums are experimenting with different models of curation that allow public participation, there is a deficit of shared knowledge on the success of these models or the terminology surrounding them. However, the literature discussed in this paper shows that links can be made between practices of inclusion, non-conventional teaching models, and new museum models, creating an opportunity for a cross-disciplinary critique of civic engagement in museums. Theories of inclusion and participation such as Arnstein (1969), hooks (1994), and Sanoff (2008) show a connection between active participation, active learning, and sharing power, which suggests that when citizens are invited to participate in institutional processes intended to create knowledge (for example, the process of creating museum exhibits) this can result in community empowerment. Additionally, results from museums that have practiced community consultation and representation appear to be favorable, indicating that there

is an environment that supports these new ideals, and museums “are ready to pursue this potential” (AAM, p. 10).

Methodology

This qualitative research examined new models of public curation, with a specific focus on success in these models. This research is situated within the larger museum discourse about civic engagement through museum exhibition, as well as in the field of public humanities.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this research. These do not seek final answers, but are instead prompts for discussion to inform a more open, public-minded museum practice.

1. How are museum professionals defining ‘public curation?’
2. How are museums creating exhibits with their communities, and how are these relationships manifested?
3. What are the benefits of a museum sharing curatorial authority with the public?
4. Is there a collective ethos that could inform museums looking to engage their communities through public curation?

Theory

When I approach the topic of public curation, I do so as a feminist, a scholar, a community advocate, and a museum professional. Acknowledging my background, as well as

the background of my interviewees, incorporates subjectivity into the study and empowers the participants. This ideology encouraged the use of qualitative research methods from the field of feminist methodology and the social sciences method of grounded theory for this study. The use of feminist methodology as a research structure affords a balanced dialogue between two parties, with both researcher and participant assuming active roles in the research process. Additionally, using unconventional terms such as “participant” instead of “subject” is a signal that the researcher is operating in a feminist framework that includes the power to name or rename. (Reinhartz, p. 22).

The choice for grounded theory rose out of my interest in allowing participants to define the key term in the study, “public curation.” Grounded theory will also allow for the development of a theory on public curation that might offer an explanation as to how these curatorial methods work in certain contexts. Through detailed coding, this method helped generalize patterns and regularities within these specific cases, instead of across the entire field of museum curation. By isolating these variables, this research as a whole may identify principles and relationships that could build a theory of public curation. By situating this research within the context of more progressive, community-oriented museum cultures, I hope to retain a richness and depth of meaning.

Methods

This data is comprised of documentation of the public curation models in question, interviews with museum professionals at each institution, and optional, post-interview feedback. For the semi-structured interview, prompts tend to revolve around definitions of public curation and the participants’ mode of curation at their respective institution, indicators of success in their

model, and their opinion on the ethos of civic-minded institutions. Post-interview feedback was collected in order to gather outstanding information that was missed in the interview or arose out of the participant’s reflection of any topics discussed in the interview. For original copies of both instruments, please see the appendix of this paper.

Participants

This research focused on five different institutions across the U.S.. These museums were chosen through careful research online and in written scholarship using keywords such as “public curation,” “crowd curation,” and “community curation.” Each museum has developed at least two exhibits using a curatorial process that shares decision-making with a public or publics for a current or past exhibit. Additionally, each museum professional was self-selected for the interview based off of the initial email that contained information on the research and the responsibilities of joining the study.

Figure 2: *Chart of research participants*

	Wing Luke Museum	Oakland Museum	Queens Museum	SF Mobile Museum	Santa Cruz MAH
Contact Name	Mikala Woodward	Evelyn Orantes	Prerana Reddy	Maria Mortati	Nora Grant; Zealand Reynolds
Professional Title	Exhibit Developer/ Oral History Manager	Senior Experience Developer	Director of Public Program & Community Engagement	Director/ Exhibit Developer	Community Programs Coordinator; Pop-Up Facilitator
Name of model	Community-based exhibition model	“Contribution, collaboration, & co-creation”	Community Partnership Gallery Exhibition Program	Mobile museum	Pop-up museum

The five institutions and participants are as follows:

Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience – Seattle, WA

The first museum professional I spoke with was Mikala Woodward, Exhibit Developer and Oral History Manager at the Wing Luke Museum. Established in 1967 through a memorial fund for Wing Luke, a prominent Seattle city councilman who made history as the “first person of color on the Seattle City Council, and the first Asian American elected to public office in the Pacific Northwest,” the museum’s vision to engage and inspire the diverse Asian Pacific American communities has been present since the first day it opened. (Wing Luke, 2014)

Although the museum has had longstanding ties with these communities since its inception, it was not until former executive director Ron Chew came to the Wing in 1991 that their current community-based exhibition model was established. Chew’s “unusual background as a journalist and community activist” led him to create a model that focuses on oral history and local issues rather than museum-sourced content. (Simon, 265) Mikala discussed the public curation process in the context of two recent exhibits the Wing has produced in the past year, *Under My Skin*, an art exhibit about race and racism, and *Grit*, the stories of Asian Pacific Pioneers across the Northwest from the 19th to early 20th centuries.

Oakland Museum of California – Oakland, CA

The second museum professional I spoke with was Evelyn Orantes, one of OMCA’s three Senior Experience Developers and the current project director for the annual Days of the Dead exhibit. Although she has been with the museum for over fourteen years, OMCA has been committed to representing the members of the Bay Area’s diverse communities since the museum opened in 1969. Part of OMCA’s methodology is referred to as the “three c’s: contribution, collaboration, and co-creation,” and Orantes’ main job is to be an “advocate for the

visitor or the user... of our exhibitions,” by working with curators, designers, and OMCA’s community advisory councils. (Orantes, 2014) The “three c’s” refer to the different levels of community participation in the conception, development, and design of OMCA exhibits, education, and public programs. In addition to guest curators and community leaders, there are five community advisory councils at the museum that are included in this collaborative process: the Latino, African-American, Asian Pacific islander, teacher, and Days of the Dead advisory councils.

Queens Museum – Queens, NY

The third museum professional I spoke with was Prerana Reddy, Director of Public Programs & Community Engagement at the Queens Museum in Queens, NY. Similar to the work at OMCA, the QMA’s Community Partnership Gallery Exhibition Program (CPGEP) arose not out of the curatorial department, but out of education and public programming at the museum, although QMA curators do often get involved in the program “on a production level, not on a conceptual level.” (Reddy, 2014) The exhibition program’s beginnings roughly coincided with the arrival of QMA director, Tom Finklepearl, and his “interest in public art, and socially collaborative work,” and his idea of “the institution as a public institution”. (Reddy, 2014) The museum opened in 1972, and its exhibits have since reflected the incredible diversity of the Queens neighborhood, with demographer Joseph Salvo calling it one of the “most diverse places on earth,” with over 46% of the borough's population identifying as foreign-born in 2000.” (Colangelo, 2009)

San Francisco Mobile Museum – San Francisco, CA

The fourth museum professional I spoke with was Maria Mortati, creator of the San Francisco Mobile Museum project in San Francisco, CA. This experimental project was created by Mortati (2014) as a “project where [she] could have an experimental platform to do a variety of public curation projects with the community.” The mobile museum was purposefully developed to be flexible, allowing Mortati to play with different “ideas, formats, and locations,” and in addition to existing as a pop-up in various locations around the Bay Area, the exhibits developed by Mortati were also cataloged and discussed on her blog, the *SF Mobile Museum* (2014). As the museum is funded entirely by Mortati, and exists as a side project in addition to other exhibit development work she pursues, the museum is currently on hiatus.

Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History – Santa Cruz, CA

The last institution I spoke with was the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History, in Santa Cruz, CA; where I spoke with their Community Programs Coordinator, Nora Grant, and a Pop-Up Museum Facilitator, Zealand Reynolds. The pop-up museum model currently used by the MAH began as an experimental project developed by Michelle DelCarlo in 2012. After coming to the MAH for a guest pop-up on “love” that coincided with their exhibit at the time, the MAH decided that the model worked well with the museum’s current and future goals, and adopted the model. The pop-up model at the MAH is supported by the James Irvine foundation, which provided a grant called the Exploring Engagement Fund, “that funded the execution of 30 pop up museum in collaboration with community partners,” however, Grant has stated that the MAH will continue to use the model regularly even after the grant money runs out. (Grant, 2014)

Analysis & Results

The data collected in this study reflect the unique method of public curation within each institution, as well many regularities across all five institutions that reflect the beginnings of a theory on public curation amongst the museum professionals who are working with these types of models. In order to identify these commonalities, each research question will be used to explore the found data, noting categorical information as it arises and grouping participant feedback to create a theory of public curation.

Defining ‘Public Curation’

Although there is a wide range of terms that are used to describe public curation, professionals who utilize these models define the scope of public curation as a publicized exhibit process that affects a community or communities, and happens outside of the traditional museum space. The definition of ‘public curation’ was one of the most agreed-upon concepts within this study. When asked to choose out of a selection of qualifiers to describe their specific public curation process, (community, crowd, and public) professionals from all five institutions chose “community” first, with only one institution selecting both “community” and “public” – the Queens Museum. When clarifying this selection, Reddy stated that while the scope of their work is both community and public-oriented, “...there’s specific emphasis around the communities that live around the museum and use the museum on a regular basis.”

It is interesting to note that while all participants chose “community” or “public” when selecting from the qualifiers of community, crowd, and public, “crowd” was never chosen. For the Wing, although “crowd” is a type of audience the Wing uses, it is used primarily for social

media outreach, which is not a part of the exhibit development process. According to Woodward, the museum is uninterested in doing “a whole exhibit, that way.” She also says, “When I think of crowd, I think of online things.” For Maria Mortati, “crowd” seems to be “unchecked... and crowd curation, which is very, very different to me [from community curation]. I mean, in order to do anything, someone has to be at the helm.”

The term ‘public curation’ can thus be broken down into two parts: the users (“who?”), and the process (“how?”). For the users of these models, museums stated that they partnered with “communities,” as opposed to the public, crowds, and so forth. These communities, as noted earlier in this paper, tended to be communities of interest (those who share a common goal, or background), and communities of place (those who reside or spend time in a specific geographical location). Defining the users of this process as a community or communities reveals not only the specific type of group, but a type of group that shares something – an interest, a common issue, or a common place.

For the Wing Luke Museum, the CAC that is gathered together represents the community of “whatever the exhibit is about,” as opposed to gathering members of the public at large, which is a “much broader [group of] people who may come to see the show.” (Woodward, 2014) Mortati agrees with aligning the exhibit topic with collaborators, saying, “I guess community curation resonates the most with me, you’re at least being specific enough – like, it’s the community of artists that you’re going to engage in. Or it’s the local, geographical community.” Determining the scope of these models appears to provide a focus to the process, says Orantes; it is inconsequential as to which one of the “three c’s [contribution, collaboration, co-creation]” is

being used by OMCA, because “...embedded in that [process] is the way we work with community groups.”

Specificity also appears to be key for professionals when describing why they have narrowed the scope of their participating audience from the larger public to a community (or related communities). This decision seems to relate to the focus of curation process, as well as the number of participants and potential size of the product itself. Both the MAH and the Queens Museum expressed an aversion to using participatory curation for creating large, conspicuous events. For the Queens’ model of gathering participants, Reddy states, “sometimes it’s the beginning of a relationship with a group of people that we want to work with in the future, or it’s already something that’s been in place. But I think that it’s not something where we announce this huge, open call [to the public].” Similarly, the MAH appears to focus on serving a select group in order to “deepen relationships amongst people through pop-up museums, rather than to provide a performance for a large group of people.” (Grant, 2014) Grant also expands upon this notion of an intimate group setting, as the MAH is “...focused on forming community within a group of people rather than doing a sort of ‘aw’ factor of large, flashy events that we do at other events at the museum.”

For the process – the “how” – of public curation, the professionals in this study discussed the open, publicized nature of their institution’s curation models. The process of each model was described as a “public” process, which first indicates transparency and accessibility within the model itself. Whether it be in print, through word of mouth, or displayed on the institution’s website, these public curation models are not insular in fashion, but have the opportunity to be widely known *outside* of the museum space. Looking across the five sites, however, suggests

that through the discussion of “sharing” or “opening up” to non-professionals, including public agencies and spaces, and having an exhibit that is physically on public, shared land, the “public” in public curation extends the reach of exhibit curation outside the traditional exhibit space one might expect to find in a museum.

For the Wing Luke Museum, the goal of the community advisory committee model is to open up the curation process to include “...a much larger group of people than just us staff or somebody who we’ve hired to be the curator” (Woodward, 2014). Additionally, for the *Under My Skin* exhibit that the museum produced in 2013 to address issues of race and racism, the Wing engaged a larger audience via community conversations that “...were very much open to the public,” before forming the CAC for the exhibit. The public conversations that were held helped the museum to identify a wider range of suggestions, a “we tried to get a much broader idea of what was important about this topic [of race].” This idea of “opening up” the process was mirrored in a discussion with Evelyn Orantes, who describes the Oakland Museum’s model as “...taking this idea of something that usually is strictly done by museum professionals and sharing that with somebody from the outside.” The Queens Museum, however, “opens up” the process of their Community Partnership Gallery Exhibition Program by focusing on intercommunity issues and public spaces, as these things “...are things that are important to civic life, especially to newer New Yorkers, and that takes a lot of work and holding public agencies and officials accountable to that public” (Reddy, 2014).

When it comes to using public curation models for moving the curatorial process outside of the museum, the San Francisco Mobile Museum and the Santa Cruz MAH’s pop-up museum exemplify a physical departure from the museum building itself. With both curation models

literally taking exhibits outside of the museum, these models may have a great potential to explore what the definition of public curation means when it's used to describe a museum exhibit that is not housed in a traditional museum. The San Francisco Mobile Museum held exhibits in Dolores Park, a large, hilly lawn in San Francisco's Mission District, whereas the MAH rotates its pop ups from businesses to parks to bars. However, it's clear that although the "public" is again, describing the process, the scope of community is not lost: "[The pop-ups] are open to the public, but rather than it just being a public event, we hope that it's a meaningful, communal space." (Grant, 2014)

In addition to defining public curation, several professionals also noted institution-specific terminology to describe their models. "Potluck curation" is a term used by both Grant and Reynolds at the Santa Cruz MAH to describe their pop-up museum model, as the participants in the process are all "bringing something to the table." This also speaks to the platform and basic structure of the pop-up model that enables people from to provide their own contribution to the exhibit, instead of just having one curator. This communal process, says Grant, is "...more like multiple people bringing something to the table as opposed to one curator providing all of the content; the content is provided by multiple people." For the Oakland Museum, how they talk about public curation is "co-creation," which is part of their "three c's" methodology, the other two being collaboration and contribution. Orantes states that they museum is "...not quite sure why we settled on that [term], – instead of public curation – to be honest with you. I think at the time it was a better way for us to talk about the different shapes it could take. And we continue to experiment and push the boundaries of what that term means for us." This data suggests that the terminology surrounding public curation is not only changing,

but will become more formalized in the future. Per Mortati, “I think it’ll get more specific. I think its been more broad in the last few years, and it seems to me that there’s a lot of thinking and writing and development and practice that’s coalescing.”

