

Museums Connect: The Next Chapter of International Collaboration

Jana Greenslit

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Committee:

Nick Visscher

Miriam Kahn

Anand Yang

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Jana Greenslit

University of Washington

Abstract

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Jana Greenslit

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Nick Visscher, Coordinator of Professional Experiences

Museology

Funding has recently become available for what is arguably the most time and resource intensive, though perhaps the most rewarding, type of international collaboration among museums: the facilitation of person-to-person cultural diplomacy. Whereas cultural content has historically been exchanged through museums in the form of objects; this new era of international collaboration transfers cultural content through personal connections. One such example is the Museums Connect program, which has funded over 50 projects between American and non-US institutions since 2008. There has been little comprehensive research on the factors that contribute to these projects' successful achievement of outcomes, nor the challenges that Museums Connect project managers may face in reaching these goals. The field could be served by a deeper understanding of the strengths and skill sets museum professionals are relying upon to facilitate these types of collaborations, as well as the barriers they face in working with these large-scale, transnational projects.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The human experience is grounded in community. Defined as broadly as a common geography or as intimately as a feeling of kinship, community links people together through shared spaces, beliefs, and experiences. In today's age of international travel and digital communication, the importance of connecting communities is continually emphasized. Museums have long taken on the role of bringing international communities together; yet the way in which this role is achieved has not remained constant. Traditionally, museums have worked to celebrate and share the culture of international communities through exposure to artifacts, artwork, and exhibitions. More recently, the importance of international collaboration among US and non-US museums has been emphasized through collections exchange, professional development, and artist residences (National Museum Directors' Conference, 2012, p. 1). Yet as technology brings people and places closer than ever before, the role of international collaboration in museums is continually being reinvented.

Today, funding sources have become available for what is arguably the most time and resource intensive, though perhaps the most rewarding, type of international collaboration among museums: the facilitation of person-to-person cultural diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy is the exchange of cultural ideas and artifacts among international groups of people (U.S. Department of State). These types of programs use museums to facilitate direct connections between international community members. Whereas cultural content has historically been exchanged through museums in the form of objects, this new era of international collaboration transfers cultural content through personal, human connections. One such example is the Museums Connect program.

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Through the Museums Connect program, the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) administers funding from the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs to projects of international collaboration between at least one American museum, at least one international museum, and their respective communities. The structure and topics of these programs vary widely, though AAM does require that these projects engage community members beyond the walls of participating institutions, and that these community members gain a deeper understanding of each other's cultures. Essentially, American and international participants collaborate remotely on a project facilitated by the cultural institutions. Participant travel to partner institutions is often, but not always, arranged by museums so that community members can meet face to face, deepening the impact of the cross-cultural connection.

Since its inception in 2008, Museums Connect has funded over 50 projects between American and international institutions from every populated continent. The success of these projects is well documented by AAM, as the grant requires that participating institutions create outcomes and indicators for each project, which are then measured at the project's end. Project coordinators are also given the opportunity to reflect upon their experiences in the context of quarterly and final reports. However, there has been little comprehensive research that delves specifically into the resources project coordinators utilize when facilitating these projects, factors that contribute to these projects' successful achievement of outcomes, nor on the challenges that Museums Connect project managers may face in reaching these goals. Identifying these factors is key, as Museums Connect represents relatively unfamiliar territory for the museum field on multiple levels, including international travel and the facilitation of cross-cultural, digital communication between community members. Museum professionals serving as project

coordinators presumably find themselves involved in work and utilizing skill sets far beyond what is ordinarily required in their daily professional lives.

The field could be served by a deeper understanding of the strengths and skill sets museum professionals rely upon to facilitate these types of collaborations, as well as the barriers they face in working with these large-scale, transnational projects. By providing a forum for past Museums Connect project coordinators to compare their challenges, successes, and experiences, museum professionals will be better equipped to tackle similar projects in the future. In turn, museums may be better equipped to expand their reach not only beyond their walls but beyond national borders as well.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research is to describe the resources Museums Connect project coordinators rely upon, the factors that contribute to the successful achievement of outcomes in Museums Connect projects, as well as the challenges faced by project coordinators, to provide guidance for future museum professionals engaged in this type of international collaboration.

The research will be guided by the following questions:

- What resources do project managers utilize in preparation for, and while implementing, Museums Connect projects?
- What factors contribute to the successful achievement of outcomes in Museums Connect projects?
- What challenges have project managers faced when implementing a Museums Connect project, and how were they mitigated?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

While the Museums Connect program is a novel endeavor for the museum field, as an act of cultural diplomacy, it operates within the historical context of American foreign policy and diplomacy. As it joins ranks with a host of cultural exchange programs sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, Museums Connect is simultaneously transforming the way museums approach international collaboration and global audiences, in addition to the role museums have traditionally played in cultural diplomacy. Museums Connect has brought person-to-person cultural exchange into the realm of museum work.

Public and Cultural Diplomacy: A Brief History

Although international exchange and cultural diplomacy have not typically fallen within the category of conventional museum work, there is a rich legacy of both in American foreign policy. Cultural diplomacy is a sub-set of the broader category of public diplomacy. As opposed to what many experts refer to as traditional diplomacy, or the formal relationships between governments (Snow, 2009), public diplomacy began as “governments talking to global publics” (Snow, 2009, p.6). The term itself first came into use in 1965 when retired Foreign Service officer Edmund Gullion established the Edward. R. Murrow Center of Public Diplomacy at Tufts University. An early brochure for the center describes its work:

Public diplomacy...deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies. It encompasses dimensions of international relationships beyond traditional diplomacy; the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with another; the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on policy, communication between those whose job is communication, as diplomats and foreign correspondents, and the process of intercultural communications (Cull, 2009, p. 19).

As Gullion’s description indicates, in its infancy, public diplomacy focused its efforts primarily on a one-way exchange of information between governments and foreign audiences. Nancy

Snow (2009) reiterates “Conventional public diplomacy emphasizes citizens, but has at times emphasized citizens in an asymmetrical one-way effort to inform and build a case for a nation’s position” (p. 7). Today, the definition of public diplomacy has expanded to include not only these one-way communications between governments and global audiences, but international communication and exchange between members of the general public as well. Instead of government institutions and officials being the sole source of information, the focus is expanded to promote the exchange of information between civilian groups and individuals. One of the many reasons for this shift is the advent of digital communication in the modern age. Not only are members of the public able to connect on a personal level from opposite corners of the globe, but digital communication has also increased public knowledge and discussion of current foreign affairs, and therefore the influence of public opinion on foreign policy making as well (Snow, 2009). As a result, there has been a renewed focus on fostering beneficial relations between general publics, and in particular an increase in cultural diplomacy, the form of public diplomacy that focuses explicitly on “the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding” (U.S. Department of State). The field of diplomacy now encompasses a range of activities, from boardrooms filled with government representatives to college students spending a semester abroad.

For the United States, public and cultural diplomacy have become increasingly vital components of the American foreign policy agenda within the past 100 years. Though the terminology for such activities did not arise until the latter half of the 20th century, cultural and educational exchange in particular became important facets of American diplomatic aims in the period between the two world wars. Globally, cultural and educational exchange had been occurring on an informal level for many years prior; however, it was not until this time that the

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United States began setting up the infrastructure for formal exchanges. First, the Interdepartmental Committee for Scientific Cooperation and the Division of Cultural Cooperation were established in 1938 (Lindsay, 1989). The Office of International Information and Cultural Affairs in the Department of State followed shortly after World War II (Lindsay, 1989), and by 1946 had 76 branches operating worldwide, displaying American broadcasts, books, films, and exhibits to global audiences (US Department of State). However, the person to person aspect of public diplomacy did not officially take hold until the United States Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948, also known as the Smith-Mundt Act (U.S. Department of State). The objective of this act was to “enable the Government of the United States to promote a better understanding of the United States in other countries, and to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries” (US Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948). The act stipulated that these objectives be achieved through two means: first, a formal information service for disseminating knowledge of the United States to a global audience, and second, “an educational exchange service to cooperate with other nations in the interchange of persons, knowledge, and skills; the rendering of technical and other services, the interchange of developments in the field of education, the arts, and sciences” (US Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948). The concept of an educational exchange service opened up the possibility for person-to-person communication and exchange within the realm of public diplomacy.

