

“Pass the Mic”:

Perceptions of Museum-Community Collaborative Exhibit Development

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Abstract

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Museums and communities are increasingly coming together to share history, culture, and skills in the development of collaborative exhibits. While collaborative work has been well-explored in the museological field, it is rarely examined from the perspective of the community. Using semi-structured interviews with museum professionals and partnering community members, this study aims to understand and compare perceptions of collaborative exhibit development among both museum professionals and community partners. The results reveal that, overall, individuals who work together on collaborative exhibit development projects maintain a shared set of values. However, there are subtle differences present in the ways in which museum professionals and community partners perceive the benefits, challenges, and relationships of collaborative exhibit development. These findings indicate that such work is still in its infancy in museum practice. With a more complete and nuanced understanding of collaborative practice, museums may work towards a more equitable, responsible, and mutually beneficial relationships with community members.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

How do we pass the mic to those who normally aren't on the stage, who normally aren't at the table, and how do we make sure we're talking across those echo chambers? - Interviewee

In the last century, museums have made a significant shift from repositories of artifacts to educational and social institutions (AAM, 1984; AAM, 1992; Weil, 1999; AAM, 2002; Murphy, 2016). Today's professional organizations, such as the American Alliance of Museums in the US, Museums Association in the UK, and the International Council of Museums, acknowledge the ethical necessity for museums to work in “close collaboration with the communities from which their collections originate as well as those they serve” (ICOM, 2017). Many have taken this further still, acknowledging that these new museum identities come with a new social responsibility (Sandell, 1998; Weil, 1999; AAM, 2002; Crooke, 2007; Schultz, 2011; Murphy, 2016). The new museum model is described by Stephen Weil as “a transformed and redirected institution that can, through its public service orientation, use its very special competencies in dealing with objects to contribute positively to the quality of individual human lives and to enhance the wellbeing of human communities” (Weil, 1999, p. 171). These changes have been brought about, in part, by communities, visitors, and emerging museum professionals who have continued to call for an acknowledgment and response to the colonial practices, both in the collection and interpretation of objects of cultural significance, which have defined museums for centuries.

In response, museums are introducing innovative programming and exhibits, new models of curatorial practice, and reshaping internal missions, structures, and staff. One method in particular, the practice of collaborative exhibit development, is being increasingly accepted as a

method which promotes the inclusion of “the voices of members of social groups who have traditionally been excluded, not only from the museum’s stories, but also from control of the storytelling process itself” (Spock, 2009, p. 9). This practice often prioritizes alternative forms of knowledge, lived experience, and communal memory (Peers and Brown, 2003; Crooke, 2007; Wei Tchen and Sevchenko, 2011; Lonetree, 2012; Golding and Modest, 2013; Murphy, 2016). At its core, collaborative exhibit development insists on “working *with* communities rather than believing they [museums] are producing a service *for* communities which is then delivered *to* them” (Black, 2012, p. 209). By listening to and learning from community members, museums can more accurately and ethically share the histories, stories, cultures, and issues which define and affect the individuals which they serve (Karp, 1992; Peers and Brown, 2003; Crooke, 2007; Simon, 2010; Adair, 2011; Lonetree, 2012; Golding and Modest, 2013).

On the surface, “scholars and communities recognize that the collaborative process is a welcome shift in power dynamics within museums” (Lonetree, 2012, p. 22). Examples of successful collaborative projects are plentiful, though most of these are told from the perspective of the power-holders, in this case, the museum professionals. Amy Lonetree cautions the museum community to avoid allowing “these narratives of collaboration to become too tidy or celebratory” as “doing so obscures the glaring power imbalances that remain and thereby reduces the real potential to dramatically shift museum policies and practices” (Lonetree, 2012, p. 22-24).

This study explores perceptions of the collaborative exhibit development relationship among museum professionals and community partners. Using interviews conducted with both museum professionals and partnering community members, I examine the ways in which both

parties understand the process and impacts of collaborative exhibit development as well as their role and power in affecting change as part of this process.

