

Museums and Sanctuary Spaces: Staff Response to Community Crisis

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**Abstract**

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Museums have traditionally articulated a role for themselves as a sanctuary space, albeit one for thoughts or learning, a sanctuary of the mind rather than the body. Spaces that occupy similar positions of institutional trust, such as libraries and places of worship, are currently, and have historically, responded to the needs of the mind as well as the physical needs and safety of their communities. Museums are coming up against the same necessity to act, as their communities struggle in the face of traumatic events and crises. This study engages with the question of how museums can, in a rapid response way, create space that serves as a sanctuary in a physical, embodied manner for their surrounding communities' post-crisis or trauma. This study draws on staff interviews and document analysis at museums that responded to their communities needs by opening the space of the museum within a week of a traumatic event, such as fires, domestic terrorism, and hate crimes. In speaking with staff, museum's reasons for responding, the nature of response, and the internal tools that allowed that response to be successful are examined. In addition, the role community partnerships play in a successful response, and the internal and external shifts a museum undergoes after a rapid-response are studied. The findings will help inform the field in developing deeper community relationships, and in deciding whether an institution should develop its own rapid-response plan to community crisis.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In 1971 Duncan Cameron opened his article “The Museum, a Temple or the Forum” with “the crisis at the moment, put in the simplest possible terms, is that our museums and art galleries seem not to know who or what they are. Our institutions are unable to resolve their problems of role definition” (Cameron, 48). Museums operate as a third place, a place between work and home, similar in this capacity to places of worship and libraries, all of which strengthen “our sense of community” (Butler and Diaz). However, they are also different, in terms of fee structures and the housing of items which are meant to remain off-limits, unlike the library books and psalters of their siblings, which leads to a more controlled and guarded environment. These similarities and differences are where some of the friction noted by Cameron lies, a desire to be *for* the public, but perhaps not *of* the public. Museums invite their communities in, but under a rigidly controlled set of rules that cannot react with agility to the material needs a community may face when in crisis in the way that libraries and churches can.

Libraries and churches have long served as physical sanctuary sites to their communities – providing spaces for children between school and home, the homeless to step out of the weather, and in general as some of the few free spaces in an overwhelmingly capitalist, pay-to-enter environment. “In fact, public libraries could be considered the ultimate sanctuary space: public libraries are free to all people, at all times. Anyone, of any race, color, creed, or immigration status, can enter a public library and use their resources, spaces, and services for free” (Saunders). In moments of crisis too, libraries and churches provide sanctuary. The Ferguson Municipal Public Library sheltered vulnerable members of its community in 2014 after the police shooting of Michael Brown, and churches across the country have sought to harbor

undocumented immigrants from violence and deportation by ICE and border agents. Museums do not lend themselves as easily to this sort of physical sanctuary. Recently, museums have begun to explore this sanctuary role as well, pushing past offering sanctuary to just collections items, but to people as well. Museums as a whole have been wrestling with how to best serve and engage with their core communities, moving “from being about something to being for somebody” (Weil, 1999). Some museums have articulated space as being an important part of service to the community in a metaphorical sense, and a few have made the jump to providing literal physical sanctuary to their community. The Jane Adams Hull House Museum sees an important part of its work in regard to “the continuing fight for justice” as “the Museum’s role in providing ‘counter’ and ‘oppositional’ space that challenges the dominant narrative. Critical to our [the museum’s] identity is the continuing commitment to the creation of a ‘counterpublic’ space that might enable a different world and public to come into being” (Lee, 2011, p. 176). The Museum of Homelessness started with the takeover of an empty building during an extreme and deadly cold snap, to highlight the very real and literal need for physical shelter and to create a platform to voice community needs (Heal, Rogers, Wajid, and Turtle, 2018).

However, it is only a few museums who have martialled their space in service of a need for sanctuary, and not yet the field as a whole. The problem my study is intended to address is then this need: how museums can, in a rapid response way, create space that serves as sanctuary in a physical, embodied manner for their surrounding community post-crisis or trauma. Rapid response, in this case, is being defined as a response taking place in under a week from the crisis event. Museums are often able to compassionately respond to a crisis with dialogue or exhibits, but in many cases months or years after the event, due to the constraints of exhibit schedules and

development times. Reactive, rapid responses from museums are then important in serving a community's immediate needs as museums also move forward with more long-term responses.

Much research has been done on the decline and necessity of third places, a place between work and home, as well as the decline and necessity of social support nets. These two fields have met in the worlds of library studies and religious institutions, with research and debate on how much of a sanctuary role these institutions should play. However, this question has largely not come to the forefront for museums.

In terms of museum studies, there is literature and discussion and action on becoming more engaged community partners, and on moving towards social action. However, very little of this literature has focused on material aid to the community in moments of crisis. Instead, museum literature has focused on topics like decolonizing collections, hiring and mentoring staff from marginalized communities, or relinquishing control of exhibits to community partners or advisory boards. The "Museums are Not Neutral" movement has been growing, urging museums to examine the stances they take, even when they claim to not be taking a stance, and to be explicit in them. However, this research is on protracted crises and events, rather than on flashpoint crises. As such, my research focused on four main questions around rapid responses.

1. What drives museums to serve as sanctuary spaces?
2. What is the physical nature of a museum's rapid response to an external crisis?
3. What internal structures support the museum's response to an external crisis?
4. What role do community partnerships play that impact a museum's response?
5. What shifts occur internally after a museum responds to an external crisis?

Museums have been wrestling with what their community role should be since at least the 1970s. Much of this discussion has circled around being more of an active partner in their community, but without much discussion or analysis on if and how they should respond to crisis events in their communities. As museums look to better serve their communities and to increase their community outreach, the material needs of the community must be considered. Museums, in striving to become for somebody, must wrestle with what that really means, and if that also means being *there* for somebody, in a time of great need.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

*When the sun is comin' up/And the world has come ashore/If you're hoping for a harbor/ then  
you'll find an open door – Come From Away, 2017*

In conducting this research, it was important to look at not only the increasing social roles played by museums, but also literature on disaster planning, space and placemaking, safe and sanctuary, and mourning and public health. Because of the specificity of the problem in regard to crisis and physical space, in order to develop a coherent language to examine the problem a breadth of disciplines needed to be examined.

### **Disaster Preparedness Plans**

In this thesis on the ways museums respond to community crisis or trauma, I am not looking at traditional disaster preparedness plans. Disaster preparedness plans are internal facing, serving to preserve the structure of the building of the museum, its collections, and the safety of staff and visitors inside the building. In this thesis I seek to explore the support that the museum offers to its outside community when disaster is at its doorstep, rather than during an internal crisis that would typically be covered under disaster preparedness plans. However, to differentiate my meaning, it is important to discuss what a disaster preparedness plan entails.

In the Alliance Reference Guide “Developing a Disaster Preparedness/Emergency Response Plan,” (2018) the American Alliance of Museums writes: “preparing for disaster is one of the most important things a museum can do in order to safeguard its collections and protect staff and visitors from hazards” (p. 1). Having a disaster preparedness or emergency response plan is one of the standards of the museum field, and should be put in place in order to “prevent harm in cases of emergency and minimize damage resulting from disasters (man-made or natural)” (American Alliance of Museums, 2018, p. 1). Per the National Park Service (1993), an

institution with similar educational and preservation goals to museums: “all National park service units are required to prepare an Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) designed, first, to safeguard human life, and secondly, to maximize the protection of the park’s resources, to the extent that this can be done safely” (p. 1). Additionally, the National Park Service (2005) notes that disasters can be natural, such as tornadoes or earthquakes, as well as human-caused, “such as structural fires, accidents and crime,” and that both natural and human caused collections “can injure visitors and staff, and damage or destroy collections...” (p. 1). The American Alliance of Museums (2018) notes that an emergency response plan

includes preparedness and response plans for all relevant emergencies and threats (natural, mechanical, biological, and human); Addresses the needs of staff, visitors, structures, and collections; Specifies how to protect, evacuate, and recover collections in the event of a disaster; Includes evacuation routes and assembly areas for people (p. 2).

However, these measures are all inward facing. Rather than utilizing the museum as a space of shelter in an external emergency, disaster preparedness plans detail an exit from the museum, in case of damage to the museum building that poses a threat to the museum’s collections, staff, and visitors.

The National Park Service (1993) writes that an Emergency Operations Plan “necessarily will be tailored to that park’s specific needs, its particular threats, and its collection’s vulnerabilities” (p. 1). Likewise, the American Alliance of Museums (2018) notes that “each museum’s plan will vary because of its unique collections, location, and facilities. A strong disaster plan will recognize all potential risks and provide appropriate procedures to minimize damage or threat” (p. 2). As museums move increasingly to being an active member of their communities, they will need to wrestle, just as libraries and churches are, with determining

whether a threat to the community is a threat to the museum as well. If so, just as disaster preparedness plans account for floods and fires, they will need to account for community crises in their planning, and how and in what ways museums can offer material aid. One potential option is to mobilize the museum as a space of sanctuary.

### **Safe Spaces, Sanctuary Spaces, Brave Spaces**

In discussing sanctuary, there is frequently a conflation of terms. In the social justice sphere, safe space, brave space, and sanctuary space are all used to describe similar concepts but have their own individual meanings. Conflation of the terms has occasionally led to confusion and debate. The most widely popularized term, safe space:

has been used in various contexts in higher education—from movement-building, to academic theory, to student support services, as well as in the classroom. Although the origin of the term remains unclear, its many uses have ultimately centered on increasing the safety and visibility of marginalized or oppressed community members. (Ali, 2017, p. 3).

Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens (2013) describe safe spaces as a “learning environment that allows students to engage with one another over controversial issues with honesty, sensitivity, and respect” (p. 135). However, Arao and Clemens (2013) worried, in dealing with their students, that the use of “safe space” promised a lack of risk that hindered efforts to create dialogue (p. 135, 136). Arao and Clemens (2013) questioned “the degree to which safety is an appropriate or reasonable expectation for any honest dialogue about social justice,” leading them to make a “linguistic shift in our facilitation practice, whereby we seek to cultivate brave spaces rather than safe spaces for group learning” (p. 139, 141).

However, some activists and educators have pushed back against Arao and Clemens characterization of safe spaces, such as Lily Zheng (2016), writer for the Stanford Daily who states: “The power of safe spaces was this: Marginalized students could express, interpret and connect over shared experiences of marginalization and struggle as a community without fear of repercussion.” To Zheng (2016), “brave spaces” “take this exact interaction and formalize it within an educational setting. The ‘dialogue’ becomes a one-sided stream of narratives, trauma, critical theory and lived experiences going from the marginalized to the not-marginalized,” in short, according to Zheng (2016), “expecting marginalized peoples to perform the labor of education,” and not allowing them a space to vent, turn off, or perform less than perfectly for a critical, privileged eye.

Although the linguistic debate continues in the academic, activist, and student affair world, the museum world has slowly begun adopting the use of “brave space.” The American Alliance of Museums accompanied its 2018 Code of Conduct with an explanation that included the term brave spaces.

In creating a code of conduct, our goal was to provide our participants with a “brave space,” a concept introduced to us by Sage Morgan-Hubbard, our own Ford W. Bell Fellow for Museums & P-12 Education. “Brave spaces” are places to freely discuss ideas, with a few guidelines in place to keep our interactions respectful and productive. We would never want to stifle discussions or infringe on free speech, but we had to find a way to protect the most vulnerable populations among us. In our Code of Conduct, we chose to focus on limiting behaviors that impact the freedom and safety of marginalized populations, rather than telling participants what opinions they are allowed to hold. (Griffin).

Similarly, the hashtag #bravespaces was featured in the Western Museum Association's 2018 Annual Meeting, with many sessions being marked with the hashtag. The inclusion of #bravespaces worked towards the Western Museum Association's 2018 theme of INSPIRE, and its focus on questions like "How can museums inspire communities to take action? How can museums be agents of social change and justice? How can museums increase diversity in their exhibits, programming, and staff/boards? How can we make museums more inclusive places?" (Western Museums Association, 3). Mike Murawski (2017), Director of Education & Public Programs for the Portland Art Museum, while lecturing on museums and social action, stated that he prefers brave spaces to safe spaces, as it is more proactive and requires more action. He floated the idea of "sanctuary spaces" as the next step in the evolution of safe spaces to brave spaces (Murawski, 2017).

However, the term "sanctuary space" already has a linguistic history, specifically that of immigration in the United States. "When first deployed in the immigration context in the 1980s, the term sanctuary primarily referred to efforts by churches and cities to provide various forms of assistance to asylum applicants from Central America" (Villazor, 2008, p. 134-135). These efforts included those of sanctuary cities and churches harboring undocumented immigrants from deportation efforts. According to Villazor (2008):

the term sanctuary could refer not only to public laws and policies, but also to choices made by private citizens that implicate immigration law. Thus, we can analyze sanctuaries along a private/public dichotomy and describe, on one end, of the spectrum those safe spaces that are more narrowly bound, such as the confines of a church or private residence, and the other end of the spectrum that attends to broader and more public domains that have relatively porous borders." (p. 137).

Along this private/public range of sanctuary spaces, there is still some sense of physical space. The confines of a church, or the borders of a city are what enable sanctuary to be provided. In addition, there is an ethical imperative behind the terminology of sanctuary space. “Importantly, the use of the word sanctuary conveyed a sense of moral and ethical obligations that churches, and to some extent, the local governments aimed to evoke. Today, the term sanctuary generally still refers to public and private safe spaces for unauthorized immigrants” (Villazor, 2008, p. 135). In using sanctuary space, there is an evocation of an existing social movement, as well as a sense of moral obligation, and a sense of physical space and place.

### **Third places – Libraries and Churches (and Museums)**

Third places, according to Ray Oldenburg (1989), author of *The Great Good Place*, are a place that comes “after home, first, and workplace, second,” and are “devoted to...community-building functions,” serving as “informal public gathering spaces” (p. xvii). Institutions such as churches, libraries, and importantly for this thesis, museums, all fall under this description of a third place where one can go after work and still be away from home, and which serve a community-building function. They fall under what science fiction author Ray Bradbury (1982) would call “A People Machine,” “a place where lingering, staying, dawdling, socializing are a way of life. A refuge from the big city, or sometimes worse, your own parlor. A place so incredibly right that mobs will rush to it crying ‘Sanctuary!’ and be allowed in forever. A place, in sum, where people can come to be people” (p. 167). Oldenburg (1989) expands on this function of a third place “as a staging area. In time of local crises, people typically find it necessary to help themselves as much or more than they are helped by municipal agencies. Severe storms and other crises often require a gathering and mobilization of local citizens for the purpose of helping one another.” (p. xix). Additionally,

in the convivial atmosphere of third places, people get to know one another and to like one another and then to care for one another. When people care for one another, they take an interest in their welfare...it is based on mutual consent, genuine empathy, and real understanding of peoples' situations. (Oldenburg, 1989, p. xxi).

The ability to serve as an effective third place requires an understanding of the surrounding community, the people who live there, and what their needs are.