Through this act, cultural and educational exchange joined the ranks of more traditional forms of diplomacy. Almost simultaneously, Congress signed a bill into law drafted by Senator J. William Fulbright in 1946 that created the now ubiquitous Fulbright Program (Fulbright U.S. Student Program). Similar to the Smith-Mundt Act, the bill called for “the promotion of

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international good will through the exchange of students in the fields of education, culture, and science” (Fulbright U.S. Student Program). Today, the Fulbright program, run by the Bureau of Cultural and Educational Affairs, sponsors a wide range of scholar, teacher, and student exchanges, operating in 160 countries worldwide and awarding approximately 8,000 grants per year (U.S. Department of State). Person-to-person exchange is not only emphasized in American diplomacy; it is thriving.

Within the past ten years, public and cultural diplomacy have been further emphasized in response to the perceived plummeting foreign public opinion of American politics and policy. Widespread polling and anecdotal evidence collected in 2003 and 2004 in the wake of the Iraq War shows the United States’ favorability ratings plummeting almost universally, from Europe to the Middle East to neighboring countries in the Americas (U.S. Department of State). Today, the reduction of anti-Americanism largely dominates American foreign policy goals, with the question of “why they hate us” at the forefront of the debate (Herrmann & Kertzer, 2015). As a result, two-way public diplomacy between American and international civilians is emphasized as a manner of circumventing distrust of American policy makers by instead facilitating communication between civilians, with whom international populations presumably have less strife. These actions exert what is referred to as soft power, defined as “the ability to shape the preferences of others” (Nye, 2004, p.5) without force of coercion, or, in other words, “getting others to appreciate you to the extent that they change their behavior to your liking” (Snow, 2009, p.3). Soft power is at the crux of all diplomatic actions.

Even when global audiences are critical of American policy and policy makers, research suggests there is a persistent desire abroad to connect with American arts and culture. John Brown writes:

America, for all its faults (and nobody's perfect) continues to fascinate the world...Foreign audiences, proud in many cases of their own high culture, expect the U.S. government (not just the American private sector) to expose them to American cultural achievements...as a foreign policy tool, arts diplomacy certainly is far better for the American image – and certainly cheaper – than bombing Baghdad. (Brown, 2009, p.59)

Foreign audiences crave a closer connection with American culture and lifestyles, regardless of criticism of American foreign policy. Public diplomacy, and specifically cultural diplomacy, fills this role by allowing for an even-footed exchange between peers. This type of diplomacy operates on the level of personal, human connections, and therefore flies below the radar of negative media coverage and political disagreement.

Exchange programs, such as the Fulbright program, are particularly well known for operating on this personal level. As opposed to government-to-public communications, exchanges “directly involve the ‘human factor,’ where an engagement with the personality and psychology of the participants is central” (Scott-Smith, 2009, p.50). Beyond the underlying political aims, there is ample evidence suggesting that exchanges are beneficial and enriching for the participants as well. Studies on student exchange programs show that studying abroad has several positive effects for participants, including expanding outlooks, increasing confidence and independence, and developing intercultural competency (Forsey, Broomhall, & Davis, 2012). Not only does studying abroad increase participants’ understanding of a new culture, it provides insight into one’s own culture and sense of place in the world (Forsey, Broomhall, & Davis, 2012). The educational component is well documented; thus these types of programs, though a form of government-sanctioned diplomacy, often feel less tied to furthering foreign policy and more grounded in experiential learning and understanding. The benefits of exchanges and similar programs reach far beyond the fostering of diplomatic relations to include personal growth and global education.

Museums & Cross-Cultural Diplomacy

The museum field has long been moving toward the trend of greater global inclusivity and focus. As repositories for material culture from around the world, museums are inherently international in scope and thus within the past decade have deliberately contemplated their place and purpose within the global community (National Museum Director's Conference, 2002). Collaboration between museums and other domestic entities has traditionally been approached as a means to remain relevant to the local and regional community (Clubb, Draper, & Yarrow, 2008); similarly, international collaboration provides a vehicle for museums to stay relevant to a global community. Collaboration between US and non-US museums has long been embedded within conventional museum activities, typically manifesting in "loans, academic study, acquisitions, special exhibitions, research, staff exchanges and maintenance of the permanent galleries" (National Museum Directors' Conference, 2012, p. 1). Today's museums are interested in building relationships with other cultural institutions on a global scale. For example, in 2008 the Institute of Museum and Library Services established the International Strategic Partner Initiative, with a mission of "strengthening connections between U.S. museums and libraries and their global counterparts" (Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2010). Projects sponsored through this initiative include partnerships between librarians in the US and China, an international filmmaker and film exchange program, and conferences promoting the use of E-Publishing as a means for sharing more resources internationally (Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2010). International collaboration between institutions is embraced as a means of strengthening the field and expanding its reach. As the National Museum Directors' Conference (2012) points out, "A museum's audience has never been so large and not everyone will experience the museum by arriving at the main entrance" (p.1). Today's museums not only

share cultural content from around the world with their visitors, they focus on teaching them the 21st century skills of global and cultural competency (Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2010).

This renewed focus on global cultural exchange within the museum field has led to an increase in the number of museum programs engaging in cultural diplomacy. As non-government entities, museums have the power to cross national borders and facilitate personal relationships between groups of people that would otherwise be divided by political differences (Bound, Briggs, Holden, & Jones, 2007). The think tank Demos points out, “Cultural contact provides a forum for unofficial political relationship-building; it keeps open negotiating channels with countries where political connections are in jeopardy, and helps to recalibrate relationships for changing times” (Bound, Briggs, Holden, & Jones, 2007, p. 12). Cultural diplomacy is increasingly seen as vital for society at large. As “physical manifestations of nations’ culture and heritage” (Hoogwaerts, 2012, p.4), “museums can play a role in cultural diplomacy by leveraging their power, influence, and international relations” (Martin, 2011). The British Museum’s 2005 exhibition *Forgotten Empire: the World of Ancient Persia* is often cited as one of the first modern examples of cultural diplomacy in museums. The exhibition included art loaned from two Iranian museums, requiring collaboration between the British and Iranian governments at a time of palpable political tension due to Iran’s nuclear program. (Flamini, 2014; Hoogwaerts, 2012). Despite this tension, the museums involved were able to collaborate for the sake of the exhibition, broadcasting the message that cultural exchange has the power to transcend political strife. This example of cultural diplomacy, like many other instances of modern diplomacy in museums, centered on object exchange, with the diplomacy occurring at the level of institutional relationships. The message to the public is the symbolic significance of

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the collaboration between two international institutions, both of which have deep ties to their respective national heritages and identities. While there is a two-way exchange of cultural information between participating museums, there is nonetheless a one-way exchange of information that originates at the museums and is then received by public audiences. In these examples of cultural diplomacy, community members play a fairly passive role.

Today, many museums have moved beyond simply object exchange to also include staff exchanges in their acts of cultural diplomacy. Museums have historically hosted, and continue to host, person-to-person exchanges that focus on connecting museum staff and providing professional development opportunities. Recent examples include the Metropolitan Museum of Art Staff Exchange program in 2006 that brought in professionals from various Romanian museums to the Metropolitan Museum in New York for a conservation workshop and two-day textile symposium (The Metropolitan Museum of Art). American museums also frequently send their own staff abroad to participate in or provide professional development opportunities. For example, representatives from both the Exploratorium in San Francisco and the Smithsonian Center for Education and Museum Studies have partnered with the Tibetan Library's Science for Monks, a program that strives to incorporate science curriculum into monastic teaching for Buddhist monks in Tibet (Science for Monks). Museum professionals from both institutions have traveled to Tibet to work with monastic educators, and monastic educators have in turn traveled to the Exploratorium in San Francisco (Exploratorium). As with object exchanges, the focus of the diplomacy in staff exchanges is on the institutional relationships, and while these exchanges involve a more personal element, community members outside of these institutions still do not actively participate in the cultural exchange.