Creating Exhibits with the Community

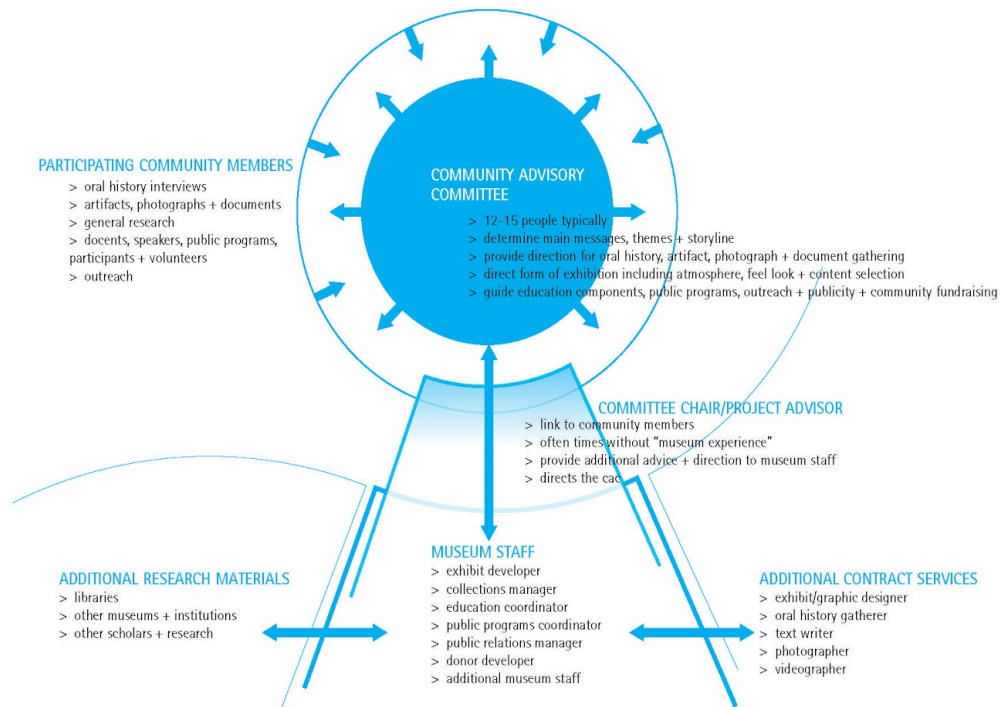
It is necessary to point out that even despite the wide range of museums studied during this process, each one depends on establishing long-term community relationships in order for the public curation model to function properly. From the Oakland Museum, with over “...140 people on staff,” to the San Francisco Mobile Museum, which exists as the one-woman project of exhibit developer Maria Mortati, each model does not exist solely within the institution that employs it, but is dependent on the needs and actions of participating community members (Orantes, 2014). Participants in the models at each museum tended to be primarily communities of interest (those who share a common goal, or background), and communities of place (those who reside or spend time in a specific geographical location). As a result, the exhibits created with this model also reflect the interests and goals of the communities who helped create them, whether it be Asian Pacific American immigrant communities, Oakland teens, or a community of local boaters and fishermen from the Santa Cruz area. In order to study the relationship between community and museum across these five sites, each public curation model will be discussed in terms of community participation and institutional methods.

Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience

The community-based exhibition model used by the Wing is referred to as a “community advisory committee” or “CAC,” and is an unique group of 10 to 15 individuals, business

associates, artists, scholars, or community leaders, brought into the museum to facilitate the Wing’s exhibit process (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: *Wing Luke Museum CAC Model Diagram*



CAC members are gathered together by the museum’s exhibit developer, Mikala Woodward, who then supervises and assists the CAC throughout the development of the final product, from “exhibition development to design to fabrication and installation, and including exhibition fundraising, publicity and marketing, education and public programming” (Wing Luke, 2014). The exhibit developer who is assisting the CAC is there not only to have a spokesperson from the museum present, but also to provide advice and to have the exhibit development experience necessary to fill in missing links and to narrow the exhibit down to a manageable size. Says Woodward, “I’ve found that it’s important to clearly define the topic of

the exhibit before you gather the committee together,” since the personality of each CAC is different from exhibit to exhibit

The CAC will also provide a base for dialogue within the exhibit by providing their own accounts or stories related to the exhibit topic. For the *Under My Skin* exhibit in particular, some of the members of the CAC, came to be interviewed as part of that or people who had been part of the race conversation, which Woodward found to be very interesting, “that they had been part of the group that had chose the art and obviously had a huge hand in how the exhibit turned out, but they would also then share these really personal responses to the piece of art that we hadn’t heard before” (Woodward, 2014).

Figure 4: *Under My Skin* exhibit entrance



Although the community members involved are not the main curatorial force in the Wing's exhibit process, they are integrated into these decision-making positions that would traditionally be reserved for museum staff or outside museum professionals. The purpose of the model is to put community members in "decision-making positions where they are empowered to determine project direction, set priorities, make selections, and guide project execution" (Wing Luke, 2014). This sharing of authority, says Woodward, also empowers the community at large to "tell it's stories," as the CAC identifies the message and themes of the exhibit, instead of allowing an institution to tell their stories for them, or in some cases, fail to do so. Says one community member, "The result is an institution that has become a 'people's museum'" (Simon, 266).

Oakland Museum of California

The designation of a "people's museum" has also been applied to the Oakland Museum of California (OMCA) (Orantes, 2014). Orantes' work with the Days of the Dead exhibit is one example of the civic-minded work that OMCA is involved in. Initiated by members of Oakland's Latino community, who felt that the East Bay area was lacking in celebrating this tradition in community spaces, the annual Days of the Dead exhibit "started as an exhibit and as a community celebration, and was the only project of its kind at the time." The exhibit has since repeated annually and has become a "platform for experimentation" for OMCA, allowing the institution to build capacity around the practice of incorporating community into exhibit development and training staff to facilitate these processes. For the first seven years, the exhibit was curated with community support, by a curator who had close ties to the Latino community, however, they have since started to open it up to guest curators every year, which Orantes says

has kept the exhibition “fresh and allowed [OMCA] to alternate from a little more contemporary some years to traditional some years.”

Figure 5: *Days of the Dead* exhibit display



By using museum methods to tell public stories and discuss public issues, OMCA has created a bridge between contemporary museum practices and local public needs that reflects the museum’s civic-minded values. This format of co-creation used in the *Days of the Dead* exhibit is a “radical departure from the way things are typically done in a traditional museum,” which may in part be due to the nature of this project coming out of the education department (Simon, 278). Orantes believes public curation results from work the education department has been doing for many years, at both OMCA and in the industry at large. Although it is difficult to pin

point when her department adopted the language of “contribution, collaboration, and co-creation,” Orantes feels that “[they’ve] been doing this work before there was a language for it... we were calling it something else – before, it was probably just the work that [the] education [department] did.”