Related to the idea of third places is the idea of placemaking, the act of creating people-first spaces, or third-spaces. Placemaking, according to the Project for Public Spaces (2018), is “both an overarching idea and a hands-on approach for improving a neighborhood, city or region,” and “a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm to maximize shared value.” Placemaking works to shift city design to be more people oriented, in a way that contributes “to people’s health, happiness, and well being” (Project for Public Spaces, 2018). In order for a public space to be successful, according to the Project for Public Spaces (2018), they must have four key qualities: that “they are **accessible**; people are engaged in **activities** there; the space is **comfortable** and has a good image; and finally, it is a **sociable** place: one where people meet each other and take people when they come to visit.” Important to the aspect of comfort is “perceptions about safety” and whether the “area feels safe” (Project for Public Spaces, 2018). The Project for Public Spaces (2018) lists as questions to determine the safety “Does the area feel safe? Is there a security presence? If so, what do these people do? When are they on duty?” but does not examine whether the presence of security personnel may make a place feel less safe for certain people or groups that may experience over-policing. Also important to a successful public space is the aspect of sociability. This is important to the success of public spaces as “when people see friends, meet and greet their neighbors, and feel comfortable interacting with

strangers, they tend to feel a stronger sense of place or attachment to their community - and to the place that fosters these types of social activities” (Project for Public Spaces, 2018). Safety and sociability are two elements key not only to a successful public place, but also to the idea of a sanctuary. Safety and sociability are also two elements shared by third place institutions most adept at offering sanctuary, churches and libraries.

A pivotal scene in Victor Hugo’s 1831 novel *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, is that in which Esmeralda is about to be hanged, only for the hunchback Quasimodo to carry her above his head “into the church with a single bound, lifting the young girl above his head and crying in a formidable voice, --- ‘Sanctuary!’ ... ‘Sanctuary! Sanctuary!’ repeated the crowd...In fact, within the bounds of Notre-Dame, the condemned girl could not be touched” (p. 363-364). This scene is demonstrative of the sanctuary that churches can offer not only spiritually, but also towards the physical well-being of the persecuted. “Sanctuary entails churches and communities harboring in a physical shelter individual migrants or migrant families faced with imminent arrest and deportation by immigration authorities and actively seeking to display the existence of their protection efforts” (Lippert, 2004, p. 536). This practice of

Sanctuary dates back thousands of years and often resurges when most needed. Rooted in faith communities, Sanctuary dates to the ancient Hebrew people, who allowed temples and even whole cities to declare themselves places of refuge for persons wrongly accused so that they might negotiate for a just outcome. (Orozco & Anderson, 2018, p. 3).

The concept of sanctuary today also hinges on the status of church as third place. The social and open aspect of churches are necessary to their role as sanctuary actors. The actions undertaken by Sanctuary congregations can range from “transforming congregations into welcoming spaces, advocacy and accompaniment to help stop deportations, assisting with legal clinics, forming

rapid response teams to stop raids and deportations, and, if the need arises, physically housing an immigrant in danger of immediate deportation” (Orozco & Anderson, 2018, p. 3). Churches offer not only a sanctuary for the soul to their parishioners, but frequently a sanctuary for the body, particularly to people marked as outsiders by a hostile government.

Libraries also offer a dual sanctuary for both body and mind. David Isaacson, humanities librarian at Western Michigan University’s Waldo Library wrote in 2004: “One of the reasons I love using both public and academic libraries is that I feel safe in them. I don’t just mean safe from bodily harm; I mean safe to pursue my thought wherever they lead me” (p. 27). Isaacson (2004) compares this feeling to that of churches offering sanctuary to fugitives in medieval times, and continues that “in a figurative sense, free libraries, especially in the United States, have always offered intellectual sanctuary to their users...users and the library staff who serve them have traditionally felt free to think, imagine, question, dream and desire...” (p. 27). Joseph Janes (2002), associate professor in the Information School of the University of Washington in Seattle put forth a similar sentiment, of libraries as “a place of sanctuary and silence” where people can take refuge from “information overload” and digital noise (p. 68). However, libraries do not only offer sanctuary in the figurative sense, but often in a literal way as well.

Lack of fees at libraries leads to their accessibility and use as a gathering or sheltering space, where homeless people can enter and take shelter, where children can be left after school in relative safety, or where people can enter daily just to have a seat or peruse the books. However, in recent years, libraries have had to plan on how to make their sanctuary potential more holistic in order to remain relevant to their communities. One such effort has focused on providing meals to the community, to combat the food insecurity many Americans, particularly school-age children face. From a 2017 report by the United States Department of Agriculture

(U.S.D.A), “11.8 percent (15.0 million) of U.S. households were food insecure at some time during 2017,” and “Both children and adults were food insecure in 7.7 percent of households with children (2.9 million households).” Additionally, the report found that “6.5 million children lived in food-insecure households in which children, along with adults, were food insecure” (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2017). These statistics of millions of children facing food-insecurity constitute a crisis of food stability and access. Libraries have begun to respond to this crisis, opening their doors to their communities in times of need.

Crystal FitzSimons, one of the authors of the “Hunger Doesn’t Take a Vacation” report by the Food Research & Action Center states, “libraries are an exciting opportunity to increase access. There’s a lot of energy around recruiting libraries to provide meals that’s happening at local, state and national levels” (qtd in Louis, 2017). To this end, numerous libraries and branches have begun serving children lunches during the summer, to make up for the gap caused by schools being closed. Over the summer, children who normally get free or federally subsidized school lunches are left with schools closed and without those meals (Louis, 2017). Libraries in Ohio, New York, and California have begun lunch programs for children under 18, after the U.S.D.A. began partnering with libraries in 2014 (Louis, 2017). Misha Marvel, a child nutrition programs specialist at Hunger Solutions New York has said of such programs: “libraries are a good fit. They are a non-stigmatizing community-accepted resource,” meaning that they do not bear the same social stigma that a food bank might and are less politicized as a site of free food for children (Louis, 2017). Because of their nature as both a free space and an institution of learning, access is made easier for the community, who neither has to pay nor be made to feel shame for entering the space. The physical confines of the building then lend themselves to becoming a sanctuary space, where library patrons can receive aid without stigma.

Taking on the work of combating food-insecurity is not the only way libraries have used their physical resources and trusted position to aid their surrounding communities.

Additionally, libraries are wrestling with how best to respond to the opioid crisis in the United States. At the Middletown Thrall Library in New York, librarians have been trained to administer the drug naloxone to patrons who show signs of drug overdose (Correal, 2018). Seeing the success of examples like Middletown Thrall Library, Representative Sean Patrick Maloney of New York introduced the Life-Saving Librarians Act in 2017 to “empower unlikely heroes in the fight against overdose deaths” (Maloney, 2017). The bill would, through a federal grant, offer libraries access to naloxone kits and training on how to spot and treat instances of overdose in their patrons (Correal, 2018). Jeremy Johannesen, executive director of the New York Library Association, said that responding to overdoses is “a perfect example of how time and time again, the government turns to libraries to step up and fill in,” placing this work alongside libraries distributing tax forms and assisting with enrollment for the Affordable Care Act (Correal, 2018). In Newburgh, Mr. Thomas, the library director, said, “That’s what a library’s job is — to respond to the needs of the community” (Correal, 2018).

Museums too, float an articulation of being an institution of sanctuary. At the 2018 American Alliance of Museums annual conference, Corine Wegener from the Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative and France Desmarais from the International Council of Museums presented a panel “The Museum as Sanctuary: Safe Refuge or Complicit in Looting?” In this panel, they discussed the legal and ethical ramifications of museums in the global north taking in and serving as safe haven for collections from museums in the global south that were under imminent threat of destruction due to war or civil unrest. Desmarais defined safe haven as “a safe area which can shelter cultural objects at risk during armed conflict, temporarily removed from

their territory for safe keeping” (Desmarais and Wegener, 2018). However, both Desmarais and Wegener cautioned against museums in the global north acting as safe haven. They stated that the power imbalance between “who decides that local conditions are safe enough to return items” and the museum forced to lend out its collections to protect them is too great and tilts the question of “who owns humankind’s past” into the hands of a select few. Desmarais called this the “double-edged sword of shared responsibility of safe haven, while there is no shared ownership of cultural property” (Desmarais and Wegener, 2018). Both Wegener and Desmarais came to the conclusion that museums serving as sanctuary or safe haven for collections other than their own is risky business, something that can go awry even with the best intentions. However, the necessity of the discussion itself points to the common articulation of museums as sanctuary space for “humankind’s past,” enough that the concept of sanctuary for physical objects and artifacts in museums needed to be interrogated.

Around all three institutions of libraries, churches, and museums there is a shared articulation of being sites of sanctuary. These articulations are all meant in multiple ways, as sanctuary of thoughts, but also of the body, of theology, and for museums, of objects. While thoughts must come from people, and objects must be made by people as well, when the language of sanctuary is brought up around museums, it is not immediately linked to the physical well-being of those same people. Museums serve people, but in a hierarchy of needs, the enjoyment of art or history or archeology must come after basic needs such as food, health, and shelter. Libraries and churches have been providing shelter for their communities for a long time in a basic sense and are increasingly engaging with deeper modes of providing sanctuary. Museums are beginning to follow in these trends as well but are behind what libraries and churches have been able to offer their community in terms of sanctuary.

## **Community Engagement and Support in Museums**

At the Western Museum Association 2018 annual meeting, during the session “Join the MASS Action Movement,” Adam Patterson, Corporate Relations Officer at the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry, said of museums: “the institution is humans, otherwise we’re just a big empty building.” He elaborated on the necessity of engaging in social action that museums “have to become comfortable with being uncomfortable” in order to be of greater service to their surrounding communities (Patterson, Wittman, and Philips, 2018). MASS Action describes themselves as “a group seeking to be agile and responsive, just like we want our institutions to be agile and responsive to our own communities” (Patterson, Wittman, and Philips, 2018). MASS Action is a museum coalition group seeking to push museums to be more socially active, and more community conscious and responsive, to “transform museums from the inside out” (MASS Action Home). To this end they have created a toolkit to attempt to address questions in the field such as “what is the role and responsibility of the museum in responding to issues affecting our communities locally and globally?” and “how can the museum be used as a site for social action?” (MASS Action Home). In the introduction to the toolkit, Elisabeth Callihan (2017) wrote that “in December 2014, a group of museum bloggers wrote a joint statement urging museums to respond to the crisis happening in Ferguson and across the country. Very few did. Many of us, particularly those in predominantly white-led organizations, just talked about it” (MASS Action, p. 5).

In 2014, after the police shooting of teenager Michael Brown, museum professionals Adrienne Russell and Aleia Brown started the twitter hashtag #museumsrespondtoferguson. This hashtag was meant to track the response museums had to Ferguson, to provide support to the affected communities, and to allow other museum professionals to talk about how they were

affected and how museums should respond. As part of this conversation, Gretchen Jennings (2014) posted to the blog Museum Commons an article entitled “Practical and Compassionate Advice on Museums and Community Conflict.” In it, she laid out four steps museums could take to engage with their communities “to bring about positive change” (Jennings, 2014). The steps included regularly engaging with the community, working with organizations that facilitate dialogue, having conversations with community stakeholders, and encouraging employees to get involved in the community as members “on nonprofit boards...mentors...or tutor[s]” (Jennings, 2014). The New England Museum Association released a statement on Museums Respond to Ferguson stating, “the great power of museums is their ability to transform the lives of individuals who walk through their doors. Their greater power, and fundamental duty in my opinion, is to act as agents of transformation to society as a whole” (Yaeger, 2014). Mike Murawski (2014) also posted a “Joint Statement from Museum Bloggers & Colleagues on Ferguson,” which prompted, “we urge museums to look to their communities. Are there civic organizations in your area that are hosting conversations? Could you offer your auditorium as a meeting place? Could your director or other senior staff join local initiatives on this topic?...now is a great time to start being involved.” Museums were galvanized to begin discussions on what role to take in their communities, especially in times of crisis, looking to their potential roles as mediators and educators.

The Editor’s Note at the beginning of the *Museums and Social Issues Journal* has made similar calls for change in the museum field, pointing at growing dangers in public life. In 2016, volume 2, the note opened by stating:

It seems fair to say that 2016 will go down in the history books as a year of significant change in the social fabric of society. There are worldwide reverberations of political

unrest, economic disparity, environmental sustainability, immigration and xenophobia...In short, it has become overwhelming to keep abreast of every issue and harder by the day to make sense of it all. (Wood, p. 95).

Wood points out that museums have historically not tackled the day-to-day issues and crises of the world as they break. “Yet,” she states, “it becomes imperative that we who work in museums do not dismiss the reality of the world we live in and how it affects our own lives, as well as those of our visitors” (Wood, 2016, p. 95).

These discussions about museum’s roles in social change, are for some not enough, merely promises without follow-through. In 2017, Davis Museum at Wellesley College in Massachusetts made headlines for its response to President of the United States Donald Trump’s first immigrant ban, “which prevented foreign nationals from Iran, Sudan, Libya, Somalia, Syria, Iraq and Yemen from entering the country for 90 days” (O’Connor). In response, Davis Museum veiled or removed artwork on display that had been created or donated by immigrants to the United States, “demonstrate symbolically what the Davis Museum would look like without their contributions to our collections and to Wellesley College, and to thereby honor their many invaluable gifts” (The Davis, 2017). However, in “An Open Letter to the Davis Museum,” Annie Wang, an alumni of Wellesley College’s class of 2014, criticized the museum’s action for failing to both decolonize and question its own collections’ provenance, as well as for failing to offer any material aid to those affected by the ban. The action, to Wang (2017), was purely symbolic, and “effective protest cannot be just symbolic; it needs to lead to action—otherwise, it becomes another well-meaning but ultimately empty gesture,” one that came with no “tangible impact.” If museums are discussing the dangers and violence their communities face, for some, there is an imperative to push past merely discussion and to offer something tangible, using their

“reassuringly measured voice of unassailable institutional authority” to help their communities (Weschler, 1996. p. 16).

### **Material Aid**

Much of the discourse surrounding the institution of the museum has historically focused on its position as an educator, or sanctuary of ideas. According to Lindsey Steward (2018), “in the past, museums were temples where knowledge was preserved and education was the highest value.” Steward (2018) cautions “museums need to remain relevant by knowing and figuring out what they stand for. We as museum professionals can connect with our visitors by providing the space to express their concerns with our society.” This articulation of space is important in a museum’s ability to offer material aid, similar to the way libraries and churches utilize their spaces to connect and provide for their public. Brenda Tindal (2018), current director of education and engagement at the International African American Museum and previously the staff historian at Charlotte’s Levin Museum of the New South, posed to the museum field the questions of “What is the role and responsibility of the museum in responding to issues affecting our communities locally and globally? How can museums respond to these issues in a timely, relevant, and responsible manner?” (p. 87).

To this end, some museums have begun to work towards marshalling their physical resources into offering material aid to their communities, beyond the traditional works of a museum as an educator and holder of objects. In 2015, museums in Berlin, including the Museum für Islamische Kunst, the Vorderasiatisches Museum, the Skulpturensammlung and Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, and the Deutsches Historisches Museum launched Multaka: Museum as Meeting Point—Refugees as Guides in Berlin Museums (Multaka Treffpunkt Museum). Under this project, “Syrian and Iraqi refugees are being trained as museum guides so

that they can then provide guided museum tours for Syrian and Iraqi refugees in their native language, Multaqa (Arabic for ‘meeting point’)” also seeks to “facilitate refugee access to museums, and to help them to find social and cultural points of connection, as well as to increase their participation in the public sphere” (Multaka Treffpunkt Museum). This project utilizes the museum’s existing resources – the objects on display and tours – and uses them to facilitate inclusion, while providing the refugee community with aid, allowing them a place “for socialising and practising English, while others are developing a deep interest in the artefacts and building their CVs,” all helpful skills in a foreign environment (Radford, 2018). In offering these tangible skills and meeting places, the museum goes beyond merely providing access to the objects in the museum.