However, with the advent of the digital age, museums are now exploring the possibility for community members to directly connect with each other in a cultural exchange. Natalia Grincheva (2013) argues, “The old principles of cultural diplomacy based on a ‘top-down branding approach, which treats people as targets rather than participants in an exchange of views’ is no longer relevant.” Museums should instead act as forums in which “cultures can meet and debate to create a polyphonic narration” (Grincheva, 2013, p.40) through digital communication platforms. Grincheva (2013) proposes three ways in which museums can use social media to directly engage community members in cultural exchange. First, museums can incorporate “cultural voices through social media” (Grincheva, 2013, p.41) by providing space for online discussions, in which community members are encouraged to provide their own narration and curation for museum content. Secondly, museums can facilitate “cultural exchange through participatory learning” (Grincheva, 2013, p.43). International audience should be invited to participate in educational programming – for example, the British Museum and BBC collaborated in 2010 for the educational radio series and website, *A History of the World in 100 Objects*. People and museums from around the world were invited to upload a narrative associated with an object, allowing not just institutions but community members as well to create the cultural content and respond to the content of others (Grincheva, 2013).

Finally, Grincheva (2013) proposes that museums can use social media to facilitate “direct people-to-people cultural exchange” (p.44). She (2013) elaborates,

Social media provides opportunities for people from different countries (with Internet access) to engage in various ongoing collaborative activities by establishing a stable, reliable, and affordable platform that facilitates conversations and makes it easy to exchange digital information including text, video, audio, and multimedia applications. Implementing such cross-cultural exchange activities can significantly enhance the social capacity of online museum communities and not only increase audiences but make cultural contact among online museum visitors from foreign countries more meaningful, educative, and engaging (p.44).

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In this final category, museums provides online spaces for international audiences to directly communicate and collaborate with each other, at last incorporating elements of personal and cultural exchange. On the spectrum of cultural diplomacy in museums, Museums Connect lies here.

Museums Connect

The Museums Connect program is a partnership between the American Alliance of Museums and the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Cultural and Educational Affairs (American Alliance of Museums). Through this program, AAM administers federal grants of \$50,000 to \$100,000 (with a 50% cost-share match) to collaborative projects that connect at least one US museum, at least one non-US museum, and their respective communities. Museums Connect projects have two overarching goals. First, "communities in the US and abroad develop a broader knowledge about and understanding of one another's cultures by participating in an innovative, museum-facilitated collaborative project." (AAM). Second, "Museums create replicable models for international collaborations that reach beyond their physical walls to directly engage members of their communities" (AAM). There is significant room for creativity in regards to structure and topic; however, Museums Connect does not fund projects involving construction, staff or institutional development, staff-to-staff exchange, traditional exhibit design or object exchange, or artist residencies (AAM). Instead, American and international participants collaborate remotely on a project facilitated by the cultural institutions. Community outreach is heavily emphasized in the application process, and travel for community participants is strongly encouraged.

Although Museums Connect does not require specific themes for project proposals, each year AAM releases a set of themes that will receive additional consideration. Given the source of

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funding, themes are generally tied to foreign policy interests. For the most recent granting cycle, these themes included empowering women and girls, youth engagement and leadership development, social innovation and entrepreneurship, strengthening civil society and social inclusion, and environmental sustainability (AAM). Furthermore, preference is given to projects that reach out to youth, underrepresented populations, and women (Grincheva, 2015). The intent is to select projects that empower these underserved populations to address and engage with societal issues in the long-term.

In addition to stipulations about the type of projects that are funded, the Museums Connect program has requirements for the types of institutions that can participate. Although the size or discipline is not specified, eligible museums must have been open to the public for a minimum of two years, and have the institutional and financial capacity to achieve the activities described in the project proposal. Additionally, partnerships must include at least one US museum and one non-US museum. Proposals can only be submitted by US museums, although non-US museums are expected to contribute equally to the development of the project proposal. International museums must also receive permission from the nearest US Embassy to participate in Museums Connect. Past recipients of the grant, both US and non-US museums, are allowed to reapply after two granting cycles have elapsed, though they must apply with a new partner, project proposal, and target audience.

Each project proposal must also include a bio for a project coordinator. The project coordinator is responsible for developing the project, working with both the local community and the partner institution, and executing the project activities. Project coordinators at non-US museums are additionally responsible for coordinating with the nearest US Embassy. In some cases, institutions have more than one project coordinator. Although the implementation of

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Museums Connect projects often entail collaboration among a host of institutional staff, project coordinators are the drivers and leaders of the program.

The outcomes and impacts of Museums Connect programs are thoroughly measured and documented, as is stipulated by the project proposal. Project proposals include 3-5 desired outcomes, one of which is always that participants gain “a broader knowledge and understanding of each other’s cultures.” Other outcomes vary depending on the topic of the project, but all outcomes are further delineated by a set of indicators, usually quantitative (for example, 70% of American participants are able to identify three pieces of Nigerian culture). Thus at the end of each program, project coordinators have a clear set of benchmarks against which to measure, and are able to provide quantitative measures of the project’s success. Project coordinators from both US and non-US museums, as well as participants, are also offered the opportunity to reflect upon their experiences in the project’s final report; however, the depth and structure of reflections vary.

A 2015 study on the Museums Connect program *Identities: Understanding Islam in a Cross-Cultural Context* revealed that although these projects are directly tied to and have a clear impact on foreign policy objectives, they are nonetheless deeply connected to the institutional goals of participating museums. In this example, the Museum of History and Holocaust Education at Kennesaw State University in Georgia, USA and the Ben M’sik Community Museum at Hassan II University in Casablanca, Morocco collaborated on an online exhibit representing personal narratives of identity. At the end of the program, the long-term impact of the project outcomes was clear, with the Moroccan Ministry of Education inviting staff at Kennesaw State to advise on the establishment of a College of the Arts, and the King Mohamed VI of Morocco establishing a National Museum Foundation in Morocco (Grincheva, 2015). Yet

despite this rich focus on impacting foreign policy, the project remained centered around the mission of participating institutions. The involvement of museums in international politics and American foreign policy has been controversial, as American museums have traditionally operated free from government interference (Grincheva, 2015). However, the study found that “Museums Connect does capitalize on the genuine aspirations and beliefs of the projects’ leaders and museum professionals who work hard to serve their institutional mission and goals” (Grincheva, 2015, p. 146), as opposed to programmatic activities being directed or manipulated by the State Department. Museums Connect forms a bridge between American foreign policy objectives and institutional goals.

While the existing research on Museums Connect has focused on the successful achievement of project outcomes and long-term impact of these projects on foreign policy objectives, the practice of implementing Museums Connect has not been thoroughly explored. As indicated by the prior research, the value of the Museums Connect program is clear. It is the intent of this research to provide a better understanding of how to facilitate person-to-person cultural diplomacy in this context.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to describe the successes, challenges, and experiences of Museums Connect project managers to provide guidance for future museum professionals engaged in this type of international collaboration, and is guided by the following research questions:

- What resources do project managers utilize in preparation for and while implementing Museums Connect projects?
- What factors contribute to the successful achievement of outcomes in Museums Connect projects?
- What challenges have project managers faced when implementing a Museums Connect project, and how were they mitigated?

This research employed a descriptive, qualitative methodology consisting of semi-structured interviews of former Museums Connect project coordinators. These interviews took place either over Skype or telephone and lasted between 30-45 minutes. The resulting data were then coded inductively to identify commonalities and unique characteristics of each data set across the interviews (Thomas, 2006).

In addition to interviews, supplementary information was gathered from the final reports for selected Museums Connect projects. The final reports are internal documents compiled by AAM's International Programs Department that provide valuable background information for interpreting the interview responses of project coordinators, including a project implementation narrative, measures of the degree to which projects achieved the indicators and outcomes outlined in their original grant application, and reflections from museum staff and participants.

Instrument

The semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix) covers three topics: successful completion of outcomes, challenges, and advice for future international collaboration.