Queens Museum

Given the incredible range in diverse communities in the borough of Queens, New York, Reddy says that the museum asked itself, what the needs of the people who would be “repeat users of this space... and the communities that live around us?” and one way of answering that was the Community Partnership Gallery Exhibition Program (CPGEP), a way to engage others in exhibition making. For the last ten years, the program has offered communities the opportunity to make a proposal for a short exhibition that usually lasts between three to four weeks. The idea is that “the education department or [the public programming] department would be the instigators or people you would want to be working with to mount the exhibition, organize the exhibition,” and the level of the museum’s involvement is flexible, depending on the “...experience and desire of the collaborating organization that we have.” For the actual implementation and marketing of the exhibit, the Queens Museum provides the space, sometimes the hardware and technology, the signage, and promotion of the event. Reddy spoke to two exhibits in particular that the museum’s Corona Plaza gallery space has held in the past years: one, a collaboration with the *Red Hook Food Vendors Committee* that brought to light the issue of health regulations in Red Hook park, where a large number of Latino food vendors had been for years, and the other with the *Ecuadorian Civic Committee* to reveal how the Ecuadorian

community, both within our country and abroad, has changed because of the phenomenon of the immigrant experience. (Bermeo, 2010)

Figure 6: *Setting up the Ecuadorian Contemporary Art and Culture exhibit*



Overall, the Queens Museums appears to be strongly motivated by goals of social change, and was the most vocal of all the participants surrounding this topic. In response to the diverse goals and backgrounds of the Queens community, the museum has integrated community organizing methodology into the curation process of the CPGEP that results in an end product that combines process, exhibit, and public discussion. Says Reddy, "...we do it because we have social change goals in mind. And so we think of this exhibition opportunity as something for organizations who are at some crucial point where visibility of an issue or public discussion

about an issue is timely in what they're trying to do and that's one of the resources we can offer them as a museum.”

San Francisco Mobile Museum

Maria Mortati's San Francisco Mobile Museum (SFMM) had a slightly different backstory from other museums involved in this study, as the mobile museum is not only a one person side project, but has the feel of an art installation rather than a museum, at times. The museum was established in 2012 to experiment with ways to engage the public as a museum, but in an alternative fashion. For SFMM exhibits, participants answer to prompts and submit content, which is then compiled by Mortati and displayed in public around the San Francisco Bay Area. The model is based off of her own design process that she has used at other institutions in addition to the SFMM project, and revolves around a two-part collaborative process: the first, when citizens submit their interpretation of a prompt to her, and the second, when museum visitors observe the work, and comment on it or react to it. For every contributor, Mortati has them photographed them professionally in addition to commenting about their contribution on the San Francisco Mobile Museum Blog and discussing reactions, related events, and thoughts about the mobile museum process.

There have been two formal exhibits; *Looking for Loci*, and *Free Shrines*. The former was in collaboration with Jaime Kopke from a similar mobile museum project, entitled the Denver Community Museum, and was comprised of small shadow boxes discussing the “spirit of a place” in their hometown of Denver or San Francisco. For *Free Shrines*, Mortati “challenged” the public in the Bay Area to create small shrines that could then be displayed on a preexisting platform (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: *San Francisco Mobile Museum exhibit, “Free Shrines”*



For Mortati, the SFMM exists as an experiment, deconstructing the definition of “museum” to the exchange of information between institution and public that can happen anywhere, even outside of the traditional museum space. Her practice revolves around ideas and the public, as she continually asks the question, “how do you engage the public in other ways?”

Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History

For the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History (MAH) The pop-up museum at the MAH is a two part project, “...designing and facilitating pop up museums in Santa Cruz county with community partners, [and] developing its web and international presence on the pop up museum

website.” (Grant, 2014) For the pop-up portion, the exhibit occurs for two to three hours at a given place and time, with a collaborator providing the theme, location, or a combination of the two. Pop-up facilitator Zealand Reynolds describes the model as a “skeleton,” as the museum provides “...the tents, the tables, ...the frames, the labels, the information, and signage.”

Figure 8: *Pop-Up at Santa Cruz Harbor*



The model itself is very flexible, as the content is provided completely by the community. This dependency on community content, says Grant, is one of the “strongest and weakest points” of the pop-up model, similar to an “...an empty frame people have been filling with something.” On occasion, the MAH includes museum objects into the pop-up exhibit, which Grant stated adds a “...nice blend of community [and] museum content, and it doesn’t happen at all of our

pop-ups, depending on staffing and time. But it's a really nice component to have community and museum content side by side. That sends a really nice message [to visitors]."

On having the pop-up museum outside the physical MAH building, Reynolds notes that this factor has tended to be an effective way to draw diverse audiences and to meet potential exhibit participants and visitors that might not typically visit the MAH. In addition to the allowance of "museum mobility," the pop-up model used by the MAH "challenges the notion of what it means to be a museum," and allows access for non-professionals to create museum exhibits to this end (Grant, 2014). By inviting community members into the exhibit process, the MAH has created a platform where the public outside the museum can see that their stories and objects are "museum-worthy" and meaningful.

Results of observed community-museum partnerships

As these institutions continue their practice of public curation, the models they use may shift in terms of budget, size, staff presence, and materials used; however, the scope remains the same. The fluid nature of these participatory curation models speaks not only to the flexibility of each museum working in this fashion, but also to the intrinsic nature of working with communities that are not static, but ever-changing, growing, and moving. Given that the flexibility of these curatorial models is in relation to combined community-museum interests, and the examples given by professionals at these institutions of the ways they integrate community members into the curatorial process, it can be concluded that the public curation models in this research are creating active, rather than passive, participation.

Identifying Indicators of Success

In order for institutions to ensure the longevity of their public curation models, it is valuable to identify indicators of success in these models to chart growth, make changes, and modify the resources needed for each iteration. Other motivations for evaluating public curation models may be to collect information on the process for grant applications, justifying budget lines, or convincing a board member to pursue a new project. Indicators of success may also be helpful in showing long-term benefits, which is crucial for museums like the Wing and OMCA, who have integrated the goals and strategies of their public curation models into their mission, vision, and culture. Many museums already use evaluation to measure the success of public events, exhibits, and educational programs, and evaluative tools can be helpful to refine these new and emerging models.

Within each interview, museum professionals discussed indicators of success, ranging from highly quantitative indicators, such as headcount, to qualitative indicators of short term and long term success. To more accurately describe how museum-community relationships operate at these sites, I compiled several indicators of success that were discussed by my site contacts. These indicators are used for evaluation purposes to ensure the model is successful, to chart growth, and to modify the resources needed for each exhibit product. Six main indicators used to evaluate success were identified: headcount/increased membership, public interest, audience diversity, community involvement, partnerships, and capacity building. The top indicator overall was evidence of community involvement in an exhibit (stated as an indicator by all five institutions), followed closely by public interest and capacity building (stated as an indicator by four out of five institutions) (see Figure 9).