The Museum of Homelessness also offered tangible aid to its community during its founding, in the form of physical sanctuary. The museum was founded in 2015 when a Central London building was taken over by local homeless activists to use as shelter and to bring broader awareness to the situation during a cold snap in the winter, which had killed members of the homeless population (Heal, Rogers, Wajid, and Turtle, 2018). The Museum has no building, but instead operates as a “stealth vehicle to emerge in other galleries, shelters, and libraries” (Heal, Rogers, Wajid, and Turtle, 2018). Matthew Turtle (2018), one of the co-founders of the Museum of Homelessness, noted that the importance of the museum and its founding

on a housing estate in the UK; by saying that the primary purpose of our collection and archive is to enable people to make social change or work through trauma or both; by founding a museum on the basis of a social need rather than to preserve an inherited collection of objects.

For Turtle (2018), the museum's work is not "...really activism. It is simply common sense. It would be unethical to address homelessness without putting lived experience at its core. We feel that a museum of homelessness must create social change and we therefore need to take a particular stance in our work."

A third example of material aid offered by a museum to a community in need is the citizenship work done by the Anchorage Museum. Until 2016, Mexico maintained a consulate in Alaska, headquartered in Anchorage. In November of that year the consulate closed, due to "budgetary constraints and diminishing demand in Alaska" (Kelly, 2015). However, there was still some demand, leading the Mexican consulate in Seattle to create periodic week long "Consulate on Wheels" "to issue high-security passports and other documentation that would otherwise require a trip to Seattle" (Kelly, 2015). In order to better serve their community, the Anchorage Museum hosted the Consulate on Wheels in May of 2018, utilizing museum event space to host the temporary Consulate for members of the community who had need of it (Wilmoth, Campbell, Shivdasani, and Decker, 2018).

All these examples marshal space to help the community, whether it be the space of the museum functioning much as it always has but with a more proactive stance, the takeover of a space to make way for a museum as a way to draw attention on a social need, or the sharing of a museum space with another institution needed by the community. While the Anchorage Museum and Berlin Museums' response took longer to enact, the Museum of Homelessness' opening act was a rapid response to a glaring and ongoing crisis. This rapid movement is important in response to crises, whereas museums are traditionally slower moving, with exhibits planned out years in advance. Brenda Tindal, while at Charlotte's Levin Museum of the New South, "helped pioneer a new approach to museum curation: the 'rapid-response exhibit'" in response to trauma

and crisis in her community (Bowers, 2018). In September 2016, a police officer shot and killed Keith Lamont Scott, an African-American man, in the process of searching for another unrelated man with an outstanding warrant (Bowers, 2018). Tindal, on the museum's response stated, "we wanted to create a space where Charlotteans could heal and could come together across difference. That episode created some real fissures in our community, and Charlotte needed a space that would be healthy, a space that would be forgiving, and a place that would be open to have conversations" (qtd in Bowers, 2018). To this end,

After quick but thoughtful deliberation among our staff, during the seven days that followed the unrest, the museum hosted an open house on September 24, followed by a town hall on September 28. Located just a few blocks from where the protest unfolded in center city, the museum was an ideal venue to host such programming. Both were intended to create opportunities for civil dialogue and community engagement. The open house was organized as a free-admission event with guided and self-guided visitor experiences. We created a reflection station in one of our meeting rooms, where visitors could journal, write reflective post-it notes, or create picket signs with slogans or statements of their choice (Tindal, 2018, p. 91).

In addition, "these forums gave the museum permission to listen to the community and assess how we could best leverage our resources and advance our mission to 'use history to build community'" (Tindal, 2018, p. 92). Over the span of three months, Tindal's team created and installed a new exhibit, entitled "K(NO)W Justice K(NO)W Peace" which detailed "the history of racial injustice and progress in Charlotte and the country at large" (Bowers, 2018). The museum's response utilized the internal strengths of the museum, such as the collections, its role as educator, and its physical space to create a space for reflection, dialogue and engagement in a

time of crisis for the community. In the words of Tindal (2018),

In roughly four months, we chartered new territory through the facilitation of programs and the creation of a rapid-response exhibit that placed the Charlotte unrest into deeper historical context and provided platforms for hundreds of area residents to share their reactions to the Scott shooting and subsequent protests (p. 96).

The response was keyed in to and supported by the local community in a time of need, and the response sought not only to educate but to initiate dialogue and reflection in the space of the museum.

In his 1999 seminal essay “From Being *About* Something to Being *For* Somebody: The Ongoing Transformation of the American Museum” Stephen Weil touches on the topic of sanctuary in churches, and its potential in museums. Weil writes:

In *Speak to My Heart*, an exhibition opened by the Anacostia Museum and Center for African American History and Culture in 1998, a label text described the community role of the contemporary African American church as being, among other things, “A safe place to be...a haven from the stressful workaday world, a place for personal growth and community nurture, an outlet for the development and use of natural talents.” How pertinent might such a description be to the museum? Is the museum only important as a place in which to receive the authorized curatorial word, or might it have some other legitimate uses as well? That so many different visitors may choose to use the museum in so many different ways should not matter. That it is so potentially open-textured as a destination, so adaptable to a variety of public uses should not – at least not in the emerging and visitor-centered museum – be regarded as a defect. Rather, it should be understood as one of its greater glories (p. 187-188).

Museums have long thought of themselves as a sanctuary for thoughts, for learning. To be a truly visitor-centered museum as Weil calls for, the museum must at the very least be aware of the day to day realities of their visitors, if not seeking to assist them within the capacity of the museum space. Museums are holders of heritage and shapers of identity in their collections of artifacts, objects, and stories. As John Falk and Beverly Sheppard (2006) state of the role of a museum in the “cultural life of a community” is of

preserving and exhibiting a community’s unique story, the heritage that sets it apart from other places...Museums also are the places most likely to organize regional commemorations, ethnic festivals, and local history events that capture the flavor of place. They build community identity and bring residents together to celebrate what is special about their own experience. (p. 149).

A crisis in a community is also part of the heritage and “unique story” of that community. Both the community’s needs and a museum’s response in that moment are an enactment of the community’s evolving history, and in order to best serve both the community’s current needs and its histories, museums must respond to crisis events, as they are as much a part of a community’s history as anything else. Museums must be more than simply an educational center, as churches are more than simply a spiritual center, and are involved with the broader lives of their visitors.

### **Healing Environments and Physical Space**

Caitlin Doughty (2017) founder of the Order of the Good Death, advocates for “a more positive, intimate approach to dealing with the death of a loved one” (p. 40) Although for Doughty (2017) this is in the context of being involved with and interacting with the dead body and funerary arrangements, she notes that in the wake of death, “plunging in and being involved is really the way to come out the other side and feel like you've done something. That interaction

is what we are missing” (p. 41). The interaction allowed by third spaces allows for the possibility for public interaction not only with each other, but also with death, rage, grief, and other negative emotions. Anne Melton (2012a) studied museum’s response to grief events, such as The Experience Music Project Museum’s (now the Museum of Pop Culture) hosting of a tribute and memorial service, as well as encouraging audience expression following the death of musician Michael Jackson or The Oakland Museum of California’s annual Days of the Dead celebration as a tribute to slain journalist, Chauncey Bailey. Melton (2012a) found

that museums can indeed be effective in helping their communities and audiences transcend suffering by utilizing their unique individual resources. This can be accomplished by acting as a gathering place where people can be in the presence of others, providing social support and an environment that supports grieving, and/or executing programming, exhibits, or events that respond to a variety of community needs which help that community resolve its grief and regain equilibrium to function fully once again.

Among the resources Melton (2012b) found that museums could use to “help contribute to the resolution of grief” were “exhibits or display of the collection, staff expertise, partnerships,” and importantly for this thesis, space (p. 47). The physical place and space of the museum itself could lend itself to grieving and healing in the wake of a grief event such as the death of a beloved celebrity or terrorist attack. Following this research, it is possible that museums can help with the processing of other negative emotions such as rage or hopelessness, that may be experienced in traumatic or crisis situations, not just with grief.

Jan Packer and Nigel Bond have found that museums function as a restorative environment for visitors. They utilize T. Hartig’s definition of restoration as “the process of

renewing physical, psychological and social capabilities diminished in ongoing efforts to meet adaptive demands” (qtd in Packer and Bond, 2010, p. 422). For them, one of the key components for a restorative experience is “a sense of escape or being away (being physically or mentally removed from routine or demanding activities” (Packer and Bond, 2010, p. 422). Demanding activities could certainly be the processing of community crisis or trauma, and Packer and Bond point to the embodied need in being physically somewhere else, such as within the walls of the museum. Indeed, Packer and Bond (2010) note “that different types of museum environments (including art museums, history museums, gardens, and zoos) have the potential to offer visitors a restorative experience that provides respite from the stresses of life and replenishes their cognitive capacity” (p. 423). Museums have the ability to offer restorative experiences to visitors on a quotidian basis, and this ability could be mobilized and amplified in times of crisis. There has been a push for museums to becoming more involved with their communities, and to become more involved in a way that offers material aid. Under these conditions, museums may look at broadening their response, not only as a passive space for restorative experiences, but also as an active one for grief resolution. There is also the potential for museums to function as a physical space for emotional resolution more broadly, across the broader range of negative emotions, in times of great strife for their surrounding community.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The purpose of this research study is to examine how museum professionals think about the role of the museum in creating sanctuary space for their surrounding communities. The study was guided by the following five research questions:

1. What drives museums to serve as sanctuary spaces?
2. What is the physical nature of a museum's rapid response to an external crisis?
3. What internal structures support the museum's response to an external crisis?
4. What role do community partnerships play that impact a museum's response?
5. What shifts occur internally after a museum responds to an external crisis?

### **Methodological Approach**

This research design used a qualitative case study approach. The study's aim was in part to look at museum response to crisis, and by their nature all crises are different from one another. Therefore, selection criteria were only that there was a museum response to some sort of crisis felt by a broad swathe of the surrounding community, that the response used the physical space of the museum within a week of the crisis event, and that this response made it into the public eye in some way. While museums may quietly respond to local crises, these responses may go unreported. Alternatively, or additionally, museums' roles are not traditionally that of crisis responder, leading to smaller numbers of museums undertaking this work. For that reason, there were not wide numbers of museums available that fit the parameters of the study, so it became more advantageous to focus on a smaller number of key museums in the case study format. A total of five museums were identified as potential sites, with four ultimately participating in the study. A case study also allowed for a deeper analysis of the museums already undertaking rapid

response to community crisis and allowed for the voices of the museum staff that were key in developing and implementing some sort of crisis response to be centered in the research.

In 2012 Anne Melton, a University of Washington Museology student, conducted thesis research on museums as sites of healing after broad societal grief-causing events. Melton's thesis looked specifically at museum response to grief-triggering events, such as the Experience Music Project hosting a memorial after the death of Michael Jackson, or The Oklahoma Museums Association's "A Day for Children" event following the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building (2012b, p. 21). The museum responses Melton studied ranged from being held a week or two after the grief event to a few months after. While Melton does mention the rapid response of some museums, it is not part of her focus, nor is museums as a site of sanctuary, as she focused on museums as sites of healing. Although sanctuary and healing may be linked, they are still different concepts. While the death of a musical icon surely caused grief, it is also not the same type of event as a bombing attack, or a targeted hate crime, as the events in my study are – more trauma than grief events, although grief surely came into play for the survivors. However, as Melton's study was similar to my study, Melton's thesis was used as a model for data collection. In particular, her layout of the triggering grief event in her thesis was helpful in conceptualizing how to discuss the trauma events to better frame my data in the analysis portion.

### **Site Selection**

By necessity, sites selected for this study must have responded within a week to a crisis or trauma in their local community. Because of the fraught nature of these events, many sites were found using news reports and press releases on local response to a crisis. In addition, some sites were found and selected based on their own discussion of the event and their response at professional conference proceedings, displaying both their fitting into the parameters of the

study, and their willingness to talk about their own response. If a museum responded to a crisis but did not receive news coverage and did not publicize the response, there was little way to know of their response, creating a self-selecting group of institutions to interview.

Ultimately, the four sites interviewed were the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the Arab American National Museum, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and the Portland Art Museum.

### The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston responded in 2013 to the Boston Marathon Bombing. The Boston Marathon occurs every year on Patriot's day, the third Monday of April. On April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013, two pressure-cooker bombs exploded near the finish line, killing three people and injuring over 260 others ("Boston Marathon bomb," 2015). When interviewed, a staff member at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston described the day as "a terrible tragedy that took place in 2013 when there were two bombings that took place, and it ended up at the marathon itself, it killed three people and injured several others and several people lost limbs and it was just a tragedy of a very epic proportion that took place that day." The Museum responded by opening its galleries for free on April 16<sup>th</sup>, the day immediately following the bombings. The rapid-response of the day after also helped set up the Museum's larger response six weeks later, which, according to interviewed staff, entailed a three-day community event from May 25<sup>th</sup> to May 27<sup>th</sup>, the display of artworks lent by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, art-making, and a community-led display of quilted flags. The community display was initiated by a woman who noticed the initial rapid-response gallery opening and reached out to the museum. According to staff, after working with the quilter, "...we received over a thousand flags from 35 countries that were then tied together

and strung across our courtyard. And that – the whole theme of that was: ‘To Boston, with Love,’ so everybody was sending love from all over the world to Boston.”

### The Arab American National Museum

On June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2016 a gunman began shooting at Pulse Nightclub in Orlando Florida, ultimately killing 49 people, and injuring 53 others, before being killed in a confrontation with the police. June 12<sup>th</sup> was a Saturday night, which “was Latin Night at Pulse, one of the city's best-known gay clubs, and the place was packed with patrons both gay and straight, young and not-so-young, from the U.S., Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Mexico and elsewhere” (Zambelich & Hurt, 2016). At the time, this was the deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history (Zambelich & Hurt, 2016).

In response to community need, the Arab American National Museum opened its Annex space, a secondary building to the main museum, as a space for affected members of the Dearborn, Michigan community to have a safe space to grieve, and as a place for a community memorial. According to staff, the Annex opening took place “within a day or two after the event [the shooting].” One staff member noted: “as we were essentially debriefing as a staff, or as at least, I should say, a leadership team of the staff, our immediate concern was our local community.” The immediate reaction was “well, what about those individuals from our local community who are grieving like everybody else, who don’t have a space to feel comfortable grieving in?” The museum decided to move to give the community that space, in opening up the Annex.

### The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

On Friday, December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2016, a warehouse converted into gallery, performance, and living spaces for the Ghost Ship artist collective caught on fire (Fuller, Dougherty, & Turkewitz,

2016). Elizabeth Weil (2018) wrote that “thirty-six people died that night – the youngest 17, the oldest 61 – in the most deadly structure fire in the United States since 100 people died in Station nightclub in Rhode Island in 2003” (p. 39). It was uncovered that the fire was “the product of civic and societal failings,” as city officials, municipal employees, police, and city fire chiefs had known “for over a year that Ghost Ship was dangerous,” after numerous complaints and visits (Weil, 2018, p. 55).