This research aims to provide space for community members to address and guide the current practice and future direction of collaborative exhibit development. It is my hope that this work will contribute to a more complete and nuanced understanding of collaboration between museums and the communities whose culture, stories, and histories they strive to represent. With this research at hand, museums may engage in a more responsible collaborative practice and, potentially, move towards a vision of the museum as a space which prioritizes community values and voices.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This study focuses on the relationships between museum professionals and community members in the process of collaborative exhibit development. Much has been written on the topic of collaboration in museum settings. To begin with, I discuss the various meanings and usages of the term “community” and examine the underlying concepts of “community collaboration”. Next, I touch on the reasons behind community collaboration, including the changing values of the museum field and the communities which they serve. Finally, I address the elements which define successful collaborative work and present some significant gaps within the literature which support the undertaking of this study.

What is Community?

The term “community” is as complex and varied as the individuals to which it is applied. The Dictionary of Human Geography defines “community” as a “group of people who share common culture, values and/or interests, based on social identity and/or territory, and who have some means of recognizing, and (inter)acting upon, these commonalities” (Johnston, 2009). The International Council of Museums (ICOM) suggests a similar definition of “community” as “a group of people living collectively or forming an association, sharing a number of things in common (language, religion, and customs)” (ICOM, 2010, p. 75). Critically, ICOM specifically states that the term “community” differs from that of “society” in that communities exist “without necessarily gathering around institutional structures” (p. 75).

Despite this clarification, many museums have applied the title “community” indiscriminately and without qualification, most often as the preferred term for “audience, public, and visitor”

(Crooke, 2007, p. 170 - 172). On the other side of this, museums also use the term “community” as a synonym in for a specific racial or ethnic group, perhaps because this term allows for multiple interpretations and carries a positive connotation. However, the institutionalizing of phrase homogenizes and strips communities of their dynamism and intersectionality. In *Museums and the Public Sphere*, Jennifer Barrett explains the delicate balance of “community”,

“It is essential that we move from a modernist concern with ‘public participation’ that envisages a homogenized ‘public’, but do not succumb to romantic notions of ‘community’. It is imperative that museum professionals avoid both romanticizing community as inherently ‘good’ and unified and resist the temptation to simply replace ‘society’ with the term ‘community’, because of the latter terms positive connotations, while all the time continuing to operate in the same way as in the past” (Barrett, 2011, p. 110).

By understanding and acknowledging the complex nature of communities as groups of individuals that may identify with multiple communities and a range of perspectives, we can better avoid some of the pitfalls which accompany collaborative community work, including stereotyping and tokenism (Peers and Brown, 2003).

This study, and collaborative community work in general, focuses heavily on the concept of the “source community” or the community from which the history, culture, stories, and artifacts derive. The term “source community” refers to both “groups in the past when artifacts were collected, as well as to their descendants today” (Peers and Brown, 2003, p. 2). In their insightful examination of museum and source community relationships, authors Laura Peers and Alison Brown explore the painful history of source community exclusion from cultural institutions. Over centuries of museum practice, there has been an overwhelmingly unequal distribution of power between museum and source communities. Objects of cultural and historical significance, believed to be in better hands in museums, were unethically and illegally removed from the

communities which created them. These objects and the stories and histories which define them were then framed through the lens of academic power with no consideration of the source communities (Peers and Brown, 2003). In other words, museum professionals have, and in many cases still do, control the narratives surrounding source communities.

Through the unflagging efforts of source community members and allies, the balance in power is slowly shifting. Peers and Brown call attention to these significant changes in museum practice over the past two decades,

“the nature of these relationships has shifted to become a much more two-way process, with information about historic artifacts now being returned to source communities, and with community members working with museums to record their perspectives on the continuing meanings of those artifacts” (Peers and Brown, 2003, p. 1).

Collaborative work directly with source community members may hasten this shift towards a more inclusive, balanced, and culturally accurate museum practice.

What is Community Collaboration?