Figure 9: Frequency of indicators across all five institutions

	Wing Luke Museum	Oakland Museum	Queens Museum	SF Mobile Museum	Santa Cruz MAH
Headcount/ Membership	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
Public interest	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Audience diversity	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓
Community involvement	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Partnerships	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓
Capacity building	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗

Community involvement & feedback

Participants in the study overwhelmingly favored the evidence of community involvement as an indicator that a publically curated exhibit was successful. When community members actively participated in the exhibit process, and are “shaping what happens,” professionals felt that seeing evidence of this is successful and significant (Woodward, 2014). When recounting evidence of community involvement in the *Under My Skin* exhibit at the Wing Luke Museum, Woodward recalled an emotional story shared by a community member on an early childhood experience with racism, which was later included as a part of the exhibit, and confirmed “...that’s the kind of experience that I look for to show it’s successful.” When discussing the process of the MAH’s pop-up exhibit, Reynolds noted that the exhibit “...could get a bunch of people to come out, but if they’re not bringing objects and they’re not engaged with the objects that other people have brought, talking to them, and creating stories and shared experiences and understandings... then, it’s not really that successful.” This trend reveals that the

act of participation that is visible somehow in the exhibit shows not only success, but dependence on community involvement as a facet of the exhibit – you “have to be working with community members... so museum staff [are] standing next to community members, hanging paper cut outs” (Orantes, 2014).

Public interest in the museum

The second most popular indicator of success professionals called out was increased public interest in the institution. This indicator can be described as an interest in the specific public curation model a museum is using, or an interest in the institution itself after attending/participating in a public curation process. Reddy also discusses an aspect of communication between community and institution as a type of public interest – whether the dialogue is complimenting or criticizing, “...if no one [in the community] is saying anything about it, [the process] is probably not doing anything.” Although an interest in the institution itself can result in another determination of success – overall headcount – it is interesting to note the role that public interest plays in the continuation of a public curation model, if an exhibit is successful, citizens tend to be more interested in participating again or visiting future exhibits (Woodward, 2014) (Grant, 2014)

For the Santa Cruz MAH, Grant noted that since the pop-up model started, the success of the model was evident in not only in the interest that present and future collaborators took in the model, but also the interest of other museum professionals in the field. Grant, and the MAH director, Nina Simon, have received numerous emails from other professionals, or “...people doing an article on experimental museum curation and it’s definitely getting traction in those areas which shows that people are discussing the pop-up museum in ways to materialize this

idea, so that's just one indicator: that's its being discussed in the field" (Grant, 2014). In addition to this, Grant also notes that the online Pop-Up Museum Manual that is available for download on the site *Creative Exchange*, which hosts tool kits for art projects, has seen a steady increase in the number of people downloading the PDF. Finally, public interest can also speak to a general interest in how public curation works, which could suggest the public is curious about participatory design in general; at the Oakland Museum, Orantes (2014) states that curators are being asked the question, "how do you work with communities?" which is something she believes was not asked before.

Builds capacity for institution & participants

Another popular indicator of success was evidence of increased capacity after the public curation process, with four out of five institutions speaking to the building of capacity or skill sets amongst both museum professionals and community participants. Capacity within the public curation process can be as basic as the creation of public dialogue around a certain issue discussed within the exhibit, such as the issue of race and racism in the Wing Luke Museum's *Under My Skin* exhibit, where Woodward noted a significant number of high school and college students visiting the exhibits and having interesting conversations "...about race and American politics and sociology... so I thought that was really an indication of success" (2014). The capability for dialogue can also show success of a model if the museum is partnering with outside organization, as is often the case with the Queens Museum. Reddy states that "...sometimes these projects are successful because they build capacity and visibility for the organization and it allows people to have a public dialogue around something that they think is important." (2014)

Capacity as an indicator can also refer to the building of professional skill sets within the exhibit development process, which is demonstrated by Mortati's mobile museum model that asks non-professionals to help curate exhibit content. Building capacity as an exhibit curator is a goal for the Oakland Museum when they collaborate with guest community curators on their annual *Day of the Dead* exhibit. Guest curators with little or no experience working in a museum are taught how to use OMCA's model, which they may then incorporate into their own practice and bring to other institutions; says Orantes, "...we give them all the things we need from them to do a good job, but in the process they're learning the process that can be applied to working with another museum."

Audience diversity

Tied for the third most popular indicator of success was evidence of diversity within either the audience of the exhibit or participants of the curation process. The Queens Museum states that another indicator of success for them has been that the model allows for a "diverse group of people" who are interested in similar social issues to be able to convene in a place to discuss it (Reddy, 2014). This holds true for the Oakland Museum and MAH as well, as professionals at both institutions stating that "the diversity of the audience we're serving" is an indicator they track in their models in order to ensure that the museum is reaching out to broader range of communities (Orantes, Reynolds, 2014).

Community partnerships

When museums collaborated with community organizations and factions, three out of the five sites in this study viewed this as success in their model. Although all the public curation

models researched relied on community collaboration for success, there was also a noted interest in calling out the partnerships that arose out of using the public curation models. For the MAH, continued use of the pop-up model has resulted in a growth of community organization and businesses that are interested in doing future collaborations with the museum because of their experience with the pop-up exhibit (Grant, 2014). This point was also brought up as the question, “has the [exhibit process] deepened our relationship?” that the Queens Museum continually asks of its Community Gallery Program, in order to ensure that they are creating long term partnerships instead of temporary ones (Reddy, 2014).

Headcount/Membership

Increased headcount is usually one of the first quantifiable indicators that museums look to for the success of an exhibit, and museums are “always [wanting] to get more people through the door” to increase their chances to create meaningful connections with visitors (Mortati, 2014). Both the Wing Luke Museum and the Oakland Museum recalled the success of their past exhibit projects by describing the number of visitors they recorded: for the opening of the Wing’s *Under My Skin*, “...over 700 people came to the opening [of *Under My Skin*], and that was a record for us.” (Woodward, 2014) Similarly, Orantes noted her experience with increasing numbers of school tours and groups visiting the exhibit, “...from the beginning it was a success ...this exhibit is open for eight weeks, and over the course of eight weeks we serve about 5,000-6,000 schoolchildren. We only tour on Wednesdays, Thursday, and Fridays – that’s a lot of kids.”

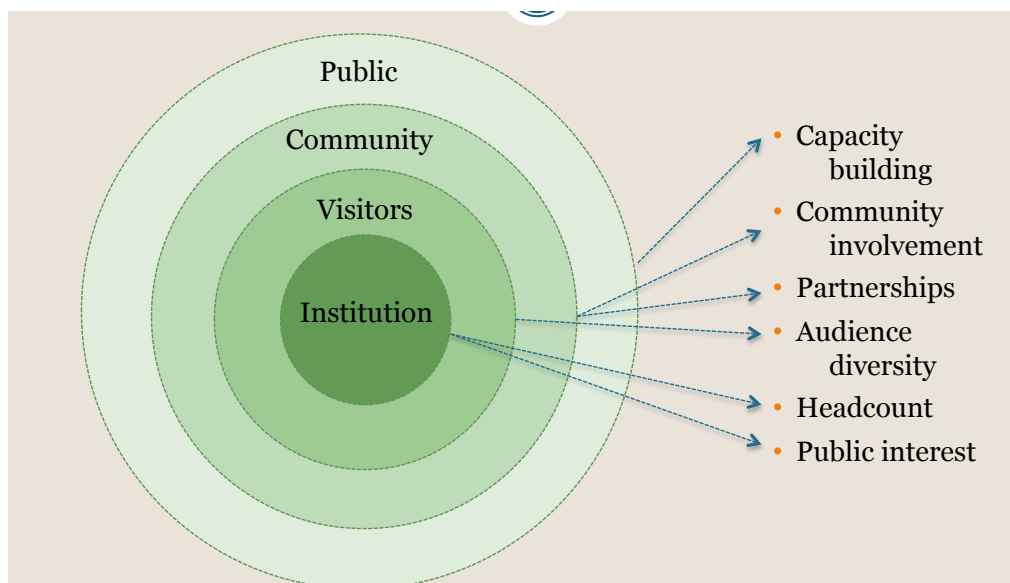
However, out of the six categories of indicators of success within these public curation models, using visitor traffic to measure success was the least common. Other institutions in the

study noted that headcount was not an important indicator of whether or not the exhibit was successful, but instead valued that the “right people show up” that reflects community interest instead of overall public interest (Reddy, 2014). For the Santa Cruz MAH, attendance has been flexible in relation to the overall size of the exhibit and whether the location permits a larger crowd; says Grant, the project isn’t so focused on numbers, ...it’s not necessarily our goal.” However, the MAH utilizes a check sheet to record headcount, diversity, and participation in the exhibit, suggesting that headcount is being used to inform the number of people being reached by the exhibit instead of whether or not a large crowd equals a successful exhibit.