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art responded by opening the gallery for free to the public six days later, on December 8<sup>th</sup>, partnering with charity to raise money for the victims, and hiring a DJ “We also hired someone who is a DJ, who was very connected and had written a lot of music and co-created with people that lost their lives in the fire, and he set up in our main area that day and spun music from some of the folks who lost their lives in the fire,” according to one staff member.

### The Portland Art Museum

On May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2017 a white man “fatally stabbed two people and injured a third,” who intervened when the man began “shouting racist and anti-Muslim slurs and being really aggressive towards two Muslim teenage women...on the MAX light rail,” in the words of museum staff. Rob Reynolds reported for Aljazeera (2017) that “one of the girls was wearing a headscarf and is believed to be Muslim.” The man who attacked the other riders on the light rail had a history of white-supremacist and anti-Muslim speech and posts (Haag & Fortin, 2017).

The Portland Art Museum had been planning an event for May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2017. The Upstanders Festival was intended as a social justice festival, planned in conjunction with “the Museum of Impact and Don’t Shoot Portland and a lot of organizations here that have been active in combating violence and discrimination against Muslim communities, communities of

color and a lot of lower socio-economic status communities here in Portland,” according to museum staff. In the early morning the day after the attack, museum staff, along with the community partners, decided to reorient the tone and goals of the event, according to staff: “we’re gonna try to uphold a safe space and we’re gonna deal with this. And heal. And process and come together.”

### **Subject Selection and Recruitment**

Once sites had been identified as fitting the parameters of the study, individuals at the sites were selected for interviews. These individuals were selected based on their proximity to the site’s response to the community event. To that end, individuals were selected if they featured prominently in news articles and press releases about the site’s response, or if they spearheaded discussion of the response in the broader professional community, such as at conferences or university lectures. Following that, additional subjects were recruited from museum departments most likely to have been involved with the community affected by the crisis, or the museum’s response to it, namely outreach departments, community development, and marketing and public relations. Additionally, the key responders at the site, chosen through press and conferences, were used to create a network and uncover other key subjects in the museum’s response.

Potential participants were recruited via e-mail. The recruitment email included my status as a University of Washington Museology Masters candidate, and briefly explained my research looking at museums’ crisis response and how this linked to the participant’s institution. I provided an estimate time of the interview at thirty to forty minutes, and let the participant know they would remain anonymous, and that my research was covered by IRB exempt status. Structured interviews were conducted with a total of six professionals across four institutions.

## **Data Collection**

Subjects participated in structured interviews, which lasted from twenty to fifty minutes in length. Interviews were conducted over two burst periods, the first being a three-week period from February 22<sup>nd</sup> to March 8<sup>th</sup>. The second set of interviews were conducted over a one-week period, from April 12<sup>th</sup> to April 16<sup>th</sup>. While a minimum of two individuals per institution was the original research plan, due to the nature of responses, this was often not possible. Most responses were led by one or two individuals, leading to a smaller potential sample size of those involved with any given museum's response plan.

Document analysis utilized press coverage of the museums' responses, as well as documents and texts released by the museum afterwards, such as museum histories or conference proceedings. Due to the rapid-response nature of the events, many museums did not have internal documents leading up to and during the response itself, and only had more reflective documents released at later dates. This led to document analysis being more restricted in the types and nature of documents available. Museum mission statements and annual reports were also used to augment the post-event reflections and news coverage in terms of documents used.

## **Data Analysis**

Subject interviews were recorded from phone calls using the Microsoft application "Voice Recorder" with the subject's consent and ability to withdraw from the study if desired. Following the recording, the interviews were transcribed, and themes were located and coded. The four research questions were used as an initial coding guide, with additional themes added as needed. Coding took language from answers and sorted it into broader themes.

In presenting the interview excerpts in this thesis, pauses, stutters, and other conversational bumps were smoothed out for readability. Participants were provided interview

questions beforehand, but as these conversations touched on difficult topics, and due to the nature of memory, participants often needed to pause to collect their thoughts, or backtrack to earlier points. These omissions in the presentation of interviews are not meant to remove data, only to smooth out the “ums” and pauses of natural conversation for this written medium.

### **Limitations**

Due to the small sample size, broad generalizations cannot be drawn from the data. If museum professionals were seeking to codify some sort of crisis response in their own institution, the data provided by this study could provide an outline of how to do so, but not an absolute framework. In addition, while the range of type of museum (small to large, art and cultural museums) interviewed demonstrates an ability for many types of museums to potentially respond to community crisis, this range also fails to illuminate if certain types of museums have better or unique tools for undertaking response work. In addition, among this range, no science or natural history museums were present, as well as an absence of aquariums and zoos, creating a gap in knowledge in how different types of museums may respond to community crisis.

## Chapter 4: Results

This chapter will lay out the results of the staff interviews and document analysis undertaken at the four museum sites. The initial research questions are used as broad organizers for the findings, with emergent themes within each research question.

### **Research Question 1: What drives museums to serve as sanctuary spaces?**

The main reasons the museums decided to serve as sanctuary space were because: it fit in with an existing goal to be more present, accountable, or supportive of surrounding community; because of staff sense of urgency or need to act; or because the response fit in with existing museum mission and values. These three reasons all intertwined, with no museums experiencing only one as a drive to respond.

#### Supporting Community

All four museums articulated their response as fitting in with their current goals to support and engage with their surrounding community. However, where they were in terms of relevance to community at the time of their responses fell along a spectrum.

The Arab American National Museum articulated the responsiveness to community needs as being baked into the museum's mission from the start. One staff member stated:

we have...from day one of opening the museum back in 2005, also worked to be very responsive to the needs of our diverse community, and to do that...required very intentional practice around how we built our bandwidth in terms of programming, exhibitions, and all the other things that we did at the museum to enable that kind of opportunity.

In addition, the Arab American National Museum has a secondary space known as the Annex, which was used in their response, and was designed as “a space that was a bit more

like...grounds for all to come, and to know they would be cared for...a legitimate community sort of space.” The Museum then had responding to community needs as both an internal goal in the museum space itself, as well as a goal for the use of the secondary space.

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston saw responding to the Marathon bombing as a logical extension of their role in the community. “Well I think that it called for a response of some sort, especially in terms of the way we view our role in the community. That, and again the whole incident had a real – it was a clarifying moment for the city, right?” said one staff member, noting that people pulled together in the wake of the tragedy. Another staff member said that the bombing led to internal conversations about “what is appropriate for us to do...and how can we connect to the community that we serve,” which helped lead to the museum’s initial rapid-response and second more long term response.

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art explained their response as stemming directly from networks between the museum and its community, that “it felt because there were so many networked connections between those that lost their lives and the overall creative community that we needed to do something in offering the museum as a place of respite and solace.”

The Portland Art Museum saw their response as “part of a continued effort that we’ve had to be responsive to the issues that matter to our local community...” Initially, they had planned the Upstanders Festival as a social justice festival, as part of their efforts “...to be responsive to things that are happening.” The Festival was meant as part of this continuing work to create and strengthen community ties, while being responsive to community needs, and in reorienting the event to be more of a response to the train stabbings, that initial intent of responsiveness held true.

For the Arab American National Museum, while their goals were to be a place for community needs, they had also specifically identified the Muslim LGBTQ+ community as an underserved population, both by their museum, and the local area more broadly. A partnership with a local activist group had been emerging over the previous six months, “So, because [we] already had this sort of established relationship with the Z Collective as a local queer-centered, um, organizing group, museum leadership reached out to them and offered the space pretty immediately.” Another staff member echoed this sentiment, stating that knowing that members of that community may have fewer spaces available to them, “our immediate reaction as a staff was ‘well, what about those individuals from our local community who are grieving like everybody else, who don’t have a space to feel comfortable grieving in?’”

The Portland Art Museum had also identified sections of its surrounding community as historically underserved by the museum, and so were working with groups like Museum of Impact and Don’t Shoot Portland. Through these partnerships, the Upstanders Festival was meant as one step in a process of community-building. In reorienting the event, the museum continued to work with these communities.

### Staff Sense of Ethics

In addition to the institutional commitment to community, the staff at each museum also felt a personal need to act in some way. For the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, this need was driven through personal connection. While crisis occurs regularly, the proximity helped drive action for the museum:

what level of disaster is required to elevate the museum to this kind of consideration?

Because, you know, we’re exposed to terrible things on a regular basis. In this instance of

the Ghost Ship, the relationships with the victims were so numerous and so many, that it really just – the board and leadership and full staff felt like it was the right thing to do.

Staff at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston also wanted to act in some way, and to help in whatever way they could:

We opened the museum for free, as a place for the community to come, as a place of respite, just because we wanted to do something to connect to the community, and I think at that moment, which was literally the next day, I think everybody was still in shock, and we wanted to act quickly, we knew we couldn't do a lot, but we wanted to do something.

Similarly, the Arab American National Museum initially released a statement, but felt that was not enough of a response to the Pulse shooting, and so pushed to do more for their community.

When the shooting occurred, the museum put out a statement in solidarity with folks who were mourning after the shooting and condemning the actions and the leadership at the time felt that wasn't sufficient. So, because we already had this established relationship with the Z Collective as a local queer-centered organizing group, museum leadership reached out to them and offered the space pretty immediately.

Staff desire to respond influenced the museum's action in these cases. Many staff felt a sense of urgency or desire to act, and unable to stand idly by, mobilized their museums to respond to community needs.

### Mission and Values

Regardless of where a museum was in their community relationships, all four museums forwarded some articulation of mission and values in their responses. Institutional mission and values either pushed a museum to act, or played a role in developing stronger community relationships that then aided the museum's rapid response, or both.

The Arab American National Museum was in a unique position of internal and external mission and values aligning in their response.

The museum is an institution of ACCESS [Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services], which is sort of like our parent company that offers a wide, wide range of services from health, to employment, to social services, and ACCESS was also able to offer them [members of the LGBTQ+ community] grief counselling and make that an available service for folks who needed it at the time. So, it was part of this larger institutional response of the museum and of ACCESS at large, both putting out statements to condemn the attack, and then also making sure that our community knew that institutions within that community specifically were here and did care about these folks.

ACCESS is an Arab American community nonprofit in Dearborn, Michigan, which strives to enable and empower individuals, families and communities to lead informed, productive and culturally sensitive lives. As a nonprofit model of excellence, we honor our Arab American heritage through community-building and service to all those in need, of every heritage. ACCESS is a strong advocate for cultural and social entrepreneurship imbued with the values of community service, healthy lifestyles, education and philanthropy (ACCESS, 2014).

The values of community service and responsiveness were not only present in ACCESS, which describes the museum as “our crown jewel” and “the centerpiece of our artistic programs” (ACCESS, 2016, p. 17). These values were also present in the museum itself “since its founding in 2005 by ACCESS social services and Dr. Anan Ameri” (Hodges, 2018). According to a staff member at the museum:

One, you know, as Arab Americans, we don't have a lot of spaces to convene. A lot of things that we tend to get involved with can be perceived as being controversial, whether its political stuff or religious stuff, you name it. So, from day one it was very critical that we build space as we build community and leverage those assets for the community.

The Arab American National Museum has an anti-oppression statement reading:

In alignment with AANM's commitment to creating an arts sector rooted in justice, we are committed to ensuring a space that is free of racism, transphobia, homophobia, Islamophobia, ableism, misogyny, classism or other bias. We also encourage freedom of expression and we aim to create a brave, generative space. **Our expectation is that all guests will honor these ethics** (Arab American National Museum, 2019).

The language of the anti-oppression statement is mirrored in one staff member's words, saying that in regards to their response, the museum staff had conversations about how "this is kind of a space that is not neutral, how do we define neutrality in the space? How do we protect the environment that we want to create in this space?" Because of the museum's vision and stated values, responding in the way they did "didn't require a ton of thinking, it was just so aligned with our vision for both the space and how we operate as an institution." ACCESS itself also has a vision statement of "a just and equitable society with the full participation of Arab Americans" (ACCESS, 2018, p. 3). The museum's response of creating a space that enabled fuller participation by a section of the broader Arab American community was in keeping with this vision statement, and therefore both internal and external visions for the museum.

A staff member at The Portland Art Museum did not specifically note mission when interviewed but did note that the museum's response was the type of event that "we're trying to do to be a museum that is meaningful within local communities that have been underserved or

not served by this museum historically, so it sort of fit into that.” The Portland Art Museum’s mission is “to engage diverse communities through art and film of enduring quality, and to collect, preserve, and educate for the enrichment of present and future generations” (Portland Art Museum, 2019). A portion of the museum’s vision statement forwards that “its hallmarks are innovation, excellence, and engaged community partnerships” (Portland Art Museum, 2019). So, while the staff member did not directly reference museum mission or vision, their answer of acting in order to better serve the museum’s historically underserved surrounding community does echo language in the mission and vision statements.

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art spoke about the museum’s values influencing responses broadly – not only their response to the Ghost Ship Fire, but also of responses that followed, such as opening the galleries again in the wake of California wildfires in the summer of 2018. The staff member stated that

our values definitely drive these decisions. So, we do have a formal strategic plan, and the values are to be brave, passionate, inclusive, and empathic. And so, when we think about how is the museum doing that, that’s a nice values framework to consider these different situations.

A portion of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston mission statement reads: “the Museum has obligations to the people of Boston and New England, across the nation and abroad. It celebrates diverse cultures and welcomes new and broader constituencies” (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 2019). One staff member at the museum saw their response as just part of this obligation to the surrounding community “...in this case I think that we were doing our very best to be an integral part of the community before it happened and continue to do that even now.” Opening the

museum galleries for community use after the Marathon bombing fulfilled the museum's mission, along a continuum of other actions the museum was taking to serve the community.

Institutional mission and value statements were vital in spurring a museum to respond. Staff could point to these statements both as justifications for acting, and as a framework for what that action needed to look like, such as being brave, or community oriented. Mission statements were a useful tool for many staff in building the museum's response.

Mission alignment also came up as a theme in answer to Research Question 3: What internal structures support the museum's response to an external crisis? It will not be discussed further in that section, however, as drive and internal structures overlapped so much in the theme of mission alignment.

### **Research Question 2: What is the physical nature of a museum's rapid response to an external crisis?**

This question sought to look at how a museum's space was used in the response, as well as what about a space was useful in its deployment as part of the rapid-response. All responses involved an opening of institutional space. In the art museums this involved an opening of the galleries and main building, and in the cultural museum a secondary space was opened. The spaces lent themselves to a feeling of respite or sanctuary, as described by staff and some visitors.