Successful Completion of Outcomes

This section of the interview addresses the factors that contributed to the successful completion of outcomes for Museums Connect projects, with a focus on both the steps individuals and institutions took to design and implement a Museums Connect project, the resources they utilized throughout the Museums Connect process, as well as any other factors key in successful achievement of outcomes. Participants were also asked to identify any outcomes that occurred that were not anticipated by the outcomes listed in the original grant application. Participants were not asked to identify the extent to which their Museums Connect project achieved its outcomes, as this information is detailed in the final report.

Challenges

Participants were asked to identify any challenges they faced while implementing a Museums Connect project. They were also asked to explain how to handle these challenges, as well as reflect upon how these challenges might be mitigated for future Museums Connect project coordinators. Lastly, participants were asked to list any resources they wish had been available to them before or during the Museums Connect project.

Advice for Future International Collaboration

To close the interview, participants were asked to reflect on three questions:

- What are the characteristics of an institution you consider to be well equipped to pursue a Museums Connect grant?

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- What steps should an individual take to prepare themselves to be a project coordinator for Museums Connect grant?
- What advice do you have for institutions or professionals looking to pursue international collaboration in the future?

Sampling Protocol

The study aimed to include the perspectives of five to ten project coordinators, from at least five different institutions. In the end, the perspectives of seven project coordinators are represented from six different Museums Connect projects, as two of the project coordinators who participated worked on the same project at the Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens. Sites were selected from the Museums Connect projects from 2012 and 2013, as these are the years for which final reports, which provided valuable context, were provided by the American Alliance of Museums.

From the 2012 and 2013 Museums Connect projects, projects were selected with the intent of including a diversity of project themes and types of institutions involved – for example, zoos, art museums, botanical gardens, etc. The institutions represented include two natural history museums, one art museum, one cultural center, one historical society, and one botanical garden and conservatory.

The projects and institutions represented in this project include:

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Table 1: Descriptions of participants' Museums Connect projects

Project Title & Partner Institutions	Project Description
<p>From the Ground Up: Nutritional Values and Cultural Connections The Gidan Makama Museum Kano <i>Kano, Nigeria</i> The Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens <i>Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania</i></p>	<p>“High school students learn about nutrition, cooking and cultural food traditions by following local food from farm to table and creating recipe books that reflect the traditional recipes of their regions and cultures”(American Alliance of Museums).</p>
<p>Design Diaries International The Palestinian Heritage Museum <i>Jerusalem</i> The Minnesota Historical Society <i>St. Paul, Minnesota</i></p>	<p>“Young women representing diverse populations in Jerusalem and Minnesota’s Twin Cities investigate the subtext of clothing in their regions and reflect on their museums’ rich textile collections along with historical context provided by older generations to design garments that reflect their unique identities. Using their knowledge and designs, they dialogue with their partners about the meaning of clothing in their lives and how it shapes their personal, and even national, identities” (American Alliance of Museums).</p>
<p>Ancient Shores, Changing Tides - Developing Local Archaeological Heritage Expertise The Palawan State University Museum <i>Palawan, Philippines</i> The Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture <i>Seattle, Washington</i></p>	<p>“Local residents work together to develop resources to protect their fragile marine environments, preserve their archaeological heritage and revitalize traditional cultural practices while exploring methods for sustainable tourism” (American Alliance of Museums).</p>
<p>Flag Stories: Citizenship Unbound The Islamic Art Museum of Malaysia <i>Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia</i> SOMarts Cultural Center <i>San Francisco, California</i></p>	<p>“Youth from Muslim, intercultural, refugee and immigrant communities in Kuala Lumpur and San Francisco interpret flags and cultural insignia through hands-on art production and storytelling; create new visual and multimedia representations of national, personal and cultural identity; and present public artworks in target community locations” (American Alliance of Museums).</p>

<p>Rethinking Home: Climate Change in New York and Samoa The Museum of Samoa <i>Apia, Samoa</i> The American Museum of Natural History <i>New York City</i></p>	<p>“Residents from both regions with homes in coastal areas impacted by hurricanes share their personal and community experiences through in-person dialogue sessions and virtual conversations to produce an online exhibition, a mobile app and cross-cultural educational resources to better adapt to changing weather patterns and manage the impact and resources in the aftermath of severe storms” (American Alliance of Museums).</p>
<p>emPOWER Parents: Fostering Cross Cultural Networks between Families with Autism The Museo ICO <i>Madrid, Spain</i> The Queens Museum of Art <i>Queens, New York</i></p>	<p>“Museums in Madrid and Queens support the creation of a bi-national network of parent advocates, giving parents of children with autism the resources to affect institutionalized change in both countries, request improved programming in schools and include their children’s learning styles in community programs. Participating parents gain skills in teaching and behavioral methods, lead programs with other local families and maintain and disseminate resources in both English and Spanish to share their knowledge with a global audience” (American Alliance of Museums).</p>

Limitations

Though this research does contribute to the field of person-to-person cultural diplomacy in museums, not all aspects are generalizable to similar projects beyond the scope of Museums Connect grants. Museums Connect projects follow specific guidelines and outcomes set in place by the granting organization, such as the level of reporting required, institutional relationships, and the staffing structure. As a result, many of the experiences represented in this research are unique to Museums Connect.

In addition, the most significant limitation of this study is the fact that only the perspectives of American project coordinators are represented. An attempt was made to contact several project coordinators from international partner institutions; however, conflicts in availability prevented their participation. While it can be assumed that project coordinators at non-US institutions use many of the same resources and face similar challenges, this research

does not begin to address the experience of managing a project funded by an American granting organization at a non-US museum. It must be emphasized that the perspectives represented within this research are strictly that of American museum professionals engaging in person-to-person cultural diplomacy.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Findings from the interview data are presented here topically and by research question.

Overall, project coordinators used resources from existing pools of programmatic and institutional resources; Museums Connect projects successfully achieved outcomes as a result of personnel both within and outside of the project; and the majority of challenges experienced by project coordinators related to either communication or logistics.

1. What resources do project managers utilize in preparation for, and while implementing, Museums Connect grants?

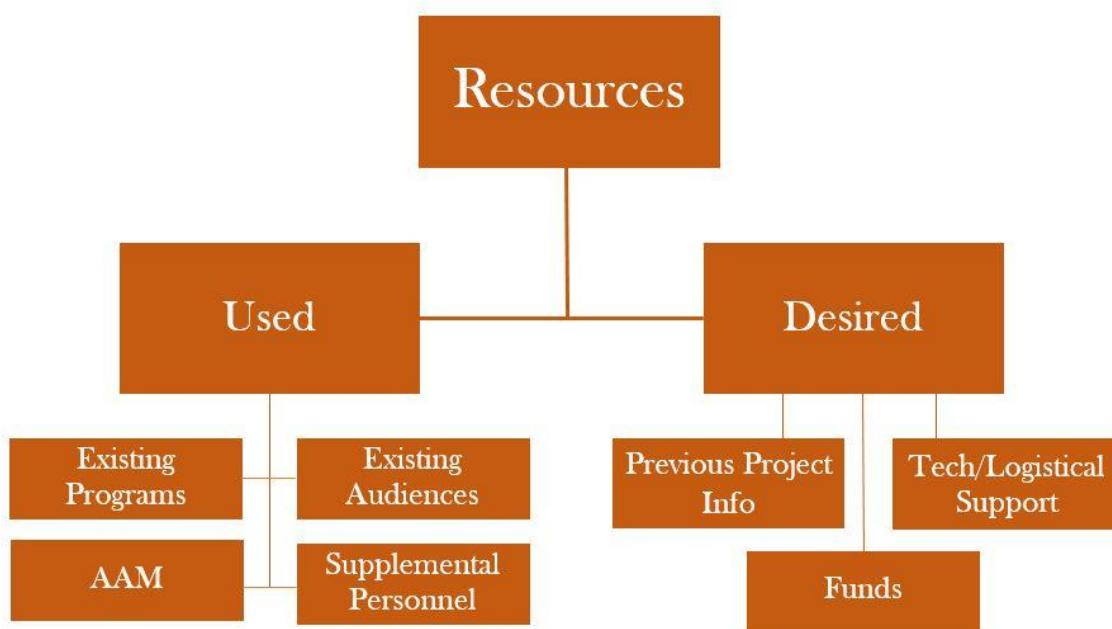


Figure 1: Resources

Project coordinators were asked to identify both resources used while preparing for and implementing Museums Connect projects, as well as resources they did not have but would have found helpful throughout the process. When designing Museums Connect projects, project coordinators relied heavily on existing institutional resources, often borrowing elements from

existing programs and working with audiences with whom the institution already had an established relationship. Additionally, they sought out supplemental personnel to aid in the implementation of the project. Resources that Museums Connect project coordinators did not always have but expressed a desire for include more information from previous project coordinators about past projects and experiences, technical or logistical support, and funds. For the project coordinators who did have access to these resources, they found them helpful and recommended their use in future Museums Connect projects.