Mapping indicators of success

After charting the frequency by which each indicator of success was found across all five museums in this study, the data began to suggest that these indicators were not inclusive to the museum, but instead were factors that impacted visitors, communities, and the larger public.

Figure 10: *Mapping indicators of success from the institution to the public*



This concept map (Figure 10) suggests that when museums evaluate the success of their public curation models, they look to factors not only within the institution, but to evidence in their visitors, communities, and the larger public. The most-used indicator, community involvement, impacts not just the institution itself, or the population of visitors coming to the museum itself, but the community at large that has a stake in the exhibit. This correlation may also speak to the range of influence these models might have when they are successful.

Institutional Benefits of Public Curation Models

Trends within stated benefits of public curation models were found similar to indicators of success. The data revealed six categories of benefits to museums using public curation models: that it increases headcount, allows for experimentation, ensures a diverse range of voices, empowers the community, is low committal and low maintenance, and that the model reflects museum values. The top benefit to this type of model was found to be that it empowers the community, closely followed by the ability for experimentation, incorporation of a diverse range of voices, and the reflection of museum values, which would effect the museum's reputation positively (see Figure 11). These benefits are closely aligned with the indicators of success discussed by museum professionals in this study, showing that benefits are dependent on the success of these models, which could be a strong motivation for museums to ensure that they devote the time and resources necessary to have a successful public curation model.

Figure 11: Frequency of institutional benefits in public curation models

	Wing Luke Museum	Oakland Museum	Queens Museum	SF Mobile Museum	Santa Cruz MAH
Increases headcount	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
Allows for experimentation	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
Diverse range of voices	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Empowers community	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Low committal & maintenance	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓
Reflects museum values	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓

Empowers community

As evidenced above (see Figure 11) empowering the community was said to be an institutional benefit within all six interviews; this data reveals that institutions value sharing the rewards of public curation models with their community and are genuinely interested in their well-being. Professionals discussed community empowerment as a sharing of authority by bringing citizens into a space that is for them specifically, whether it be in or outside the museum building. For the Wing Luke, the initial motivation for the community-based exhibition model was to bring Asian Pacific American community members into the museum, make them a part of exhibit development, and “empower them to tell their own stories” (Woodward, 2014).

Woodward goes on to describe this goal as a necessity, since “the more people have a stake in it [the exhibit] and feel a part of it is important because we need it to empower people to tell their stories rather than having an institution do it for them or fail to do it for them.” Woodward also notes that by bringing citizens into the public curation process who may have felt that they

weren't comfortable, welcome, or well-represented in a museum , the public curation process opens the museum up in this way to the community.

Professionals also defined community empowerment by highlighting the importance of sharing curatorial privilege, which Orantes describes as taking the curatorial process, which is something that is "...strictly done by museum professionals and sharing that with somebody from the outside to hopefully come up with a genuine product that really can capture a visitor's attention, can inspire, can say it in a way and through using the tools that we use at museums, tell the story that we couldn't tell just through our own lens." For Mortati, sharing the role of curator was her way of respecting the public by treating them with the same level of reverence that is given to curators in the industry. Grant echoed the accessibility of the model, stating, "...we wanted anyone to have that [public curation] experience, and not just specific artists or historians," which shows community members that their background and point of view are "museum-worthy" and meaningful."

Allows for experimentation

Another benefit of the public curation model was found to be that it allows museums to experiment with alternative exhibit models, processes, and content. At the MAH, Grant spoke of the pop-up model as a "platform for experimentation," that challenges the "...notion what it means to be a museum." At the SFMM, Queens Museum, OMCA, and MAH, experimentation has also been found to be an attractive feature of the public curation model to communities, as well, since many of these exhibit models create short-term, rather than long-term exhibits that are usually more informal and low-key. Mortati believes this experimental feature is a way to get people on board, by stating that her mobile exhibit is "going to be temporary, it's not going to

last, it's open ended...I think that in general people are really attracted to the idea of impermanence." She goes on to describe her mobile museum model as platform for experimentation where you can "at least take over a room in your space so that you can try things out." For the Wing Luke, the ability to experiment was not discussed by Woodward as a benefit for their museum, but it can be suggested that because "the co-creative exhibition model is so tightly integrated with the overall goals and strategies of the institution," experimentation is already built into their process.

Reflects museum values

Professionals in this study also stated that the public curation model benefits museum reputation by showcasing institutional values by working with like-minded organizations and engendering dialogue between communities. At the Queens Museum, Reddy states "...what is successful for us is that the values of the museum have a place to appear inside the gallery." Orantes states that representing museum values is also a way for institutions to reflect the values that community members might share with the museum; it's the philosophy, and the commitment to "find ways of bridging what we do and what people are doing outside of our walls" so there is, as Reddy puts it, "a mutual understanding of values."

Ensures a diverse range of voices

The diversity of audiences reached was beneficial to four out of the five institutions in this study. Although it is not surprising for an institution that is choosing to integrate community voice into a curation process, museums have a lot to gain from expanding the range of viewpoints discussed within the museum. Both the Oakland and the Wing Luke Museum

describe this benefit as working “in service to the community,” with Woodward speaking to the Wing Luke’s mission, which has “...always been is not to tell other’s people’s stories for them, but to bring them into the museum... to tell their own.”

The factor of diversity within the museum also highlighted that the benefit is not simply the range that exists, but the interactions that diverse communities can have with one another. At the MAH, Grant states that pop-ups are about “...forming and strengthening bonds around people who already know each other, as well as bridging bonds between people who might not have met or known each other.” These connections are also important in diverse neighborhoods such as Queens, where Reddy discussed the benefit of having a diverse audience that is comprised of several communities discussing a common issue “...that [is] important to a lot of different people.”

Increases headcount over time

The Wing Luke, Santa Cruz, and the Oakland Museums stated increased visitor traffic as a benefit, and both the Wing Luke and Oakland Museums had stated headcount as an indicator of success in earlier discussions. For Grant, the pop-up museum has received a significant amount of public interest, which has “...brought in more people, so there’s increased headcount.”