#### Mobilizing Space

All the museums interviewed opened up their space in some way. Two of the art museums – the San Francisco Museum of Modern art and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston - opened up their gallery spaces for free to the public, whereas normally there would have been a fee to enter these spaces. The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art opened for free from 6 – 9

pm Thursday, December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016, six days after the Ghost Ship Fire on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, “in a gesture intended to honor the victims of the devastating fatal fire at Oakland's Ghost Ship artists collective” (Batey, 2016). According to staff, the museum was opened at this date and time to increase accessibility. “We decided to open up on Thursday. Yeah, because we’re open till 9 pm, we wanted to select a day where you could come either in the day or in the evening.” The Museum of Fine Arts Boston also responded “by opening the museum for free, the day after. Yeah, eliminating all admissions fees and making it a place for calm, respite, reflection, that kind of thing.” Opening up on April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2013 was rapid-response and the museum followed up with a second, larger response...we wanted to do something bigger than that. And so, we decided to host a 3-day event, and we did that from May 25<sup>th</sup> to May 27<sup>th</sup>, and we basically created a community weekend, three-day community weekend where people could come together to the museum and it was a tribute to the people of Boston, and just creating an environment where people could come, and come together in community. So, there were those two moments. The first moment was just sort of opening the doors, and then the second, larger moment which was May 25<sup>th</sup> to May 27<sup>th</sup> with three days that were really filled with activities and responses to what had happened with our theme of “Boston Strong.”

While only the first response falls under the definition of rapid-response being used in this study, both responses used the environment and physical space of the museum to support the community.

The Portland Art Museum reoriented its existing event, The Upstanders Festival, in the wake of the Portland train stabbings. The Festival was always intended to utilize the museum’s space, but the response reoriented the intended tone and purpose of the event slightly. One staff

member noted that “we were proud to have the event continue and not cancel it...” The event utilized two spaces, a gallery space and a performance/stage area. According to staff,

We basically gave over two large room spaces here in our museum. We have like an event office building that’s an old Masonic Temple, and so we had really one main space, and then a side gallery that was an exhibition with an artist that we worked with, Karina Puente, and she had a cut paper art...installation with all of the names of ... people of color who’ve lost their lives to police – the hands of police violence carved into it, and that was on view and then she added names of those here in Portland during that day, as well, and families came that had lost loved ones to police violence and met her, and worked through the process of getting their names added to this work of art. So that was one gallery space...And there was art-making, and then there was a large ballroom space that was for panel discussions, performances, kind of a stage setup, is what our community wanted, so [we] sort of made those spaces available for these things.

Exhibitions in the main museum building tied in with the original goals of the Upstanders Festival, to “shine a light on the bravery and brilliance of activism and changemakers in our midst” (Portland Art Museum, 2017). In particular,

there was one contemporary art installation that connected with Black Lives Matter activists and police brutality and surveillance. So, people were invited throughout the entire day to go and connect with those exhibitions and, and really the whole space of the museum, but primarily it was this kind of ballroom space and then gallery space, that we turned over to community.

The Arab American National Museum also activated a secondary museum space apart from the main building, just as the Portland Art Museum did. This space, called the Annex,

opened in 2015 as “grounds for all to come, and to know they would be cared for, a legitimate community sort of space.” The building itself is

a concrete block, it is nothing like what you see in the beautiful museum itself. It is a space with state-of-the-art technology, reverse projection, film screening, a collapsible stage...The space was really conceived and designed to function as an incubation space, a community space, as a flexible space.

The space was always intended to fill an auxiliary role “so that we could shut down the museum, but still afford the community access to this auxiliary space.” This space was opened to the LGBTQ+ community after the Pulse shooting as a place to grieve and heal. However, the staff of the museum could not speak to its use more than that, “because we weren’t in there. Yeah, we weren’t in there and that was really important...because they [staff] didn’t want to, for lack of a better term, I don’t want to say ‘pollute the space,’ but they just didn’t want to have an institutional presence in it.”

Two of the art museums opened their main gallery spaces in their response. Portland opened the main museum space, as well as a secondary building, while the Arab American National Museum utilized the secondary Annex space in its response. Regardless of whether the space used was the main museum building or a second museum space, the results were the creation of a space that felt safe or provided harbor and refuge. Many responses used the traditional calm and contemplative museum environment to create a space of healing in a time of grief and trauma.

### Why This Space?

Staff at all four museums mentioned the ability of the museum space to create a welcoming or safe environment. All staff at all museums at some point utilized language that

pointed to the environment of the museum lending as instrumental in the response. Phrases like “...the museum as a place of respite and solace...to open the museum for free as a place of sanctuary,” “we opened the museum for free, as a place for the community to come, as a place of respite,” “space just for grieving and healing,” and “so that was one gallery space, which kind of became a really nice healing space, ‘cuz it wasn’t loud – it was kind of a quiet, contemplative space,” came up in all interviews in regards to the museum as a whole, or specific spaces within the museum. In addition, two museums specifically articulated the very nature of art museums as lending themselves to aiding in a response.

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art released a media alert, that was explicit in providing an explanation as to why the museum was responding, namely that “as advocates for the contemplative and restorative power of modern and contemporary art, SFMOMA offers the Bay Area community a chance to reflect with the collection, friends and the arts community at no charge” (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2016).



**MEDIA ALERT**

December 7, 2016

**SFMOMA OFFERS FREE ADMISSION FROM 6–9 P.M. ON THURSDAY, 12/8**

- WHAT:** The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) will offer free admission to all visitors from 6–9 p.m. this Thursday evening, December 8, 2016 in recognition of the terrible loss to the Bay Area creative community through the recent tragedy in Oakland.
- WHY:** As advocates for the contemplative and restorative power of modern and contemporary art, SFMOMA offers the Bay Area community a chance to reflect with the collection, friends and the arts community at no charge.
- WHERE:** SFMOMA  
151 Third Street  
San Francisco, CA
- INFO:** [sfmoma.org](http://sfmoma.org)

During the interview, the staff member at SFMOMA echoed this sentiment. When asked what about their space lent itself to use in their response, they stated “what about our space lent itself to this use? Well, obviously we’re a comprehensive contemporary art museum.” On the

museum's about page art as a positive force is also brought up, with the museum stating that they believe "the art of our time is vital and shares it with passion and purpose, and that art and the creative process can open minds and help build a better world" (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2019).

A similar sentiment of the space of an art museum being a restorative one was also forwarded by two staff members at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in their explanation of what the museum offered in its response stating:

we were I think trying to tell people that we were here for the community, that we could be a place for people to come together, that we could be a place where people could gather, that we could be a place where people of all kinds would come together, of all ages, and that they would be able to heal, a place where they could come together and heal, that it would be a peaceful place. And I think also maybe that was the primary thing, but also to just maybe have people think a little about the role that a museum or an art museum could play in the community, you know, that we could be a place where people could come and create artwork of their own, or respond, but also that there is a power to art, that it sort of can transcend what's happening in the world, and you see the power of great art, and the power of humanity through art.

A second staff member at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston expanded on this notion of art museums as places that lend themselves to restoration or healing.

I think an art museum is naturally a place where one comes and contemplates history and culture and things like that, and I think that makes us a sort of a natural – I will tell you...there are quite a few hospitals within three square miles [there] is Children's Hospital and Brigham Women's Hospital, and people always come here. We have tons of

visitors that are seeking treatment or visiting families who are seeking treatment and it has always served that function for that particular group and in this case of the response to this bombing, it served that function for a lot of other people.

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston also put out a press release that utilized the language of respite, comfort, refuge, and peace in the galleries during “this painful time for our community” (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 2013).



[www.mfa.org](http://www.mfa.org)

Press Release

**Contacts:**

**MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON, OFFERS FREE ADMISSION TODAY, APRIL 16,  
IN RESPONSE TO YESTERDAY'S TRAGEDY**

BOSTON, Mass. (April 16, 2013) – In response to the tragic events at yesterday's Boston Marathon, general admission to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA), will be free to the public today, Tuesday, April 16. The Museum's galleries and special exhibitions will be open for visitors who wish to find a place of respite during this painful time for our community. Drop-in programs, including art-making activities, tours, and story hours for families and children, will also be available.

"Our entire community was affected by yesterday's tragedy," said Malcolm Rogers, Ann and Graham Gund Director. "We hope by opening the Museum's doors and offering free admission we will be a place of comfort, refuge, and peace."

The Museum is open from 10 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. today.

In a Boston Globe article covering the Free Day, one of the museum visitors, and a runner in the Marathon, was also explicit about how the space and its art was welcoming, stating “It’s important to watch some architecture and paintings and just remove yourself from the news” ” (qtd in Edgers, 2013, p. B1). Later in this same article, the museum director is quoted saying “Ours is the opposite of cancelling...It’s doing something positive. You’ve just seen a horrible example of what a perverted human mind can do. What the works of art in our care show is what the human mind and the human hands can do at their greatest and their most inspired” (qtd in Edgers, 2013, p. B6).

The Arab American National Museum, while not an art museum, also forwarded an idea of the museum as a site of respite. In a 2013 article in *The Detroit News*, the director of the museum was interviewed prior to his exit from the museum and mentioned the role of the museum in the community.

Devon Akmon was moved when the head of the Ferguson Commission, which investigated the 2014 police killing of Michael Brown, called on museums in a Philadelphia speech to step up after such public tragedies. “He argued what people need more than anything is a place of respite,” said Akmon, director of Dearborn’s Arab American National Museum. “He asked, ‘What if museums opened their doors?’” So after the 2016 Pulse nightclub murders in Orlando, Akmon invited members of the local LGBT community to gather at the museum’s Annex for commiseration and support. (Hodges, 2018).

In the upcoming book *Museums as Agents of Change*, a section on the Upstanders Festival at the Portland Art Museum pulls from community partners and artists involved with the event, who also described the response as creating a sanctuary or site of healing.

Teressa Raiford, activist and lead community organizer for Don’t Shoot Portland, later remarked how much the museum felt like a sanctuary that day. Another artist involved in the workshops and activities of the festival, Karina Puente, also reflected on how a program like this gave the Portland community “a place to heal.” The art, music, dialogue, and energy of the Upstanders Festival brought more than eight hundred people together at the museum that day—just hours after the traumatic attack--to stand together against hate, discrimination, and violence. (Murawski, In Press).

Museums can provide a calm, restorative environment, and this language was used throughout by museum staff, visitors and artists at all four sites. The traditional environment of a museum as one for contemplation and reflection lent itself to crisis response. In opening up the museum, all four sites offered the community a place to congregate, with the articulation by staff that this use of space for the public could provide room to heal and grieve in safety.

**Research Question 3: What internal structures support the museum's response to an external crisis?**

Three main internal structures emerged as important in supporting a successful internal response to an external crisis. The first was the space of the museum itself (discussed in Research Question 2), the second, similarly to Research Question 1, was staff, and lastly, social media was of great importance in alerting each museum's community that they were taking action.

Staff

Just as staff help drive a museum to choose to react in a rapid-response way as covered in Research Question 1, staff are also part of the internal structure that allows a museum to enact its response, once the decision has been made to respond. The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, articulated a resource-based calculation as part of their response, knowing that

it was going to take resources and just in terms of logistically knowing that we were gonna have crowds, how do we deal with visitor services, installing works would involve our registrar's office, our curatorial staff, our educators 'cuz we were offering opportunities for art making, our communications staff because we had...huge communications campaigns.

Part of this staff member's response was in regard to the museum's second response of the three-day Boston Strong event, particularly in terms of installing works and the "huge communications campaign." However, a second staff member echoed some of the logistical and staff structures that allowed them to respond rapidly the immediate day after. They touched on ticketing and admissions continuing much the same as normal, albeit without an admissions fee, in order for the museum to continue tracking attendance. In addition, they were the only staff member interviewed to mention volunteer efforts in a museum's response: "the volunteers who were able to make it in were really keen on sharing this place, with a lot of visitors who clearly hadn't been here before, right?" This same staff member later continued on the efforts of volunteers, as well as security staff, that "we didn't do too much differently – our regular sort of daily gallery tours and our volunteers were around to help, and you know the security department. It was in many ways a regular day but with a very somber overtone." The first staff member at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston noted of all the different people at the museum helping with the crisis response that "sometimes in a case like this, where it was such an unusual circumstance, you're kind of relying on people to do things that might have been a little bit outside of their typical role. But, in this case a lot of people really wanted to help in some way."

All four museums saw one person leading the charge or forwarding the idea of responding, which was then either agreed to by leadership, or the person who forwarded the idea was themselves leadership. To discuss their positions further would break the anonymity of the study. Staff at the Arab American National Museum, The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art noted a broad array of staff members as backing up the initial point person in creating and implementing the museum's response.

Only two staff members at two museums – The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Arab American National Museum – brought up that staff were also affected by the crisis event they responded to.

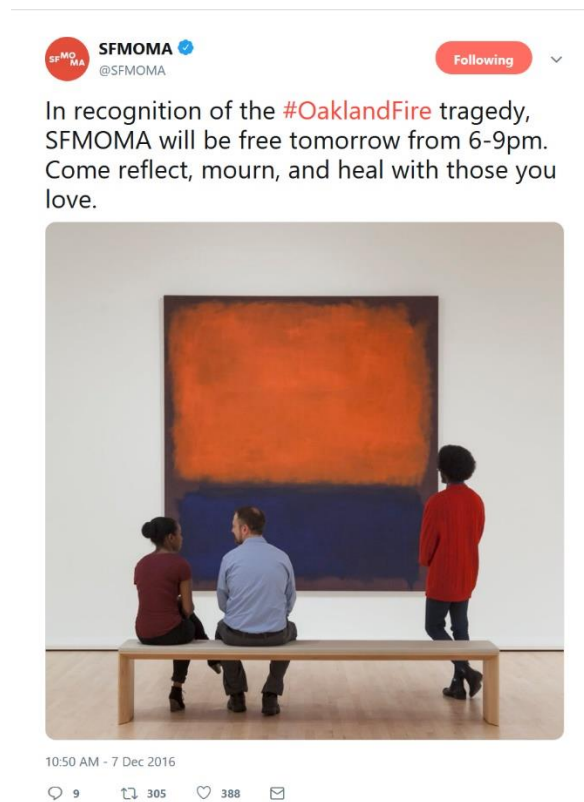
### Social Media

Social media was vital for the success of all four museum’s response. Social media was instrumental in letting the surrounding community know that the museum was responding and was there for them.

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Arts’ social media allowed them to alert the community to the museum opening for free. According to staff, in order to get the word out, the museum utilized traditional public relations as well as social media. “Yeah, we use Instagram and we also use Facebook. So, Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, our own website, and traditional public relations.” In an Instagram post, liked by 5,219 people, the museum posted that admission was free on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016, as a place for the community to come to “reflect, mourn, and heal,” in the hopes that the “galleries can give you a moment of peace in remembrance of the lives lost” (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2016).



The linked Oakland Fire Relief page is no longer active on their website but was also linked to in a Twitter thread about the museum's admission waiver (SFMOMA, 2016).



In addition, the museum released the previously discussed media alert on December 7<sup>th</sup>.

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, also utilized social media, in addition to media partnerships [discussed in Research Question 4]. Social media was crucial to the success of opening the museum for free the day after

because the first part about just opening our doors for free was done so quickly, we did that basically – sent out...300,000 emails, posted on Facebook, posted on Twitter, it was trending in Boston and Cambridge, and it ended up that the media was so on top of it, that we got a lot of local and national media, again all online but very quickly.

The email that was sent out for the museum's free day following the bombing

was a sort of a very quick, short email that basically said: ‘In response to the tragic events at yesterday’s Boston Marathon admission to the Museum of Fine Arts will be free to the public today. The Museum’s galleries and exhibitions will be open for visitors who wish to find a place of respite during this painful time for our community.’