Existing Programs and Audiences

When designing programs, project coordinators relied upon the resources from existing programs within their institution. Overall, six of the seven project coordinators reported embedding elements of previously established programs into their Museums Connect project, allowing them to draw upon existing programmatic resources and expertise. For these project coordinators, the grant represented an opportunity to expand programs that had already seen success and interest at a local level to an international audience. Lopez at the Queens Museum of Art, who had been working on programming with families affected by autism prior to Museums Connect, viewed the grant “as a way to think about our project in a new way and a new direction. Our community was anxious to start doing something new.” Melino at the Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens similarly reported, “We were in the middle of developing an exhibit on the Congo,” and Borger adds, “We had a summer internship program with lower-income youth, and we talk a lot about the importance of using local produce, so it was going to be an opportunity to continue this program throughout the year.” By borrowing resources from existing programs, project coordinators were able to build upon work proven to support institutional goals, and that the organization wished to take to a new level. For these projects, Museums

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Connect provided a means for institutions to expand their existing programming and values to a global audience.

In addition to borrowing resources from existing programs, several project coordinators also utilized an audience with which their institution already had a relationship, as opposed to seeking out an entirely new population to participate in the Museums Connect project. Three of the seven project coordinators mentioned working with an existing audience for the program, allowing them to recruit participants with a clear need or interest in the program. For example, Thornberg from the Burke Museum reported working with the same population as one of the museum's archaeological field schools in the Philippines, who had previously demonstrated a need for the valuation of archaeological resources. Similarly, Lopez at the Queens Museum of Art had already been working closely with a group of parents with children with autism, and therefore knew that this community was looking for an opportunity to expand programming for their families. Working with these populations seemed like a natural progression for these project coordinators, and furthered existing relationships with both local and international communities.

Supplemental Personnel

In addition, project coordinators from all six Museums Connect projects reported relying upon supplemental personnel in various capacities to plan and implement their Museums Connect projects. The tasks given to these personnel varied widely, as did their roles, which included assistants, interns, volunteers, museum staff, and even project participants who were given tasks to lighten the load of the project coordinators. Hoover at the SOMarts Cultural Center, for example, hired a new staff member specifically for the Museums Connect project, while Newell at the American Museum of Natural History enlisted her assistant. Both Vinick at the Minnesota Historical Society and the project coordinators at the Phipps Conservatory and

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Botanical Gardens recruited interns to support their project. Thornberg at the Burke Museum similarly relied upon volunteers, and Lopez at the Queens Museum of Art even enlisted project participants to help document aspects of the project, tasking them with uploading photos of their workshops and experiences. Overwhelmingly, personnel was a key resource. Project coordinators required the additional hours and effort these individuals provided to complete the many tasks required of Museums Connect projects.

Support from AAM

In addition, several project coordinators relied upon AAM staff members for support throughout the Museums Connect process, with three project coordinators mentioning a staff member by name who was particularly helpful. Compared to other granting organizations that projects coordinators had worked with in the past, these project coordinators reported AAM staff as being inordinately attentive and supportive throughout the process. Thornberg at the Burke Museum reported, “I did call Heather at AAM a lot and tried to get feedback from her and really asked for a lot of help from her. Definitely got help from AAM a lot. In terms of funders, they were very hands-on.” These project coordinators described help they received from AAM staff members for problems as they arose in real time, testifying to the availability of these staff. Overall, AAM staff were a valuable resource for project coordinators.

Previous Project Information

Five out of the seven project coordinators either found information from coordinators of past Museums Connect projects helpful, or expressed a desire for more of this type of information. Overall, they felt that detailed information about individual projects would serve as a useful framework when designing the structure of their own program and provide a better sense of the challenges of that potentially arise in this type of work. In particular, project coordinators

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found the colloquium in Washington D.C. hosted by AAM for the US and non-US project coordinators at the beginning of the granting cycle to be a valuable source of this type of information. Thornberg from the Burke Museum of Natural History & Culture reported, “I could see what other groups had done as their activities, outputs, and partnerships. That was really helpful.” However, several project coordinators expressed that even more information would be helpful. For those who had not sought out this information or did not have access to it, in hindsight they felt it would have greatly streamlined the process and informed their project design. Lopez from the Queens Museum of Art even suggested, “It wouldn’t hurt to have an active alumni group to act as an advisor. It was always said that you can connect with somebody but you don’t have that relationship. It would be nice to elect a few individuals that have worked on projects that may be similar.” Both connecting with project coordinators personally and reading through past project proposals was suggested as a way to prepare future project coordinators. As a whole, project coordinators recognized the uniqueness of the Museums Connect program, and therefore felt guidance from those who had gone through the process before them would positively impact the experience for future project coordinators.

Technical or Logistical Support

Two of the project coordinators also mentioned the desire for technical or logistical support for their project. Specifically, they expressed a need for personnel with expertise beyond their own, for example - in the configuration of communication technology, editing of a film for an exhibit, the booking of travel for program participants, or making purchases for the non-US partner. Project coordinators felt that they were faced with tasks for which they had little prior experience, and felt the need was great enough to warrant additional outside help for these tasks. When Vinick at the Minnesota Historical Society had difficulty setting up video conferences

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between project participants, she reflected, “I wish that I had budgeted in my report to have somebody I paid – a tech person – to be there every time.” Vinick felt more time, attention, and energy could be devoted to dialogue and discussion between program participants if the technological aspects were being monitored by another person. Similarly, Lopez at the Queens Museum of Art reported, “I think that the purchasing of flights and booking of accommodations should be done by someone else.” Lopez found herself answering requests for purchases from her partner institutions almost arbitrarily, as she was unsure of whether or not certain purchases were allowed within the confines of the grant. Thematically, these requests from project coordinators for specific types of support demonstrate that project coordinators did not always take into account the difficulty of logistical and technological aspects of the project. While every project coordinator relied upon supplemental personnel for their project, these additional individuals did not always cover every necessary role or realm of expertise.

Funds

Lastly, several project coordinators reported a desire for additional funds. As opposed to Museums Connect not awarding the full amount desired to its grantees, several of the project coordinators had under budgeted various aspects of the project, including staff time, resulting in the use of their own institutional funds for portions of the program. Additionally, it was noted that Museums Connect grants only cover a portion of the staff time required for the project, and in turn it is difficult to find funding for this additional staff time, as most funders are not interested in backing projects initiated by other granting organizations. As with the desire for technical and logistical support, the desire for additional funds once again ties back to the high level of staff time and personnel required by Museums Connect projects. When staff time is under-budgeted, the lack is sorely felt.

2. What factors contribute to the successful achievement of outcomes in Museums

Connect projects?



Figure 2: Factors Contributing to Success

The majority of the factors contributing to successful achievement of outcomes in Museums Connect projects relate to the human elements of the project, including the commitment of the individuals involved, relationship building among participants and project coordinators - especially as facilitated through digital connection, and outside support for the project. In addition, many project coordinators emphasized the use of both planning and flexibility throughout the process.