Calls for a more democratic cultural institution have led many museums to incorporate collaborative efforts with source community members (Lynch, 2011; Hutchison, 2013; Iervolino, 2013). As Serena Iervolino addresses in her article on migrant community inclusion in Italian museums,

“Over the last two decades museums have sought to increase the diversity of their audiences and modify museum practices in order to become more democratic and inclusive institutions. In seeking to challenge the dominant view of museums as hegemonic institutions, museums have started looking beyond their walls and have attempted to involve different communities in their activities” (Iervolino, 2013, p. 113)

This work may take many forms, from simply consulting with community groups on the focus, veracity, and content of museum programming to the full-scale incorporation of community members as volunteers, staff, or board members. As Beverly Sheppard (2007) explains, “Collaboration exists on many levels. It can be a simple cooperative project between two or more institutions or it can become a deep and systemic partnership, fusing thinking, language, and formats, and ultimately creating something totally new” (p. 182).

In reviewing the literature, it is clear that “collaboration” is often applied, rather indiscriminately, to any and all partnerships with community members, regardless of whether these relationships truly allow for equal representation. The balance of power and authority plays a key role in collaboration and as such many researchers have attempted to capture and classify the ways in which power informs various levels of collaborative work. In her 1969 article, *Ladder of Citizen Participation*, Sherry Arnstein addresses some of the actions undertaken by institutions which masquerade as collaboration while really excluding citizens from active participation. Her work introduces a typology of citizen participation; “a ladder pattern with each rung corresponding to the extent of citizens' power in determining the plan and/or program” (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216).

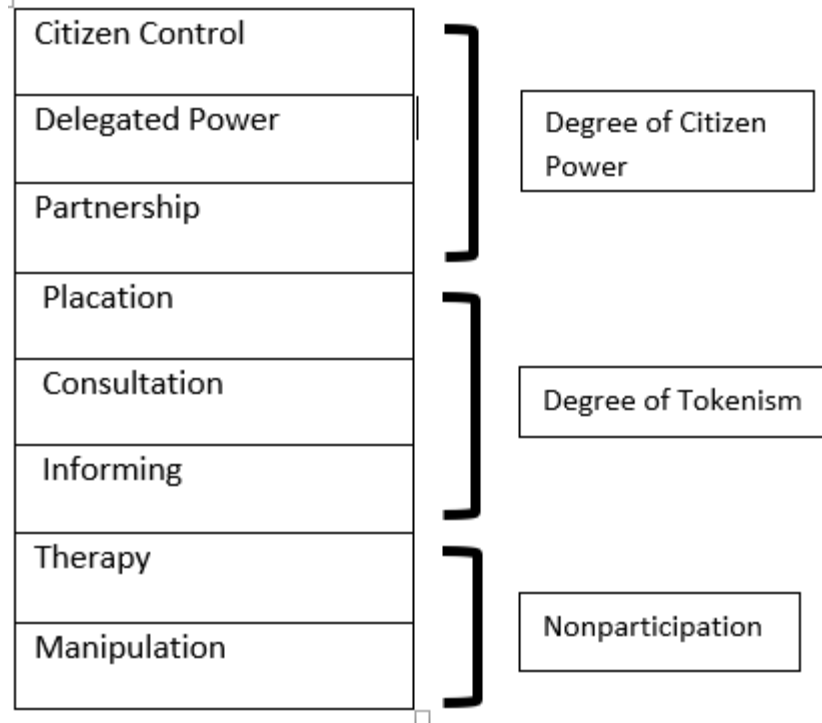


Figure 1: Ladder of Citizen Participation, Arnstein, 1969, p. 217

At the lowest level of the ladder are Manipulation and Therapy representing “non-participation” in which the “objective is not to enable people to participate in planning or conducting programs, but to enable power holders to ‘educate’ or ‘cure’ the participants” (Arnstein, 1969, p. 4). Next on the ladder, and of particular importance for museums, is the level of “tokenism” which includes the behavior of Informing, Consultation, and Placation. These actions, when used as the only form of engagement with community, create conditions in which citizens “lack the power to ensure that their views will be heeded by the powerful” (Arnstein, 1969, p. 4). Within museums, consultation has become a particularly common form of “collaboration” with community members. This practice rarely provides consultants with an effectual voice in the decision-making process of the institution. At the topmost rungs of the ladder, Arnstein addresses actions which support true citizen participation. These include Partnership, Delegated Power, and Citizen Control, in which the “have-not citizens obtain the majority of decision-making seats, or