The email also touched on the museum’s role as a sanctuary, as the “director added a quote that said: ‘by opening our doors we are hoping to be a place of comfort, refuge, and peace.’” This email was also instrumental in helping set up the connection with the quilting community that became a large aspect of the museum’s second, later response. Staff at the museum created a PowerPoint after both the museum opening and the Boston Strong community weekend to assist in discussing the events and their responses. In the PowerPoint presentation, a response rate of 74,000 opened emails of the 302,000 emails sent is reported (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 2013). The Facebook post announcing the museum free day received 3,910 likes and 2,600 shares (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 2013).

Portland Art Museum and the Arab American National Museum shared the most similarity in terms of social media usage, as in articulating their answers, staff from both museums pointed to successful deployment of social media hinging on community trust and partnerships. While the Portland Art Museum utilized their own Facebook page to get the word out about the continuation of the Upstander’s Festival,

number one communication strategy was Don’t Shoot Portland, which was our primary partner on this. They have a really extensive network of communication and really, really, rapid communication strategy, so they were able to get out through social media

that morning way more rapidly and more targeted to affected communities saying “we’re still doing the event, we really need you to come to this event and come together.” So, I think, they were the main – we sort of let them take on communication for this event. And that was kind of our strategy all along, but definitely that morning when I was texting back and forth with our community partners I was asking them like, “please, can you use all of your channels of communication and your sort of networks to communicate this out as quickly as possible.”

The Arab American National Museum also got the word out

through social media or whatever sort of communications channel that we’re able to tap into and I think...keeping ourselves on the radar for these effected communities afterwards proved to be something that we were able to do because folks found the space sufficient enough and adequate enough to hold their needs, and so, I recall there were a lot of folks who were referred back to the museum to host their own events afterwards.

The responses of both the Arab American National Museum and the Portland Art

Museum points to the importance of not just social media as a tool for communication, but also of community trust as important to museum communication, which segues into Research Question 4.

**Research Question 4: What role do community partnerships play that impact a museum’s response?**

Every museum interviewed was successful in their response in part because of their community partnerships. The emergent theme of staff answers was that all museums martialed outside aid and connections in putting together their response, either through official community partnerships, or more emergent assistance. Partnerships that led to a successful museum response

also occasionally included other museums working in a network to support one another, or their community.

### Outside Assistance

The Arab American National Museum initially moved to put out a statement condemning the Pulse shooting, as well as offered the space of the Annex to the affected community. The space of the Annex lent itself to a memorial, that

was organized by a local group called the Z Collective. Maybe six months prior to Pulse they approached the museum leadership seeking space, safe space, that they were looking for without having to leave the Dearborn community...one of the Collective's primary members was an intern at the time, and so that's kind of how the conversation began between the two groups.

The Upstanders Festival was always intended to be an event stemming from community partnerships, with the Portland Art Museum working with Don't Shoot Portland, the Museum of Impact, and community activists even prior to the reorientation of the event to be a response to the train stabbings the day before. The flyer advertising the event read, in part: "special thanks to the Museum of Impact, Don't Shoot Portland, Pacific Northwest College of Art, Marylhurst University, and all our community partner and volunteers for making this festival possible" (Portland Art Museum, 2017). These community partnerships were so integral to the Upstanders Festival that "the event was the partnerships, like we didn't have an event without the partnerships...they basically worked with us to create the event and we kind of played accomplice, or a sort of ally role in everything." The partnerships with these outside community members and institutions was so inherent to the event that

if they hadn't shown up the event, we would have cancelled – they would have been able to cancel it, like it wasn't a museum call, it was really if our community partners had said “no, there's no way we're going to come to the Portland Art Museum, this very traumatic thing just happened in our community.” We would have been like “ok, well we have to cancel this because there's no – we can't do it, without...” like it was a community-centered event

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art pulled directly from the affected community in order to make their response meaningful.

We also hired someone who is a DJ, who was very connected and had written a lot of music and co-created with people that lost their lives in the fire, and he set up in our main area that day and spun music from some of the folks who lost their lives in the fire who were composers. So, we had the connection of the artistic community here, on-site in that way.

While outside assistance came after the Museum of Fine Arts Boston opened its doors in its immediate response, the rapid-response was instrumental in bringing in allies for the larger response six weeks later. Part of this larger, later response of the community weekend was the display of “over a thousand flags from 35 countries that were then tied together and strung across our courtyard. And the whole theme of that was: ‘To Boston, with Love...’” However, these flags came from wholly outside the museum, according to the staff member.

I got a call that was forwarded to me that had come into the director's office and it was a woman who had seen the email that we had sent out...saying we were gonna be open for free the day after the Marathon...She called, she had had a dream about creating these small, basically like prayer flags, like little quilts, mini quilts. And she had this dream

about creating them and having people all over the world create them and stringing them together...And so, I asked... “Is there any way you can activate your social media communities?” And I can’t remember what platform they were using at the time, but they ended up pulling that together through social media and getting everything to us in time for the memorial day open house three day community weekend.

The museum staff member found it “fascinating” that “these folks did not work at the museum, and that they activated this quilting community. You know a thousand quilters from all over the world...to create these things, and to mail them and to get them here in a manner of time was unbelievable, you know?” While not part of the initial rapid response of opening the museum the day after the bombing, that rapid-response did spur the outreach of community assistance from the woman and her quilting community that was used in the later more extensive response of the community weekend.

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston also used existing community partnerships to help further spread the word about the museum’s events. According to one staff member:

We already had contacts at all of those local community organizations that were throughout the city. And so like, I have this crazy list of schools, and Boston Chinatown neighborhood center, and Boys and Girls clubs, and all these different non-profit and community – Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, National Center for African American Artists, churches - so we have all of these contacts – Sociedad Latina - that we could just reach out very quickly and send them this piece. And I think everybody was really eager to help us.

Additionally, in getting the word out about their response to the community, several museums mobilized existing partnerships with media outlets. While similar to mobilizing social

media to get the word out to affected communities, these media outlets were not internal to the museum the way an Instagram account is and required an existing level of partnership and outreach. For the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston these included

WBZ TV, and Boston Globe. So, I feel like that was very helpful, because I remember for that, I had a contact at the tv station, called her, and said “we’re thinking about doing this.” And she said, “whatever we can do, we’ll help.” You know, we had contacts on the business side, and on the reporting side. Same with the Boston Globe, we’d had partnerships with them over the years, so that was already in place.

Similarly, the San Francisco Museum of Modern art utilized relationships with media outlets to spread the word about the museum opening for free. “So many vehicles like the San Francisco Chronicle carried it, and KQED – that’s our PBS station – they announced it as well.”

Museums, while using their own internal resources of staff and space, nevertheless required outside assistance and partnerships in order to be successful. Whether these partnerships were with the affected groups, or a third party who was able to assist in messaging or providing other resources, that outside assistance was vital to the opening of the museum reaching the communities it needed to.

### Museum Community

Two museums drew from a network of museum partnerships, whether that be in assistance to their rapid response, or in the aftermath of the museums’ immediate response to community need.

While not working directly with the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, one staff member did mention that other museums responded to the Boston Marathon bombing in order to support the Boston community: “...we weren’t alone. The ICA [The Institute of Contemporary Art] I know

was open for free, the same day.” In a news report run by the Boston Globe, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum and the Boston Conservatory were also identified as offering free admission or a free event (Edgers, 2013, p. B6).

Another staff member at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston also brought up working with the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art of New York City, although it was for their second response, which stemmed from the first:

Yes there were three paintings that were lent to us by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, lent by the Director of the Metropolitan, who had called us immediately after the tragedy, saying that they were with us, an art museum that was with us and thinking of us, and somehow this idea came up that they wanted to show their support, and so we talked about them lending works of art, and that became part of our weekend.

More directly in terms of rapid-response, the Portland Art Museum had been partnered with, among other community partners, the Museum of Impact for the initial planned Upstanders Festival. “Museum of Impact had been someone that I had been working with a little bit for about the previous two years,” said one staff member, and the Museum of Impact was one of the community partners that pushed for the event to continue after the train stabbing.

Partnerships and networks between museums were brought up at two of the four sites. So, while not as strong an emergent theme as broad community partnerships, networks between museums still allowed for more powerful responses. Museum organizations were either able to support one another in their responses or work to respond to community needs at multiple locations.

## **Research Question 5: What shifts occur internally after a museum responds to an external crisis?**

Three museums saw or discussed some formalization of rapid-response teams or positions that could take up a similar role after their initial reaction. Stemming from this, there was a strengthening of commitment to continue acting in support of the community within the museum. This internal change also led to an external one, with all museums reporting a shift or strengthening of the way the community saw the museum.

### Formalization

At the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art conversations about how to formalize methods of responses occurred after their initial response.

We're talking about having now, something called a "rapid-response team" at the museum. We haven't formed it yet, but as part of our strategic planning we did discuss the need to be able to rapidly respond to events in the community, and actually formally establishing a small group of people at the museum to convene, and make decisions in a rapid way. So that might have one person from our collections department, one person from our public relations department, one person from operations. This would be a group that would be charged with, if something were to happen, quickly coming together to make some recommendations on what the museum might do. So, we haven't done that yet, but it has been an outcome of these moments.

Similarly, the Portland Art Museum had discussed creating a rapid-response team. However, their discussion was prior to their response to the Portland train stabbing. The Portland Art Museum differs in that the impetus for the discussion of how to formalize crisis response was

not tied to their rapid-response event, but was more of an ongoing conversation, of which their rapid-response played a part in. “We as a museum had been developing kind of a rapid-response team, so, senior staff members that could kind of be on call to respond to things like this. So, this kind of helped us think a little bit more about that [the logistics of responding].” In addition, museum staff had already discussed the museum’s role with leadership after prior museum events had

sparked some pretty heated conversations around whether we can be doing these things, what our role is, are we being political, like how do we fit within this? So, by the time we got to this event, I think a lot of those conversations had sort of happened, and I think there was general support for being a space for these types of things to happen with community.

The Arab American National Museum created a staff position, not in response to the specific event, but in order to respond to the community more broadly.

Yeah, so the formal position that we have at the museum called the “Community Events Organizer,” that came into fruition in 2015? 16? It was just right around the time of Pulse...and this is also around the time of the Annex opening – so all of these things like really inform one another and came about together. But, the purpose of that position was to activate the Annex as a community space that can respond to community needs as they come about, particularly the different communities of color that are in the area, just looking at how extremely diverse and rich that variety is in the Metro Detroit and Dearborn area.

While initially funded on a two-year grant, the position was extended and entrenched in the museum, and the “...position is still here, and there’s no sort of shakiness as to like, ‘is this a

position that we need to maintain?’ It’s very much understood as just another pillar of the museum and what we offer, and what all our facilities can offer as long as this position is staffed and has the capacity to do so.’ Because of this internal change where a position is now in place, and because of the community’s knowledge of the museum’s response, the museum is

thinking about it proactively, if and when another crisis does happen, there’s already a base here, like there’s already some sentiment of togetherness and people already have familiarity with the space, and so I think that will only help us in the future in terms of people knowing that we’re here and how effectively we can respond in the future too, to crises that may come up.

While three of the four museums moved in some way towards formalizing a method of response to community needs, only one museum undertook formal debriefing after their initial response. The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston did a formal debrief and an evaluative report, which included their second response as well, the accompanying PowerPoint of which is referenced in Research Question 3. The three other museums had informal conversations afterwards, but no formal debriefs, although the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art did report back to their Board on their response after the fact.

#### Commitment to Community

All four museums saw their actions as being rooted in a commitment to community. The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston saw that their focus is we’ve always been close-knit with the community, and have educational partnerships with community groups, and Boys and Girls Clubs, and things like that. And I would say that this incident in particular probably didn’t change that element of the

museum's mission, how's that? Yeah, which is to say, we're already out there doing that kind of work.

The museum, while not having a formalized response role, still had a commitment to the community, and in the words of one staff member, "I think that it [the museum's response] showed our commitment to this community, and the role that we want to play in being an important part of it." If the need arose again to open the museum in response to community need, one staff member noted

these sort of civic crises or emergencies are by their nature unpredictable and so I would think that any options on appropriate response to something like that would stay on the table, sure. Up to and including free admission, I wouldn't be surprised if that was the way we respond to things down the road, and I wouldn't be surprised if there were additions, right? Each one calls for its own response, I think.

All three of the other museums echoed similar sentiments of the institution's desire to continue to support and be responsive to its surrounding community. The Arab American National Museum saw that

public programming I think really strengthened after that too, in terms of collaborating more with other communities of color in the area and just as, like shows of solidarity, strength in numbers, things of that nature...So, I think, like all of these internal changes that we're making are reflective of wanting our community partnerships to be able to be as rich as possible moving forward.

Staff at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art brought up how they opened the museum for free again following the 2018 California wildfires.

Well again, this fall we just did it for the smoke impact, and that was also more in coordination with the city of San Francisco...our air quality inside the museum is spectacular. Probably one of the best places to breathe in an environment where the air quality outside is like a five on a negative scale of five...it is nice to be able to come out and look at art and stuff, but there's also the biology of it all. This response is part of our strategic planning for the next 5 years.

The Portland Art Museum noted that their response to the train attack was part of a spectrum of actions they were undertaking to become more meaningful to their community. The staff member interviewed stated that their response was "one of many efforts we've tried to make to be a place where community can come together, when there's a need for healing, and support, and safety to a certain extent." The staff member also discussed the museum's ongoing community work and how

this event [the Upstander's Festival] was a big step in terms of building trust, and for a lot of individuals to start to move their perceptions of the museum from a place that "I would like never see myself going to," to a place where like, "if it's part of one of these partnerships and initiatives I could see myself going to," and I think we continued to work towards building those relationships and building that trust, and doing the work we need to do to make sure people know that we're a museum that's in the process of transformation.

The museum placed the Upstanders Festival in a continuum of engagement. In their publication "A History of Engagement: The Portland Art Museum 1892-2017," the museum presents a timeline which, after editor Jen Reyes, "focuses on strategies that move outside of standard practice, reach beyond the Museum to build relationships, foster community participation, and

make clear that a museum can be a center of not only cultural engagement, but civic, social, and community activity” (Lampen, 2017, p. 1). The Upstander’s Festival is the second to last entry in the booklet, followed by “2017 Museum partnered with Portland State University’s Center for Public Interest Design, the Village Coalition, and others to raise awareness for issues of homelessness in Portland” (Lampen, 2017, p. 32).

### External Change

Because of each museum’s responsiveness, their standing in their communities changed. Whether their relationship was minimal, emerging, or ongoing, three of the four museums saw a shift in their perception by their surrounding community. The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston’s free day, and later community weekend,

enhanced our relationship with the community...I also think that, in terms of the community, I think that...they saw us in a new light and saw the role that the museum could play in connecting with the community. And really, being an important part of Boston and the city. Yes! I think that people see us differently and see that we can find ways to connect to the city and to special causes, and crises.

At the same time, another staff member saw that while the response may have shifted community perception the museum was always doing community-engaged work, stating “we were doing our very best to be an integral part of the community before it happened and continue to do that even now.” Similarly, the Arab American National Museum had always worked with a community focus since its founding, so that while a staff member believed “that nothing particularly changed in terms of the institution. I think what it did was built a lot of trust and good will...we certainly heard afterwards, as word kind of spread, that people really kind of appreciated that gesture and felt a sense of welcomeness.”