Woodward also expands upon this, pointing out that through networking and collaboration with community members, these types of curation models are a way to bring people in to the institution, who then “...bring their friends in to see the exhibit, to become members themselves.” However, it was not confirmed if the museum is tracking if new visitors decided to visit the museum after hearing about or participating in a public curation process. It is interesting to note that the benefit of increased headcount is the most quantitative and tangible result of

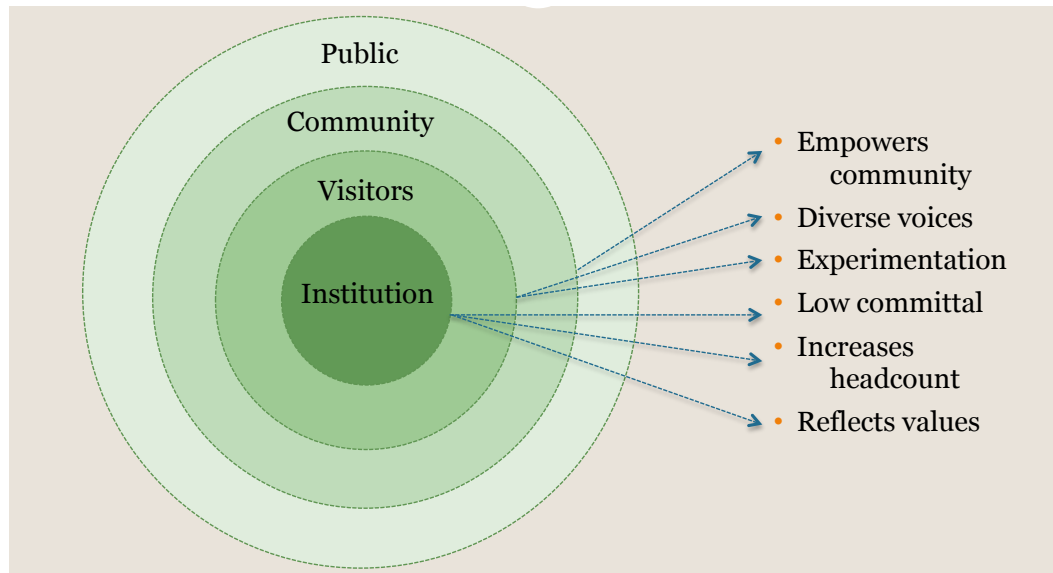
public curation, as the other benefits discussed in this section tend to be more qualitative, and dependent on professional feedback and conversation to ascertain the range of profit.

Low maintenance, low committal

Only two institutions – the San Francisco Mobile Museum and the MAH’s pop-up museum – stated the low maintenance and commitment of their public curation models as a benefit to their respective institutions. Mortati describes her platform for exhibit development with the SFMM as, “...less committal, because it’s not long term and is low-maintenance.” For the MAH, Grant described a particularly “edgy” pop-up entitled *F My Ex*: “We would have not done that [topic] for an exhibit at the museum, but pop-up is a low-maintenance, low-committal event...the pop-up enables that low level of commitment but high quality experience.” The benefit of public curation models that are “low maintenance” was discussed not only in terms of its ability to require fewer resources from the museum, but also as a “pre-made platform.” While Grant refers to the pop-up as a “blank slate,” Mortati states that the model is more of a base support structure – “...you’ve worked out the common needs...in order do the custom stuff.”

The range of benefits that museum professional discussed suggests that public curation models are not only advancing the goals of the institution, but of those outside of the institution as well. Using the same concept map that showed the range of indicators of success from institution to public, the data revealed that institutions were not only benefitting from increased headcount and reputation, but also factors that affected the museum visitors and communities. The benefit of community empowerment shown (see Figure 12) indicates that this factor is impacting the museum, visiting audience, and larger community of stakeholders.

Figure 12: Mapping benefits from the institution to the public



Institutional Cultures and Professional Advice

Finally, data from this study suggests certain modes of action for institutions that are undertaking public curation models or might be interested in doing so. Although all five organizations in the study have voiced a commitment to the integration of public curation in their institutional model, it can be suggested that a great deal of work has been done and continues to be done to maintain the staff, resources, and relationships necessary to continue this type of exhibit development. These courses of action, which revolved around evaluating institutional resources, staff capacity, and infrastructure, were stated by museum professionals at each institution as practices or suggestions that they felt had been significantly helpful in their own public curation processes.

Assess where your institution is

When discussing the suggestions or advice to be given to museums that might be interested in trying a public curation model, professionals at all five institutions first

recommended a realistic assessment of where the institution is in terms of its staff, resources, experience, and current community relationship. Orantes spoke to “knowing your institution,” and becoming self-aware about where the museum is and if it has clear goals in mind for what it would like to do. Mortati agrees with the awareness needed to take this next step, by stating “...evaluate what you have, what resources – people, human resources you have – and what ideas you traffic in, so to speak, and look at the community that you’re interested in engaging.” Being clear and consistent is important in the way you communicate with the community members you are interested in working with, and with the rest of your staff, which Grant says is “really being direct, honest, and realistic about what both parties can bring to the table.”

Self-awareness also allows an institution to evaluate if they have “buy in” from all levels – from the top levels of management, the board, and the director, to the lower level staff in all departments within the institution; Orantes asks: does the “buy-in trickle down, or does it stop in one area? Or from below, how far up does it go?” According to Orantes, the Oakland Museum has found that integrating civic-minded goals into their philosophy has created a staff of museum professionals that are interested and engaged, in some way, in the process of sharing authority with the community and “...has always been part of the conversation at this place.” Without first evaluating where the organization is, Reddy remarks that “...there are times it doesn’t work when organizations bite off more than they can chew, and they don’t have a good sense of how much work or time it takes to create an exhibition [of this type] successfully.”

Time and money are factors

Having the time and money necessary to implement public curation models was also discussed among the professionals in this study, as the citizens participating in these projects are

volunteers, which suggests that they have other priorities outside of their experience with the museum, such as their work, family, and free time. Because these participants are not at the museum full-time, these models often take “more time than it would take to just sit down it in house,” says Woodward. However, Woodward also states that an extended length of time in the process is also important to ensure that “people are comfortable” and to understand that the museum is listening to them. After the exhibit process is finished, both the Oakland and the Wing Luke Museums discussed the importance of establishing and revisiting relationships with the community to ensure that institutions do not lose touch with the communities they have tried to empower. Says Orantes, “...when you just do a one-shot, and expect that all your problems are going to be solved, that’s not going to happen.”

Orantes also spoke directly to the issue of finances, saying, “this [model] doesn’t bring in tons of money most of the time. It does take more time, and this is what several museums are grappling with, is how does the balance of serving community meet up with sustainability in these institutions?” For many museums, it is difficult to balance the issue of sustainability when more qualitative indicators of success and institutional benefits are being used. Although the data suggests that community empowerment can be a valuable long-term benefit for some institutions, it is not a factor that directly “equates to dollars.” This can put strain on an institution that might not be prepared to enter into political and social arenas, or cannot build the capacity to do so. Like any long term collaboration, says Reddy, public curation has “potential risks.” For the MAH and the SFMM, there was a distinct difference in the amount of resources these low-tech models exhibits used in comparison to the models in place at the Wing Luke,

Queens Museum, and Oakland Museum. However, it can be suggested from the data that the pop-up and mobile museums may also have comparable needs for resources.

Build capacity amongst your staff.