Commitment of Individuals

Project coordinators frequently attributed the success of their Museums Connect programs to the commitment of individuals involved, including both program participants and project coordinators. Given the hefty undertaking in Museums Connect projects, it's hardly surprising that the focus and commitment of the individuals involved played a key role in successful achievement of outcomes. To begin, five out of the seven project coordinators expressed admiration for the staff involved at their own institution as well as their partner institution. Thornberg at the Burke Museum of Natural History & Culture described her experience, "People who were involved in the grant were incredibly passionate, and giving of their own time and energy well beyond what they might expect to get out of the grant. People weren't doing it because they thought they would get something out of it. They were doing it because they really believed in what we're trying to accomplish." Hoover reported a similar situation at the SOMarts Cultural Center. He said, "Having teachers on both sides that were willing to talk and engage and create projects that were fun and engaging and that kids really want to be a part of is important." The presence of staff at both institutions that genuinely value the work that is being done plays a significant role in achieving outcomes. Additionally, two of the project coordinators addressed the role participants played in the success of their project. Borger at the Phipps Conservatory reported, "I think the excellence of the students we had involved made it really easy to implement, because they were all really positive about the experience and engaged." As with the project coordinators, the dedication of participants contributed positively to the successful achievement of outcomes. Individual commitment was consistently attributed to project success.

Relationship Building

In addition to commitment on an individual level, relationship building, between both participants and staff at the non-US institutions, played a substantial role for six out of the seven project coordinators. To begin, the ability to cultivate relationships between project participants through digital platforms was key for three out of the seven project coordinators. They cited Skype and Facebook as useful tools, for both face-to-face conversation in the case of Skype, as well as conversations that weren't dependent upon everyone participating at the same time via Facebook. Melino at the Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens described her project's use of both platforms, "Skype was really significant in getting the students to see that there are participants on the other side. That they're actual students just like them. I think we should have set up a Skype call earlier to kick off the project." In terms of Facebook, she added, "The extent to which everyone connected on Facebook was really valuable and relevant to the point that when the five Nigerian students came over, all of our US students could recognize them based off their Facebook page. They could call them by their first name as soon as they met." The use of digital platforms allowed for relationship building to begin before participants got a chance to meet in person for projects including travel, and provided a way for people to connect that didn't necessarily depend upon time, schedules, or face-to-face encounters. Overall, project coordinators place great importance on building relationships between participants, and found digital connection to be a useful bridge in achieving this goal.

In additional, three out of the seven project coordinators found it helpful to build a personal relationship with their counterpart at the international institution, especially through face-to-face interactions. Hoover at the SOMarts Cultural Center said, "Having good trust with the person you're working with is important...just meeting each other in person was huge. I trusted him because we met face-to-face, we talked, and I got to know him." Lopez at the Queens

Museum similarly reported, “We needed to build the team within our own staff, within their staff, because they’d never worked that intensely before together...I don’t think we would have been able to do it if we didn’t have a chance to meet each other, sit down, and eat, and get to know each other...get to know each other’s families.” As both Hoover’s and Lopez’s experiences indicate, project coordinators found it vital to build a relationship with their counterpart that extended beyond the professional realm. Several project coordinators also highlighted the importance of the Museums Connect colloquium in Washington DC, as it provided one of the few opportunities for face-to-face interaction. Close, personal relationships between project coordinators were key in successfully achieving outcomes.

Community Support

Project coordinators from all six projects highlighted the importance of community support for their projects. As Hoover at the SOMarts Cultural Center pointed out, Museums Connect projects tend to have a “gravitational effect,” in the sense that they attract community participation. As a result, each of the projects involved community members who contributed their own time and resources. For Vinick at the Minnesota Historical Society, the participation of local Palestinian community members was an unexpected but valuable addition to their project. She reported, “I can’t say enough about the good will in the community here that we encountered. The Palestinian individuals that we worked with who helped support some of our programming, especially when the Palestinian girls came here, were just wonderful.” For her, the enthusiasm and participation of local community members provided valuable support to the Museums Connect programming. Newell at the American Museum of Natural History had a similar experience in New York. “We made many more connections in New York than we thought we would because we were doing programs here in Staten Island, and there were other

groups in New York who were doing Hurricane Sandy community projects. Those have been ongoing connections for us, which have been useful.” Not only do Museums Connect projects reach new global audiences, they attract new local audiences as well. Community involvement provides an additional layer of support, labor, and expertise for Museums Connect projects.

Planning & Flexibility

Project coordinators stressed the importance of both planning and flexibility when implementing Museums Connect projects. In particular, many project coordinators found it helpful to plan out the programmatic aspects of their project, session-by-session, far in advance. Creating a schedule for activities with participants provided a necessary framework and allowed the project to move forward productively. For example, Melino from the Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens cites one of the reasons for the success of their institution’s Museums Connect project as “having that schedule in advance and knowing exactly what we were going to do for each session. Within each session, we made sure that we were providing something that would help us reach those target goals.” The presence of a detailed schedule kept all activities closely tied to project outcomes, and was cited as a vital contributor to success for over half of the Museums Connect projects represented.

Flexibility was also considered important, in terms of both keeping an open mind as a project coordinator and having the institutional freedom to respond to changes and adapt the project. For example, Hoover at the SOMarts Cultural Center emphasized both flexibility and patience as important attributes of an effective project coordinator, in particular when dealing with cultural differences. He noted, “Being open to other cultural ways of doing things is important.” In addition to having a flexible attitude on a personal level, project coordinators also mentioned the importance of institutional flexibility. Lopez at the Queens Museum of Art,

when describing an institution that would be well equipped to pursue a Museums Connect grant, said, “It would have to be an institution that gives some kind of autonomy to the project manager. If it was too strict, it would be really challenging to achieve some of the things that you need in the moment.” The institution itself must be flexible in the sense that it grants the project coordinator an adequate level of freedom to adapt the project as it progresses. As many project coordinators testified, unexpected events and challenges are bound to arise in a Museums Connect project. Flexibility on both an individual and institutional level is key for responding to these occurrences in real time.

3. What challenges have project managers faced when implementing a Museums Connect grant, and how were they mitigated?

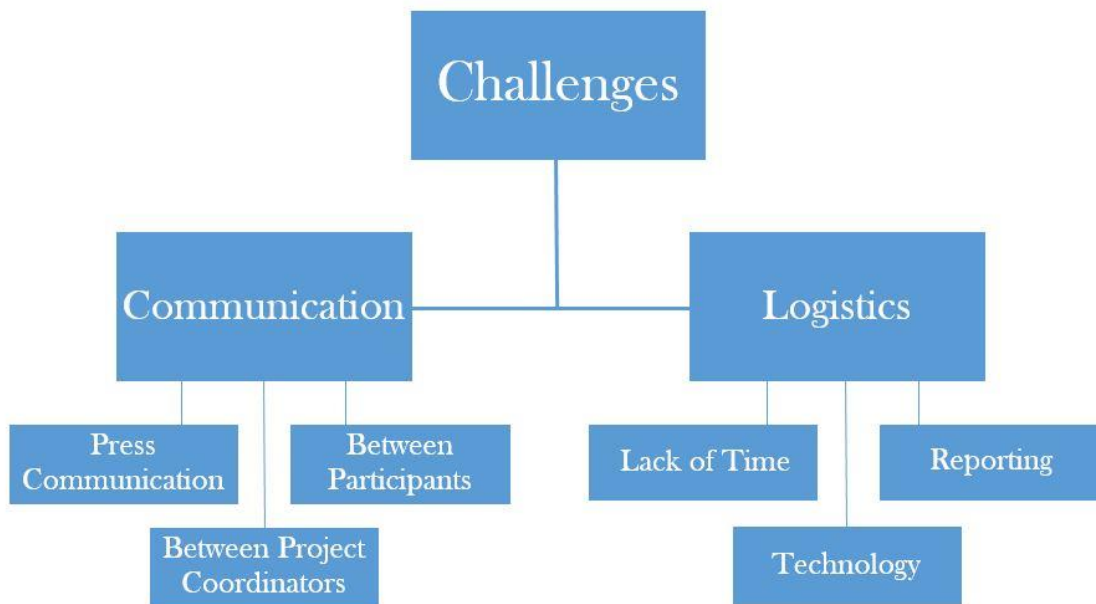


Figure 3: Challenges

The challenges faced by Museums Connect project managers fall into two categories: communication and logistics. Challenges relating to communication include communication

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between project participants, between project coordinators, and outward press communications. Logistical challenges include administrative duties, technology, and lack of time.