Lastly, the Portland Art Museum found that the Upstander's Festival caused people to "start to move their perceptions of the museum from a place that 'I would like, never see myself going to,' to a place where like, 'if its part of one of these partnerships and initiatives I could see myself going to,'" as discussed earlier. The Upstander's Festival itself was the museum's "second big risk and experiment with a truly community-centered event where we sort of stepped back and said, 'you decide what this is and program it and we will support it' ...So this was like the second [in] now a series of different moments where we've had these kind of anchor programs." The response was then one of many that led to a shift in community perception of what the museum was and could offer them.

### **Additional Findings**

While it did not fall under any of the guiding research questions, an important theme touched on by two of the staff at two of the museums was the danger that comes with taking a stand and protecting communities that are made at-risk by the forces of xenophobia, homophobia, and white supremacy. In acting and responding, museums must be aware of the pushback they may get. The museums are anonymized in this section for further safety.

In terms of violent pushback, one staff member mentioned that their museum's response drew the attention of

a couple clearly identifiable white supremacists that showed up...and so we ended up working with our security, we had additional plain clothes security guards here that day. But we also worked with our security to make sure that those individuals didn't come in to the programming space and I believe they were removed from the campus at some point without...police being called.

Staff at another museum pushed this point further, saying that in general, due to the museum's commitment to its community, that they had been threatened by white-nationalist elements. "And I should say our museum, in and of itself had been threatened...by far-right groups and other folks. I mean, I've had to call the police at multiple points to provide elevated security during my tenure." A third staff member at a third museum did not explicitly mention either of these factors but mentioned in response to the interviewer noting it was powerful that the museum was formalizing a response team that "it's just 2019, the world we live in, you know?"

Lastly, while not a broad theme but important nonetheless, one staff member identified feeling pride after their museum's response. "I was very, very proud to be a part of the museum that day. It's one of these, you know, one of these signal moments, right?"

## **Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications**

The purpose of this research study was to examine how museums are, in a rapid response way, creating space that serves as sanctuary in a physical, embodied manner for their surrounding community post-crisis or trauma. The study was focused on staff responses and supplemented by document analysis. To that end, data came from structured interviews with staff, and analysis drawn from press releases, news reports, and museum documents intended for both internal and external use. Community relationships, physical space, staff mobilization, and formalization stood out as key thematic areas in staff responses.

It is hoped that this research can be used by other museums as part of a broader discussion and set of resources to determine when, if, and how best to respond to a community crisis. These findings could be used at the starting point in determining whether an institution is equipped and ready to respond, at the middle point in mobilizing resources in an effective way, or looking towards the future and how to codify a museum response.

### **An End to Isolated Temples**

Outside assistance was vital to the success of the responses at all four museums. While some of the museums and their surrounding communities – such as the Arab American National Museum and the LGBTQ+ community, or the Portland Art Museum and local communities of color – were in the process of developing their relationships, these museums nonetheless drew on either these relationships or others in creating their response. The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art also drew on its existing ties with the affected community, bringing in a DJ to play music created by some of the victims of the fire. The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston drew on existing community ties to help get the word out, as well as developed new community ties with international quilters through their rapid-response that assisted in creating their second, larger

response. Relationships were either emerging or ongoing with some sort of community that was able to assist in creating a rapid-response or in getting the word out that a museum was opening its doors. A museum that had been historically internally-facing could likely not have responded with success the way these museums did. This trend echoes what Patterson says of museums, “the institution is humans, otherwise we’re just a big empty building” (Patterson, Wittman, and Philips, 2018). Each museum used their physical space in their response, but it was community ties that allowed the response and use of space to be effective or known about.

These findings also support Jennings “Practical and Compassionate Advice on Museums and Community Conflict” steps “to bring about positive change,” particularly the step of regularly engaging with the community (Jennings, 2014). Engaging with the community helped develop the bonds that allowed museums to martial outside assistance in the crisis responses, which then led to further positive growth in their community relationships. Lindsey Steward (2018) writes of the institution of museums positing themselves as temples “where knowledge was preserved and education was the highest value,” and pushing for museums to pivot their goals, and “remain relevant by knowing and figuring out what they stand for.” The four museums, in responding to a crisis in their surrounding community, knew what they were standing for, and that was their surrounding community and its needs, even if that lay outside the traditional uses of the space. Some museums, such as the Arab American National Museum, had in their very formation known they were community-oriented, and so moved only to confirm this commitment to the people outside the walls of the museum by bringing them in. No museum acts alone, especially in the act of serving community, as community is a web, and the museum a point in that construction.

## **The Power of Spaces**

This is not to downplay the necessity and importance of the museum's space in their response. These places were activated through community, but it was a physical place that was activated. The art museums all pointed to some aspect of the museum, or of a single gallery, as assisting in creating a place of respite or sanctuary, by the nature of the space as a calm and contemplative one. This echoes what Packer and Bond (2010) argue about restorative experiences stemming in part from "a sense of escape or being away (being physically or mentally removed from routine or demanding activities)" (p. 422). The Portland Art Museum's reframing of the Upstanders Festival may have allowed for what Order of the Good Death founder Caitlin Doughty advocates, in "plunging in and being involved is really the way to come out the other side and feel like you've done something." Through making art, attending a panel, traversing the exhibits while feeling grief, or rage, or fear, a sense of involvement may have been created. Further research could focus more on the visitor experience of museum's rapid-responses, to determine if this held true.

Packer and Bond (2010) cast a wide net across different museum types, including not only art museums but also "...history museums, gardens, and zoos) [which] have the potential to offer visitors a restorative experience..." (p. 423). The mobilization of the Arab American National Museum's Annex space supports this belief that a wide array of museum types are able to create restorative environments. In this case, the space utilized was part of the museum institution, but not the museum space per se, as it was not a gallery space. The success of the Arab American National Museum's response reveals the potential for a wide array of types of spaces to be used as a sanctuary space. It is not necessary for a space to hold an exhibit, or art, but merely that is offered, and is welcoming. Additionally, it may not be necessary for staff to

oversee the use of a space particularly if (and perhaps because) that space does not house collections. This community use was then different from all others offered by the museums studied, as even Portland Art Museum, which was an extremely community-driven approach, did not fully relinquish its space to however the community chose to be in it. There is further room for study in the different mobilizations of space within a response, as well as more room to delve into what about different museum types and their spaces lend themselves to a rapid-response. To that end, this research could be expanded into the other types of museums mentioned by Packer and Bond, as well as others, including science and natural history museums, history museums, children museums, and zoos, aquariums, and botanic gardens.

Important in this range of space usage too was the placement of spaces. The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston offered their main building, the Arab American National Museum offered an auxiliary space, while the Portland Art Museum offered a mix of both their main building and an auxiliary one. This, along with the split between gallery and performance space among the museums, points to the simplicity of the need to congregate after crisis. While the art museums pointed to their artworks as helping in the restorative process, there was something helpful in the physical construct of the building itself. More room for study would be to speak with visitors, to determine what lent to a sense of sanctuary in a museum space turned over after crisis.

### **The Few and the Many**

While all museums utilized the support of numerous staff members, be that security, visitor services, directors, or outreach, responses tended to be spearheaded by a single individual. This ranged from an individual raising the initial idea of a response, and finding broad support, to a single individual doing the majority of the legwork on the museum side. Most of the

institutions pointed to wide ranges of staff assisting with the response. While an individual initiated all the responses, a wide range of museums staff positions and volunteers were necessary to successfully pull off a response and downplaying that removes the reality of the resources and human-power needed. In unique circumstances, a single individual both initiated and implemented the museum's response. However, it was more common across the four museums for an individual to initiate the response, followed up by broad coordination and support within the museum from the rest of the staff. Just as museums as institutions could not have succeeded all on their own and needing the assistance of community partners, staff pushing for their institution to respond succeeded in part because of the rallying of other staff around them or behind their idea. The Project for Public Spaces notes that placemaking is “a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm to maximize shared value” (2018), and this holds true for the mobilization of museum space after a community crisis. For most of the museums it was a collaborative process across staff, even if the initial idea was driven by an individual.

Only one staff member brought up volunteers, and a second staff member brought up interns when interviewed, pointing to a need for further research into the role of volunteers and interns in supporting and implementing rapid-responses in museums, especially for small and mid-size museums which rely heavily on volunteers and interns to augment limited staff positions.

### **Formalization and Readiness**

Two of the four museums are currently taking or have already taken steps to formalize a method of response in the future. The Arab American National Museum created the Community Events Organizer position, which, while not solely dealing with rapid-response, works more in

tandem with the community to activate the museum space for their needs. The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art is in discussion to create a cross-departmental rapid-response team. The Portland Art Museum had already been discussing a way to formalize rapid-response prior to the action discussed in this research. The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, did not mention formalization, but has kept similar responses on the table as an option, if needed. Formalization is important for succession planning, so that if the person who spearheaded the initial response ever leaves, that institution does not then lose its ability or drive to respond. In addition, many museums pointed to the institute's mission or vision as being part of the reason they responded. This is already a level of formalization that allowed staff with ideas about responsiveness to point to internal values as justification for action. The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art pointed to its strategic plan, and a five-year plan with rapid response embedded, or about to be embedded in both. The Arab-American National Museum's anti-oppression statement gives grounding for the museum in acting to support its community in the face of oppressive acts. Codifying a response team or position goes beyond the reactive and creates a new vehicle that allows for proactivity.

When asked if opening up the museum for free has continued to be an option in terms of response, one staff member responded that "these sort of civic crises or emergencies are by their nature unpredictable and so I would think that any options on appropriate response to something like that would stay on the table." A museum seeking to be responsive to a community may use opening the museum as a singular response, or it may, as Museum of Fine Arts, Boston did, use it as one of many responses to the ongoing lived experiences of its community, both providing free admission in the immediate aftermath, as well as creating a community weekend further out from the initial traumatic event, acknowledging the ongoing needs of the community and the

ongoing effects of the event. Other rapid responses have included exhibits and forums, such as Brenda Tindal's of the pioneering rapid-response exhibit, and the open house and reflecting stations used at Charlotte's Levin Museum of the New South, discussed in Chapter 2. As Tindal asks museums "What is the role and responsibility of the museum in responding to issues affecting our communities locally and globally? How can museums respond to these issues in a timely, relevant, and responsible manner?" museums should be looking to a range of responses, from art making, to free admission, to reflective spaces, to exhibits, as ways to respond to and work with communities and their needs in times of crisis.

The National Park Service and the American Alliance of Museums have formalized both an acknowledgement of and response system to natural disasters. From flash floods, to fires, to crime, both institutions have set out measures and guidelines to protect visitors, staff, and collections from harm (National Park Service 21(9), 1). Museums seeking to be more accountable and responsive to their surrounding communities could consider something akin to the Park Service's Emergency Operations Plan, or San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's proposed rapid-response team, or the Arab American National Museum's Community Events Organizer. Adopting a plan or position would help a museum prepare to respond to the lived realities of the communities they serve, as the environment degrades or as the rate of hate crimes rise. One staff member did caution that all crises are different and thus require different responses. However, the National Park Service Conserve-o-grams have found a way to provide bare-bone guidelines to assist in preparation, even as all forest fires are different from one another. It does not have to be comprehensive, but a museum should have some responsiveness guidelines in place, and more museums should begin having conversations about the role they

wish to play in their communities: if rapid-response is something that institution has the capacity, resources, and relationships to carry out.

## **Recommendations**

Considering these results, I propose some recommendations for museums that are considering how best they can rapidly respond to crisis, drawing on the themes that emerged throughout the interviews. As the museums interviewed were mid- to large-sized art and cultural museums, these suggestions may not wholly fit other museum sizes or types but may still provide good starting points for larger conversations.

- **Leverage Mission Statements** – In their articulations of why they acted, most staff interviewed mirrored language or goals present in their museum mission, values, or anti-oppression statements. These statements can be helpful in making a case for why it is the museum’s place to act, and how responding supports institutional goals. If something like an anti-oppression statement does not exist already, pushing for one to be written can be an important first step in preparing to be a more responsive institution.
- **Build on community partnerships** – All museums that responded had some sort of partnership in place, even if it was in its early stages and still emerging. I would caution against acting unless there is some sort of community partnership and genuine relationship is in place already. This helps to ensure that a museum’s response is both needed and wanted, and that the response will be effective in creating a healing space, rather than a re-traumatizing one. In addition, community partnerships with numerous communities can allow for a fuller, more effective response, and a wider range of resources available to a museum in that response.

- **Take stock of space** – What resources does the museum have to offer? Is there a current show or exhibit that lends itself to deeper conversation, or to creating a feeling of safety? Note the layouts and usages of available space, and what those environments can offer in terms of emotion. Two museums interviewed mobilized auxiliary spaces with great success. Is there an auxiliary space that can be turned over to the community in some capacity? If not, logistically can the main space be opened quickly and with the support of all staff? Taking the time to answer and examine these questions can lead to the museum knowing what resources it has on hand to mobilize, similar to knowing that a disaster preparedness kit has first aid equipment included to care for visitors, and trash bags and towels to try and protect artifacts from fire or water damage.
- **Debrief** – Only one of the museums interviewed had any sort of formal evaluation or debrief after responding. If implemented, debrief session can help potential future responses, as well as museum staff. It was touched on only briefly in interviews, but museum staff are also part of the community, and therefore also affected by crisis or trauma in the community and may need their own space to process and grieve or heal. Debriefs can also lead to more effective responses in the future, in allowing the museum to take stock of what was effective, what was not, and what resources emerged that may not have been noted prior to acting.
- **Formalize** – Lastly, if a museum wishes to continuously be responsive to community needs in the face of crisis, something must be formalized. Whether this is a plan, similar to a disaster preparedness plan but more externally facing, a position, or a team, formalization would allow for rapid and dependable reaction. Formalization can lead to a better ability to act, shifting museum responses from a one-off to a consistent option.

## **Implications**

Art museums and cultural museums may be better equipped to marshal their spaces in this particular way. History museums, science museums, children museums, and others did not appear in the news or conference cycles in the same way that art and cultural museums did in regards to rapid response. However, this may mean that the news did not accurately capture museums responses, that these museums present on their responses less frequently at conferences (or that the researcher missed out on an important session or conference where they did), or that these museums were able to respond in a different, yet still necessary way. Further study on the modes of response utilized by these kinds of museums is warranted.

While individuals spurred museum response, in terms of resources many staff members were needed to successfully open the museum space, whether that be through staffing or outreach. This points to the need for formalization of response systems on two counts. One is so that if an individual leaves an institution, that museum does not lose the ability to respond. The other is so that when a museum responds, staff throughout the museum are able to join in on that response, know what is expected of them, and participate, as they too are members of the community. Stemming from this point of participation, two interviewed staff members mentioned that other staff at the museum may have been affected, but did not carry this point further, as the interview questions did not cover it. There is room for further study in how museum staff are affected by a crisis that their institution may be responding to, as well as further acknowledgment of how museum staff are people outside of work, who may be affected by things outside the walls of the museum, especially as museums seek to diversify staff. This is an emerging topic of study for museums. In the 2019 report TrendsWatch, Elizabeth Merritt notes that “museums, along with other employers, pay a high if hidden price for stress. Turnover

results in a loss of knowledge, experience, and institutional memory” (p. 44). Merritt (2019) goes on to describe broad measures museums can take to combat employee stress, such as allowing telecommuting, or offering paid parental leave. (p. 45). While this indicates that the stress levels and well-being of staff are beginning to be reckoned with in the museum field, this report does not look at the emotional fallout that a museum responding to a crisis would have on staff, who are likely to be just as affected as the other community members. As museums take action for their community, they must also take action for their staff, who feel the effects of crisis and trauma as well.

