

Toolkit: Wellbeing for Emerging Museum Professionals



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Purpose

The purpose of this project is to provide emerging museum professionals (EMPs) with an inclusive wellbeing toolkit in order to synthesize resources and methods of support from across the museum field.

Desired Outcomes

- To help you understand what professional wellbeing is, and why it matters;
- To encourage you to reflect on your current professional wellbeing;
- To connect you to resources that can help you enhance or rebalance your professional wellbeing; and
- To guide you in developing strategies to maintain your professional wellbeing.

Deliverable

A wellbeing toolkit created through consulting EMPs, researching how to navigate these issues, and organized into a toolkit accessible to EMPs.

Host Site

- The National Emerging Museum Professionals Network (NEMPN)
- Mission: “To engage and support self-defined emerging museum professionals in building vibrant, equitable, and inclusive communities of networking, collaborative practice, & exchange.”
- This toolkit will be available on their website.

Process

This project began in fall of 2021 after I identified a deficit in wellbeing across the field through anecdotes from myself and friends. I formed a committee, including the president of NEPMN. My thesis advisor guided me in researching various wellbeing methods and theories. With personal, authentic, and scientific data, I created the final deliverable in the winter of 2023. All resources mentioned are free to readers, and the overall document was designed with accessibility as a priority.

Framing - Wellbeing

Bakker and Schaufeli (2008) write that professional wellbeing is dependent on positive organizational behavior, which evaluates the combined stressful and motivational job characteristics that impact professional wellbeing. They also state that job characteristics can be organized into two categories: **job demands** and **job resources**. If job resources (things that foster growth and development) outweigh the demands (things that require effort associated with physiological and psychological costs), then professional wellbeing is relatively positive—and vice versa.

RYFF'S PSYCHOLOGICAL SCALES OF WELLBEING
PURPOSE IN LIFE
SELF ACCEPTANCE
POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS
PERSONAL GROWTH
AUTONOMY
ENVIRONMENTAL MASTERY

Measuring Wellbeing

Carol Ryff created one of the first systematic models of psychological wellbeing, which has remained one of the most scientifically backed and empirically accurate today. (Ryff et al., 2007; adapted from Ryff, 1989).

Framing – Emerging Museum Professionals

A group of researchers surveyed over 1,000 participants the following fall about why they left or would leave the museum field (Erdman, Ocello, Salerno, Van Damme, 2017). The most common response was **low pay**, with other participants reporting **poor work/life balance**, **workload issues**, and **insufficient benefits**.

Literature also suggests that those who work in nonprofits like museums are struggling to meet job demands due to long hours and low pay (Kosny & Eakin, 2008). In addition to struggling to make ends meet, in many museums, workplace culture enforces a view of work as an extension of yourself, resulting in many museum professionals working additional unpaid hours, driven (or manipulated) by their institution's mission (Thistle, 2011).

Focus Groups

- I held 2 focus groups with 12 total Museology graduate students at The University of Washington.
- Students were asked how they define wellbeing, their thoughts on the state of wellbeing in the field, and concerns for their wellbeing along with their peers.
- The most common concerns were over their **financial** and **emotional** wellbeing
- Students expressed confidence in their **relational** and **intellectual** wellbeing

Key References

Kosny, A., & Eakin, J.M. (2008). The hazards of helping: Work, mission and risk in non-profit social service organizations. *Health, Risk & Society*, 10(2), 149-166.

Ryff, C. D. (1989). Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57, 1069-1081.

Wilkens Consulting, & American Alliance of Museums. (2022, February 7). *National snapshot of COVID-19 impact on United States museums*. American Alliance of Museums. <https://www.aam-us.org/2022/02/08/national-snapshot-of-covid-19-impact-on-united-states-museums-fielded-december-2021-january-2022/>

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Conclusion, Reflection & Next Steps

In the same report on low wellbeing across the museum field, it is shared that the most common concern amongst museum professionals was the wellbeing of their colleagues (AAM, 2021) which indicates a strong sense of community, something beneficial for wellbeing. There is also a recent trend of museum workers unionizing and noticing an improvement in employee wellbeing through solidarity (Horowitz, 2020). Overall, research is beginning to show that while wellbeing is low, there are tools available to help us improve our wellbeing—the most important one being each other. Sharing resources like this toolkit with our peers and creating more dialogue to work through these concerns can make a difference.