COMMUNICATION

Participant Communication

Four of the project coordinators reported difficulty both scheduling and facilitating conversation between project participants. The initial challenge of finding a time that was mutually convenient for participants to meet was compounded by the challenge of sparking live conversation between groups of strangers teleconferencing in from different continents. As Newell from the American Museum of Natural History reported, even if you manage to get both groups of participants Skyped in on the same call, “How you get them to have any meaningful conversation is very difficult.” Project coordinators cannot expect participants to instantly dive into deep, relevant discussions; rather, the discussion must be thoughtfully facilitated. Even with the intent of facilitating conversation, large numbers of participants and technological glitches can further complicate successful facilitating of discussion. For Vinick from the Minnesota Historical Society, whose project worked with 20 teenage girls from each museum, she wished she “had shaped it so that there were more small group conversations, but we had so many frustrations figuring out the google hangout anyway that it was just really difficult.” Managing conversations through digital platform was a balancing act of guiding the conversation as well as attending to the technology. Even the project coordinators who experienced success as far as the level of conversation attained through digital communication reported being unable to set up conversations as often as desired due to scheduling conflicts. Borger from the Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens expressed, “It would have been ideal if we had done Skype every single time we met. I think they would have gotten to know each other more and been able

to ask more.” However, time differences prevented a Skype call from occurring as often as desired. Overall, the process of managing communication between project participants requires project coordinators to oversee the scheduling, technology, and dialogue facilitation. When these elements don’t all align, conversations may not be able to attain their richest potential. As a result, the relationship building and cultural sharing between the participants may suffer.

Project Coordinator Communication

In addition to experiencing difficulty facilitating communication between project participants, five of the seven project coordinators described the challenge in communicating with their counterpart project coordinator and managing the relationship with the partner museum. Challenges faced while communicating with project coordinators included managing expectations for the project, as well as delays in response time, with both of these factors often impacted by or related to cultural or ideological differences. Difficulty managing expectations for the project resulted from differing levels in institutional commitment to the project. For example, Thornberg at the Burke Museum of Natural History & Culture reported, “I initially found that I didn’t have a lot of the other museum’s attention early on, as they were busy with other projects.” Hoover from the SOMarts Cultural Center expressed similarly, “They didn’t have full institutional buy-in,” which was attributed to differences in educational philosophies and museological values between the two institutions. The subjectively varying levels of commitment to the projects often delayed the project’s ability to move forward, or complicated various steps along the way. However, international museums are by no means universally less committed than US museums. Project coordinators also described situations in which the partner institution was even more committed to the success of the project than the US institution. For example, Vinick at the Minnesota Historical Society reported, “They ideologically and

logistically were really committed to making this a successful project, more so than our museum. They have a lot of political and personal interest in projecting the Palestinian Heritage Museum as a world class museum.” Although no perspectives from non-US project coordinators are represented, it is clear that expectations and perceived commitment to the project ran the full spectrum for both US and non-US museums.

Once expectations for the project had been properly managed between project coordinators, the most significant challenge regarding communication was delay in response time. As mentioned earlier, international communication is inherently limited with the difference in time zones. The time difference proved especially problematic when project coordinators needed rapid responses from their counterpart regarding flights or purchases, with technological capabilities or cultural values often impacting turnaround time for emails. Newell from the American Museum of Natural History described communication with her counterpart, “She was running the museum single-handedly and her email didn’t always work. We’d sometimes not hear from her for weeks.” Technology was a major barrier in regular communication with her counterpart. Additionally, cultural values regarding how quickly one responds to email often played a role. Lopez from the Queens Museums of Art describes differences in cultural communication styles between herself and her counterpart, “I think as American people we expect that if you email somebody they answer.” Several project coordinators reported similar cultural differences impacting the lag time between email responses. Overall, there are a variety of complications that contributed to difficulty communicating between project coordinators, whether it be unclear expectations, time differences, technology, or culturally different communication styles. Project coordinators are equal partners working towards a common goal, yet international communication is inherently fraught with challenges.

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Press Communication

Lastly, two of the project coordinators reported difficulty with external communications. They were unable to attain the press coverage their program merited. Press coverage, while not the most integral outcome of Museums Connect projects, is still considered important for achieving a greater scale of cultural diplomacy beyond direct project participants. This challenge was not attributed to their internal capacity for press communications; rather, outside factors impacted their ability to attain media coverage. For Vinick at the Minnesota Historical Society, the lack of media appeared to be related to American media bias against the population they were working with. She explained the lack of press, “I don’t know why, but I have a few theories. If you ask anyone who is Palestinian-American, they’ll say there is an American media bias against Palestinians. I would not totally disagree with that. It was frustrating.” Choosing to work with a population with historically fraught relationships with the US was an intentional move on the part of the Minnesota Historical Society. Despite a positive attitude on the part of participants, staff, and community members, not all barriers against Palestinian-American relations were surmounted. For Lopez at the Queens Museum of Art, current events in Spain overshadowed any media attention her project may have received abroad. She described the experience, “We were going to have all the major news channels come to the Embassy. They were all scheduled to come at the end of the project. When we were at the Embassy, the king abdicated. No one was interested in our story anymore.” Regardless of any interest the media channels initially expressed in the project, it could not compete with other breaking major news stories. For both the Minnesota Historical Society and the Queens Museum of Art, the lack of press coverage was a result of outside forces, for which no available contingency plan could compensate.

LOGISTICS

Administrative Duties

Five out of the seven project coordinators stressed the burden of keeping up with the amount of reporting and paperwork required by the grant. Melino from the Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens said, “I found the most taxing part of this project to be the documentation and reporting.” This sentiment was echoed by the other four project coordinators, who similarly found it hard to keep up with the budget, paperwork, and administrative aspects of the program while simultaneously managing every other aspect. Several project coordinators suggested “mak[ing] friends in your finance department,” as the arduous levels of documentation and reporting are not confined to the project coordinator, but experienced by the financial officer in charge of handling the Museums Connect project as well. Although museums in general are used to working with large federal granting agencies, such as the National Science Foundation or the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the Bureau of Cultural and Educational Affairs seemingly requires a different level and style of reporting than project coordinators were accustomed. Newell from the American Museum of Natural History reported, “It was a very complicated and detailed budget every quarter, whereas most grants I think you report just at the end instead of having to do this major thing four times basically.” Although many staff at her institution had worked with federal granting agencies before, no one expected or was prepared for the amount of time required to keep up with the administrative work. Evidently, one of the drawbacks of collaborating internationally with another museum through more formal channels of diplomacy is the intensified amount of tracking, reporting, and administration.

Technology

Technology, though a vital tool in facilitating international communication, also posed a challenge at times. Two out of the seven project coordinators highlighted the challenges brought

on by the use of technology specifically on the American side. For Vinick at the Minnesota Historical Society, she found that Skype, a popular tool for facilitating discussion between participants in other Museums Connect projects, was not compatible with the technology at her workplace. Oftentimes she was forced to improvise when the teleconference did not function as planned, resulting in her using Skype on her cell phone. Hoover with the SOMarts Cultural Center similarly experienced challenges with technology at his institution; however, the difficulties resulted from the lack of basic computer literacy among the American project participants. He reported, “We thought our kids in America would know how to use video and Facebook and email accounts. Instead, we were backed up the first month trying to get these kids Gmail accounts.” His participants were mostly urban, low-income, and immigrant students who had never before had access to computers; therefore a significant portion of time had to be spent building up not only the technological capacity of the institution, but the participants as well. In today’s age, it is easy to assume that technology will function exactly as it is intended; yet project coordinators were still forced to improvise and rethink their use of technology to suit the needs of their institution and participants.