Rapid response may be important to the community but is not the end goal— or the only solution— in community relationships. All the museums saw an increase in community trust, which then allowed for further development of relationships. Rapid response is one tool among many for museums to support their communities, but, as forwarded by one staff member “it’s just 2019, the world we live in, you know.” Rapid responses by museums may become a necessity as social safety nets are stripped away by hostile powers or are strained to capacities. As Stephen Weil noted, in the movement of museums away “from being about something to being for somebody” museums may, with increasing numbers, need to step in to provide their communities sanctuary that is denied or taken away elsewhere.

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## Appendix

### Item 1: Instruments

#### Event Description

1. I’m looking primarily at your institution’s response to x event. Could you explain what this event was?

2. What did the museum's response entail?
3. Why did the museum respond, and why did it choose to respond in this way?
4. How was the museum's space used in its response to the event?

*Probe:* What about your space lent itself to this use?

### **Internal Logistics**

5. What were your considerations about opening the museum space in a non-traditional way?
6. Was there support or conversation about the museum's role from leadership prior to its implementation?
7. What were the positions of those involved in developing a response plan to *x* event?

*Probe:* How many years were they at the museum by that point?

8. How quickly was the response plan put together and implemented?

### **Community Partnerships**

9. How did the museum get the word out to affected communities?
10. Was a partnership with the affected community or communities in place before?

*Probe, if yes:* In what context? How did the partnership help in the event?

### **Post-event**

11. After *x* event, what was the post-event debriefing, if any?
12. Did the museum's outreach or community partnership plan change at all after their response to the event? In what ways, if any, did your relationship with the affected community change?

*Probe:* has this changed how you operate in your community?

13. Since responding, has your activation energy increased or decreased for future response?

*Probe:* Have you since continued to open up the museum when the community needs it, or hold that as an option?

## **Item 2: Consent Script**

Hello, my name is Gabrielle Friesen and I'm currently pursuing my master's degree in Museum Studies from the University of Washington. This study is for my thesis on how museum professionals think about the role of the museum in creating, in a rapid response way, space that serves as sanctuary for their surrounding community post-crisis or trauma.

As a disclaimer, I'd like to let you know that your participation is completely voluntary and there are no consequences for choosing not to participate at any time. You can also skip any questions you're not comfortable answering. I will record the interview, but I'm the only person who will have access to the recording. I will let you know before I start recording. Your name will also remain confidential and nothing will be attributed to you by name.

You can contact me with questions at any time. I have provided my phone number and email address via email in the original email, and I will also send a follow up email with my contact information again.

Do you have any questions?

All right, great. I'm going to start recording now.

[Interview]

Thank you so much for participating. I really appreciate your time today. A final component I need to complete for my thesis is document analysis. I'm collecting documents like press releases, internal planning, and any museum documents related to the museum's response to the event for analysis. The documents will only be seen by myself.

In addition, are there any other employees at the museum who were present during the museum's response and might be interested in participating in my study?

Thank you again. Have a good day.

### Item 3: Coding Matrix

Responses to questions have been omitted to protect confidentiality, and to protect the wishes of the participants.

### Item 4: Media Referenced in Chapter 4

The screenshot displays the website for the Arab American National Museum (AANM). The header features the museum's name in English and Arabic, along with a decorative background image of a traditional Islamic architectural element. A vertical navigation menu on the left lists various sections such as 'About the Museum', 'Virtual Tour', 'Contact Us', and 'Exhibits'. The main content area is titled 'ABOUT THE MUSEUM' and contains the following text:

The Arab American National Museum (AANM) is the first and only museum in the United States devoted to Arab American history and culture. Arab Americans have enriched the economic, political and cultural landscape of American life. By bringing the voices and faces of Arab Americans to mainstream audiences, we continue our commitment to dispel misconceptions about Arab Americans and other minorities. Since opening in 2005, the Museum has shed light on the shared experiences of immigrants and ethnic groups, paying tribute to the diversity of our nation.

**MISSION**

The Arab American National Museum documents, preserves and presents the history, culture and contributions of Arab Americans.

**ANTI-OPPRESSION STATEMENT**

In alignment with AANM's commitment to creating an arts sector rooted in justice, we are committed to ensuring a space that is free of racism, transphobia, homophobia, Islamophobia, ableism, misogyny, classism or other bias. We also encourage freedom of expression and we aim to create a brave, generative space. **Our expectation is that all guests will honor these ethics.**

*This statement has been graciously shared by the National Performance Network, of which AANM is a partner.*

The bottom of the page features logos for 'Smithsonian Affiliate' and 'International Coalition of SITES of CONSCIENCE', along with contact information and a footer with copyright notice and links to 'Site Map', 'Privacy Policy', and 'Contact Us'.

The Arab American National Museum's mission and anti-oppression statements.



Search

- Contact Us
- Mission**
- A Brief History of the Museum
- Press Office
- Affiliations
- Board of Trustees
- Management
- Ticket Donation Requests
- Careers
- Volunteer
- Green Policy
- Privacy Policy

## Mission

The mission of the Portland Art Museum is to engage diverse communities through art and film of enduring quality, and to collect, preserve, and educate for the enrichment of present and future generations.

### PHILOSOPHY AND CORE VALUES

The Portland Art Museum strives to be an inclusive institution that facilitates respectful dialogue, debate, and the free exchange of ideas. With a deep commitment to artists – past and present – and freedom of expression, the Museum and Northwest Film Center’s collections, programs and staff aspire to reveal the beauty and complexities of the world, and create a deeper understanding of our shared humanity. We are a Museum for all, inviting everyone to connect with art through their own experiences, voices, and personal journeys. The following core values guide the Portland Art Museum:

#### Creativity

The arts are at the core of our humanity, representing a timeless human impulse.

#### Connection

The arts touch us and connect us across time, geography, and cultural differences, shedding light on how humans interact with their world.

#### Learning

The arts open us to diverse ideas and ways of knowing ourselves, our community, and our world.

#### Accessibility

The arts must be economically, intellectually, and physically accessible to everyone.

#### Accountability

Transparency and careful stewardship of resources—including collections, staff, facilities, and investments – are essential for mission fulfillment now and in the future.

### VISION

The Portland Art Museum is the leading cultural institution in the state and region. Its hallmarks are innovation, excellence, and engaged community partnerships. The Museum presents a relevant and dynamic program originating from its collections and Film Center. With historically preserved and newly designed architectural space of the highest quality, the Museum invites, inspires, and fosters contemplation and discussion. As a beacon for culture and education for our growing and evolving community, the Museum is known for its exceptional trustees, staff, programs, collections, and visitor amenities.

### WELCOME TO THE MUSEUM

Become a Museum Member

Support us by making a donation



Social Media Guidelines & User Policy

#### PORTLAND ART MUSEUM

1219 SW Park Avenue  
Portland, OR 97205  
General info: 503-226-2811  
Membership: 503-276-4249

Press Office

[More contact information](#)

#### MUSEUM HOURS

|            |                  |
|------------|------------------|
| <b>Mon</b> | Closed           |
| <b>Tue</b> | 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. |
| <b>Wed</b> | 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. |
| <b>Thu</b> | 10 a.m. – 8 p.m. |
| <b>Fri</b> | 10 a.m. – 8 p.m. |
| <b>Sat</b> | 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. |
| <b>Sun</b> | 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. |

#### MUSEUM ADMISSION

|             |                                                          |
|-------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Free</b> | Members                                                  |
| <b>\$20</b> | Adults                                                   |
| <b>\$17</b> | Seniors 62+, College Students                            |
| <b>Free</b> | Children 17 and under<br>Special program fees may apply. |

#### Purchase tickets

**Adult Group Tours** – \$16 with reservation

**K-12 School Group Tours** – Free with reservation

The Portland Art Museum and its donors are committed to making the Museum a resource for all. Learn about our [Admission Access Programs](#).

#### SUBSCRIBE TO OUR NEWSLETTER

First name

Last name

Email address



## The Portland Art Museum’s mission statement

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## Mission Statement ✉️

**About**

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Adopted by the Board of Trustees,  
February 28, 1991

The Museum of Fine Arts houses and preserves preeminent collections and aspires to serve a wide variety of people through direct encounters with works of art.

The Museum aims for the highest standards of quality in all its endeavors. It serves as a resource for both those who are already familiar with art and those for whom art is a new experience. Through exhibitions, programs, research and publications, the Museum documents and interprets its own collections. It provides information and perspective on art through time and throughout the world.

The Museum holds its collections in trust for future generations. It assumes conservation as a primary responsibility which requires constant attention to providing a proper environment for works of art and artifacts. Committed to its vast holdings, the Museum nonetheless recognizes the need to identify and explore new and neglected areas of art. It seeks to acquire art of the past and present which is visually significant and educationally meaningful.

The Museum has obligations to the people of Boston and New England, across the nation and abroad. It celebrates diverse cultures and welcomes new and broader constituencies. The Museum is a place in which to see and to learn. It stimulates in its visitors a sense of pleasure, pride and discovery which provides aesthetic challenge and leads to a greater cultural awareness and discernment.

The Museum creates educational opportunities for visitors and accommodates a wide range of experiences and learning styles. The Museum educates artists of the future through its School. The creative efforts of the students and faculty provide the Museum and its public with insights into emerging art and art forms.

The Museum's ultimate aim is to encourage inquiry and to heighten public understanding and appreciation of the visual world.

**VISIT US**

Avenue of the Arts  
465 Huntington Avenue  
Boston,  
Massachusetts 02115

617-267-9300

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The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston's mission statement

## About SFMOMA

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art is the largest museum of modern and contemporary art in the United States and a thriving cultural center for the Bay Area. Our remarkable collection of painting, sculpture, photography, architecture, design, and media arts, is housed in an LEED Gold-certified building designed by the global architects Snøhetta and Mario Botta. In addition to our seven gallery floors, SFMOMA offers 45,000 square feet of free, art-filled public space open to all.

SFMOMA believes the art of our time is vital and shares it with passion and purpose, and that art and the creative process can open minds and help build a better world. For that reason, we assemble unparalleled collections, create exhilarating exhibitions, and develop engaging public programs that connect with our community. Welcome!

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art’s “About” page.



### Upstanders Festival

WHERE: May 27, 2017 @ 12:00 pm – 5:00 pm



Search

- Calendar
- Member Events
- Patron Society Events
- Event Space Rental

#### WELCOME TO THE MUSEUM

Become a Museum Member

Support us by making a donation



Social Media Guidelines & User Policy

It's time to amplify voices and activate caring to make our city a better place. Join the Museum of Impact, Don't Shoot Portland, and the Portland Art Museum for a fun-filled day of spoken word, restorative justice, music and media, interactive workshops, art zines, and poster making in support of social justice, activism, and positive community change.

Upstanders Festival is a social justice extravaganza, shining a light on the bravery and brilliance of activism and changemakers in our midst. Produced by the Museum of Impact, this event series transforms audiences from bystanders to Upstanders through a variety of activities to enhance equity and creative expression.

The festival activities and events are free.

#### SCHEDULE

Noon — Welcome to Upstanders Fest / "What is an Upstander?"

12:30 p.m. — VLR Reunion music performance

1:20 p.m. — "Lowsley Hate in America" Discussion

Discussion with Glenn Waco, Chris River, Dylisha Gordon, and Eric Orr, moderated by Teresa Rafford, around racism, prejudice and micro aggressions.

2 p.m. — History in the Making: Papel Picado Now!

Artist Karina Puente leads an interactive and uplifting workshop where participants learn how to make colorful, paper protest flags inspired by the Mexican paper cutting tradition called, Papel Picado.

2:20 p.m. — "Say Their Name" Performance

Performance and artist talk by intersection about the song, the hashtag and the many lives lost to state sanctioned violence in the Black Lives Matter journey for justice.

2:30 p.m. — "You Can't Control Art" discussion

Discussion with Michael Woods (former Baltimore police officer), Nicole Rose (attorney), and Jesse Horton (Portland business owner and entrepreneur) on intersecting issues of art, activism, and freedom of expression. Moderated by Teresa Rafford.

3:30 p.m. — "Black Fashion in the Movement" by PDX Formation

Fashion walk + discussion presented by PDX Formation. "Black Fashion in the Movement" art illustrations by artist Stephanie PhaFa Roy, on display from Museum of Impact's collection.

3:55 p.m. — The Cipher

A collaboration by multiple artists, performers, slam poetry, SlamBoo artists.

Additional games and art-making activities will be available throughout the day.

The Upstanders Festival is presented in conjunction with the special exhibition *Constructing Identity: Petrucci Family Foundation Collection of African American Art*, on view through June 18. This exhibition features artists that embody the brave and brilliant spirit of being an Upstander, including artists like **Edward Bannister**, whose decision to become an artist nearly 150 years ago was an act of resistance and strength against racial discrimination; **Elizabeth Catlett**, who protested, picketed, and was arrested in her quest to win justice for African-American and Mexican workers; **Margaret Burroughs**, a prominent community organizer and social activist in Chicago; **Faith Ringgold**, who in the 1970s organized protests against the major art museums in New York for excluding works by black artists and women artists; **Reginald Gammon**, who formed the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition in 1968, a highly political group of artists that also actively protested the exclusion of black artists and curators for museums; **Norman Lewis**, who taught for Harlem Youth in Action, an anti-poverty program designed to retain youth in school and many others whose resilience, strength, and activism helped bring people together and create community change.

Special thanks to the Museum of Impact, Don't Shoot Portland, Pacific Northwest College of Art, Marylhurst University, and all our community partner and volunteers for making this festival possible.

#### Accessibility

The Portland Art Museum is pleased to offer accommodations to ensure that our programs are accessible and inclusive. All spaces for this program are accessible by wheelchair. Assistive listening devices are also available for lectures. All restrooms have accessible stalls but no power doors. There are single-stall all-gender bathrooms available. Please ask staff for directions.

We will do our best to accommodate your needs when you arrive, however, we need 2-3 weeks advance notice for some specific requests. Please email requests to [access@pam.org](mailto:access@pam.org), or call 503-226-2811.

#### PORTLAND ART MUSEUM

1219 SW Park Avenue  
Portland, OR 97205

General info: 503-226-2811  
Memberships: 503-276-4249

Press Office

More contact information

#### MUSEUM HOURS

|     |                  |
|-----|------------------|
| Mon | Closed           |
| Tue | 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. |
| Wed | 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. |
| Thu | 10 a.m. – 6 p.m. |
| Fri | 10 a.m. – 6 p.m. |
| Sat | 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. |
| Sun | 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. |

#### MUSEUM ADMISSION

**Free** Members  
**\$20** Adults  
**\$17** Seniors 62+, College Students  
**Free** Children 17 and under  
 Special program fees may apply.

**Purchase tickets:**  
 Adult Group Tours – \$16 with reservation  
 K-12 School Group Tours – Free with reservation

The Portland Art Museum and its donors are committed to making the Museum a resource for all. Learn about our Admission Access Programs.

#### SUBSCRIBE TO OUR NEWSLETTER

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## Upstanders Festival Event Information