Finally, professionals in this study discussed the necessity to have a driving force within the staff. Orantes has stated that because the Oakland Museum is openly community-oriented, she believes that it attracts "...a particular type of museum professional... [who] has a little more of a social justice bent." However, the Oakland Museum has grown in its civic-minded practices since its beginnings, and "...many staff members have had to confront their own biases and fears about visitor participation." (Simon, 2010, p. 278) Mortati recommends that institutions interested in public curation should be "hospitable and informal," but should locate "people on [their] staff who are outgoing," in order to ease the process of creating and maintaining community relationships. The sociable nature of a professional can be helpful in promoting a positive experience for participants, as Orantes states, "if they (the community members) have a really crappy experience with the curator – and this exhibit is something they've worked so hard for – that's going to ruin their experience." (Orantes, 2014)

For the Queens Museum, it was helpful for them to have a driving force amongst their staff in the beginning. Reddy states that before the Community Gallery Partnership began, executive director Tom Finklepearl was "...very interested in public art, and socially collaborative work, and he used to run the percent for art program for the city of New York, so I think that his idea of the institution is that it's a public institution." Having a lead or point of contact that acts a liaison between the institution and community, such as Orantes' role as

“senior experience developer,” can be helpful in easing the transition between the role of a community member and the role of a participant in a public curation process.

Overall, professionals in this study recommended that institutions become self-aware, evaluate their resources, and understand the potential risks in taking on a public curation model. Consistent evaluation of the model appears to be a trend in this advice, suggesting that public curation can be just as much a learning experience for institutions who are new to the process as institutions who have been practicing this model for decades. Says Reynolds, “I think you learn a little more each time about what works and what doesn’t work.”

Conclusion & Recommendations

It has been shown in this study that public curation models have been effective tools of civic engagement within institutions that have a community-oriented agenda. As the currency of social inclusion in the industry begins to take root, museums are both empowering individuals (giving them civic agency) and empowering communities through one-on-one relationships, and social bridging – using the museum as a connector for two or more different communities of interest. Although there are still a minority of museums who have taken on a more radical departure from the traditional curation model by establishing pop-ups, community advisory committees, and co-creative content, this research suggests several trends amongst these models of public curation and the institutions that choose to utilize them:

1. The scope of public curation can be defined as a publicized exhibit process that affects a community or communities; and happens outside the traditional museum space.

2. The public curation models observed in this research allow for active, rather than passive visitor engagement through integration of community members into the curatorial process.
3. The most common determination of success for public curation models in this study was the evidence of community involvement in the exhibit product, and the most common benefit of utilizing public curation models is marked community empowerment. When reflecting on the relationship between indicators of success and institutional benefits, data suggests these models are not insular, but have a wide range of influence on visitors, communities, and the larger public.
4. Museums utilizing these models tend to also value community empowerment and self-awareness, and this type of institutional culture is a strong factor in a museum's decision to pursue public curation and to continue utilizing the model.

The results of this study suggest that overall - public curation models are powerful tools and not only can assist museums looking to reach out to their communities, but can also result in a more open, public-minded museum practice. Additionally, the data in this study revealed trends across all five institutions that suggests participatory curation models are examples of both engaged pedagogy, since the models are “empowering [*sic*] students instead of treating them as passive consumers;” and participatory design, as museums are changing their practice of design to a more egalitarian model, in order to have an effect on the lives of the end-users (hooks, 1994, Sanoff, 2008). As these two theories of collaborative social inclusion are reflected in the trends discussed above, there is strong support for an underlying theory of public curation that may help to inform future efforts by museums to engage citizens outside the industry.

Limitations

These case studies only represent a segment of the larger movement in the museum industry to create a more civic-minded museum practice. This research was limited to documents and interviews provided by museum professionals at the Wing Luke Museum, the Oakland Museum of California, the Queens Museum, the San Francisco Mobile Museum, and the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History. However, in order to place these models in context with other possible museum work that has happened or is currently happening, a background literature review was conducted to present a larger background picture. It is also necessary to note the nature of institutions that are willing to work with their community, and throughout the data collection process, issues of community service and social justice frequently came up in conversation. At the Oakland Museum, Orantes called this trend out in particular, by stating that because a museum is civic-minded, "...it will attract a particular type of museum professional... that has a little more of a social justice bent. So, I think that's already part of why people would already be attracted to an institution like this."

Further Thoughts

Although this study has provided a great deal of information on how museums have begun to take a more active social role, there is still further research to be completed in order to identify consistent regularities between the models of public curation that exist in the industry. In order to accomplish this, a more holistic case study should be completed, with the incorporation of community feedback in order to compare and contrast the goals for public curation within both parties of interest. Additionally, as these models progress and change, and undergo various trials and errors, it is possible that they may become more formalized in terms of terminology

and basic design formalizing terminology and models. For Grant, she believes that the movement of public curation may go towards citizens "...taking museums into their own hands and reclaiming that word [museum] and what it means to share objects and stories."

Although public curation has been discussed in this research by both professionals and through some bias by the researcher as a powerful and potent tool of civic engagement, I do not believe that public curation is a necessary tool to be used by all museums, or do I believe that all museums will begin to shift towards this model eventually – it is just as valuable for there to be a diverse range of museums as it is for there to be a diverse range of audiences. However, written scholarship and discussion of public curation can become a motivating factor as a language of civic-minded practice, which in turn may continue to empower the communities and professionals who use that language as much as it empowers others to create, share, and welcome the diverse history of today's society. To Reddy, the growth of interest in public curation is "...a movement of relevance [to the public]... and curation is just one aspect of that."

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Instruments

INTERVIEW FOR MASTER'S THESIS WORK

FORM C

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON - CONSENT FORM

Researcher: Amanda Stone, MA Candidate in Museology

Advisor: Kris Morrissey, Thesis Chair, Museology Program Director

This section is a request for your participation in a research study that is part of my Master's Thesis work at the University of Washington. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, what will be asked of you, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you for your records.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This research will examine emerging models of community directed or informed exhibit curation as a means to analyze how museum professionals are defining what successful civic engagement looks like within an exhibit space.

STUDY PROCEDURES

This interview is estimated to take under 60 minutes to complete, and will include prompts for discussion on your professional work in museum exhibition and your experiences with public curation. This session will be audio-recorded. Any direct quotations used will include your name and institution, and will be sent to you via email for verification before they are included in any published form.

You may refuse to answer any question within this interview or quit at any time.

Name of Participant: _____

Date Submitted: ___ / ___ / 2014

INTERVIEW FOR MASTER'S THESIS WORK

FORM C

1. Please provide a brief summary of your professional work at your institution.
2. How would you define public curation?
3. Looking at these words, describe which ones most closely fit your definition and why?

Crowd

Community

Public

4. What led your department and/or institution to pursue this model of exhibit development?
5. Which indicators of success have you identified in your experience with this exhibit model?
6. Based on these indicators, in what ways do you feel that the exhibit has been successful?
7. This is an experimental, new process for many museums. What have you found that doesn't work? Did you encounter any roadblocks?
8. What advice can you offer to other institutions who are looking to take on a public curation project?
9. Where do you see the movement of public curation going in the future?

POST-INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

FORM B

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON - CONSENT FORM

Researcher: Amanda Stone, MA Candidate in Museology

Advisor: Kris Morrissey, Thesis Chair, Museology Program Director

This section is a request for your participation in a research study that is part of my Master's Thesis work at the University of Washington. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, what will be asked of you, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you for your records.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This research will examine emerging models of community directed or informed exhibit curation as a means to analyze how museum professionals are defining what successful civic engagement looks like within an exhibit space; specifically focusing on exhibits that discuss social justice, public memory, and community empowerment.

STUDY PROCEDURES

This questionnaire is estimated to take under 15 minutes to complete and will include open-ended questions regarding to your reflections of the initial interview. Any direct quotations used will include your name and institution, and will be sent to you via email for verification before they are included in any published form.

You may refuse to answer any question within this questionnaire or quit at any time.

Name of Participant: _____

Date Submitted: ____ / ____ / 2014