Lack of Time

Lastly, a lack of time posed a major logistical challenge for four of the seven project coordinators. Simply, these project coordinators underestimated the amount of time necessary to both implement the program and keep up with the paperwork. As Thornberg pointed out, the Museums Connect grant only covers a small portion of staff time towards the project. However, she found herself easily working half-time and even full-time on the project, which required her to volunteer her own hours to both keep up with the project and her other institutional duties. At the Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens, an insufficient amount of time was budgeted for

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participant workshops. Borger reported wishing they had scheduled full days for workshops, instead of only four hours, and that it required many hours volunteered on the part of their intern to complete certain project outputs. Overwhelmingly, these project coordinators suggested making sure to budget enough time for both your own capacities as a staff person and the outputs to be completed by workshop participants. Museums Connect projects have many moving parts, and as such require quite a few hours from both project coordinators and participants.

MITIGATION OF CHALLENGES

Project coordinators suggested a variety of ways that challenges could be mitigated for future project coordinators of Museums Connect grants. These suggestions did not often overlap, given the unique qualities of Museums Connect projects and wide variety of individual experiences. However, they did fall within three main categories: establishing a relationship with the partner institution, time management, and reporting. The following is an exhaustive list of their recommendations.

Partner Institution Relationship

- Establish a common framework or philosophy for the project with your partner institution early on, to insure that you share the same values and goals.
- Build trust with your counterpart project coordinator at the non-US museum. Engage in as much face-to-face communication as is feasible and get to know them on a personal level.

Time Management

- Budget more time, and in some instances, more money, than you think you'll need to implement the project, as well as to keep up with the administrative duties.

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- In instances in which you're unable to budget more time or money for the intended project activities, find a way to scale down in a way that doesn't greatly reduce the impact of the project. For example, involve a smaller group of core participants, but put more effort into attracting community involvement.
- If time is limited, focus more effort on relationship building between participants as opposed to other workshop activities, as in the end the relationship building is the most important aspect.

Reporting

- (On the part of AAM) Find a way to lessen the amount of reporting and paperwork required from project coordinators.
- Set up an internal system for sharing reports, documents, receipts, photos, deadlines, etc. between the partner institutions, such as a cloud space or online calendar that staff at both institutions can access. It streamlines the process and lessens the overall reporting burden on an individual level.

CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

Implications

Museums Connect demonstrates the importance of the human element in cultural diplomacy and exchange. First, this research has shown what many museum professionals already know intuitively - museums are filled with passionate, dedicated individuals, whose commitment to these projects played an invaluable role in their success. Additionally, as with many aspects of museum work, Museums Connect projects are most successful when the work extends beyond the walls of the institution. Relationship building between participants and project coordinators is vital for achieving this extension, through a greater ability to both facilitate cross-cultural understanding between participants and work together effectively among museum staff. At that same level, community networks play a key role, as they bring in expertise in areas where project coordinators may be lacking, and allow the project outcomes to extend beyond the direct participants. Lastly, as a professional organization and grant administrator, the American Alliance of Museums provides a significant cushion of support, and it many ways can be considered simply a larger community network, bringing expert knowledge and experience to the table for project coordinators. The dedication and enthusiasm of the individuals involved at all levels, whether they be project coordinators, participants, community members, or AAM staff, is a primary predictor of success for these projects. Perhaps this dedication speaks not only to the quality of the individuals involved but the quality of the topics and programs pursued as well. Plainly, people get excited about Museums Connect projects, and are willing to put in the effort for this type of work.

However, while the Museums Connect program builds upon museums' strengths, it also exposes their weaknesses. Although museums are succeeding on a number of levels within

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Museums Connect projects, communication nonetheless poses a challenge. Communication between project coordinators and participants is understandably hampered by the logistical and technological challenges that are inherent to the process of international communication, and there are strategies that museum professionals can utilize to reduce those limitations, such as configuring technology beforehand, or providing multiple digital platforms for communication. Yet beyond the technological and logistical factors, the Museums Connect program also provides an opportunity for the field to reflect upon the skills required to facilitate meaningful dialogue. No amount of planning or technological configuration guarantees that a meaningful discussion involving cross-cultural exchange and understanding will occur. Plainly, project infrastructure is not a substitute for expertise in dialogue facilitation. Museum professionals should continue fine-tuning the technological and logistical aspects of facilitating international communication. Yet the opportunity for the field to deepen its skills in dialogue facilitation, especially with international audiences and over digital platforms, should not be overlooked.

Furthermore, as the museums field continues on the path of cultural diplomacy, Museums Connect demonstrates the importance of creating replicable models for international collaboration. In its pursuit of this goal, Museums Connect has revealed an important facet of this model – specifically, the expansion of local programming with proven appeal to a global audience. For institutions pursuing cultural diplomacy in the future, even beyond the scope of Museums Connect, it would be wise to first look within their existing program line-up for an opportunity to branch out internationally. Museums Connect reveals that person-to-person cultural diplomacy can be reasonably achieved by simply revamping programs museums already do well on a larger scale. As the field strives to further clarify the replicable aspects of international collaboration, the concept of scaling up plays an important role.

Lastly, there is a clear need for more research documenting the successes and challenges of this type of work. As several project coordinators expressed, a forum for museum professionals who have engaged in this type of international collaboration would be immensely helpful in moving the field forward and preparing individuals to pursue this type of work in the future. Although Museums Connect is one of the first programs to take on peer-to-peer cultural diplomacy in museums, it's unlikely to be the last. Whether museums wish to work officially within the realm of cultural diplomacy, or simply expand their capacity to collaborate internationally, the groundwork is far from over. The field should continue to explore ways in which to expand the technological and logistical capacity for this type of work, as well as the skill sets that lend themselves well to this sphere. International collaboration cannot occur if museum professionals are not given the opportunity to collaborate as well.

Conclusions

The world is continually shrinking, as opportunities to connect with people on the other side of the globe multiply. Whether these connections occur in person or through a screen, there is undeniable value in facilitating cross-cultural understanding, regardless of differences in national and political climates. As cultural institutions, museums are inherently duty-bound to operate within this sphere, though exactly what role museums are meant to play is constantly evolving. As museums charge forward with this type of work, the chance to reflect on the skills that museums bring to this realm should not be lost. Lasting change in the type of work that museums pursue and the role they see themselves playing for an international audience will be the result of both innovation and reflection.

Further research on the topic should be more inclusive of the perspectives of non-US museums and professionals, as well as programs beyond the scope of Museums Connect with

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similar goals of cross-cultural understanding and exchange. Museum work that falls within the category of international collaboration and peer-to-peer cultural diplomacy is going to vary in structure, audience, topic, and location, but that does not mean commonalities cannot be found, discussed, and hopefully improved. In the end, global audiences, both in the US and abroad, are eager for more of this type of work. The museums of tomorrow must shift their focus to address this need.

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APPENDIX

Interview Guide

The purpose of this research is to describe the factors that contribute to the successful completion of outcomes for Museums Connect grant projects, the resources that project coordinators rely upon as they implement Museums Connect projects, as well as the challenges of implementing these projects. We will also discuss the characteristics that you believe equip institutions and individuals to host Museums Connect grants, and any advice you may have for future international collaboration.

Part I: Successful Completion of Outcomes

1. Why was your institution originally interested in pursuing a Museums Connect grant?
2. What were your expectations for the role this project would play both at your institution and in your community?
3. To what extent did your experience match these expectations?
4. How did your or other members of your institution prepare for implementing a Museums Connect project?
5. For your project, you specified these outcomes: (name institution's specific Museums Connect project) How did you determine these outcomes?
6. Can you briefly describe the products or activities you developed to address these outputs and outcomes?
7. What factors contributed to the achievement of these outcomes?
8. Were there any outcomes that occurred that were not anticipated by the outcomes stated in your grant application? (If yes) What were they?

Part II: Challenges

1. Please describe any challenges faced by your institution in implementing your Museums Connect project.
2. How did you handle these challenges?
3. What are some ways that you believe these challenges could be mitigated for future Museums Connect project coordinators?
4. In hindsight, are there any resources you wish had been available to you before or during the Museums Connect project?

Part III: Future International Collaboration

1. Based upon your personal experiences, what are the characteristics of an institution you consider to be well equipped to pursue a Museums Connect grant?
2. What steps should an individual take to prepare themselves to be a project coordinator for Museums Connect grant?
3. What advice do you have for institutions or professionals looking to pursue international collaboration in the future?