full managerial power” (Arnstein, 1969, p. 4). Overall, Arnstein’s ladder sheds light on the significant power imbalances which frequently undermine collaborative work. As she explains, “participation without distribution of power is an empty and frustrating process for the powerless” (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216).

This distribution of decision-making power also plays a key role in McCarthy and Herring’s Partnership Continuum. In *Collaboration Guide for Museums Working with Community Youth-serving Organizations*, the authors posit a continuum to describe the numerous and sometimes mislabeled levels and characteristics of collaboration.

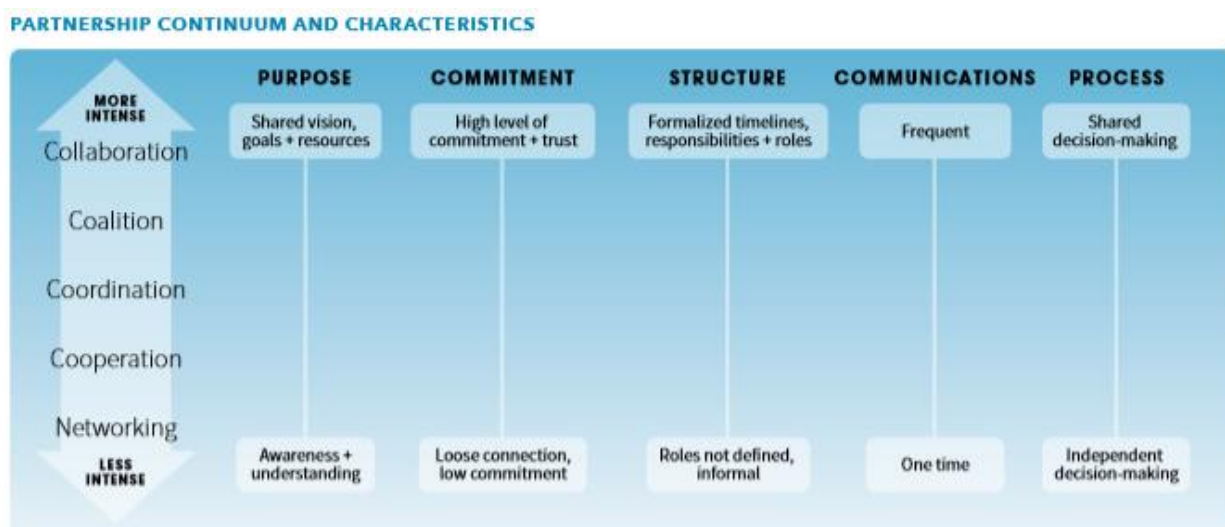


Figure 2: Partnership Continuum and Characteristics, McCarthy and Herring, 2015, p. 7

On the lowest end of this continuum is Networking, which roughly maps to Arnstein’s level of “tokenism”. In the process of networking, museums may make low commitment, one-time, connections with community members or groups while maintaining traditional roles of power and independent decision-making. The overall purpose of networking being to build awareness and understanding within the institution of the views and priorities of communities. At the upper

end of the continuum is “collaboration” which involves shared goals, defined roles, frequent communication, shared decision making, and a high level of commitment. Collaboration, as defined by McCarthy and Herring is evident when “organizations and individuals make a commitment to work together and contribute resources and expertise to achieve a common, long-term goal” (McCarthy and Herring, 2015, p. 4).

In museums, collaboration takes a number of different forms. Museums may partner with local communities on relevant educational and public programs. They may consult with community members to better understand and care for the objects in their collections. They might work with specific communities to develop marketing campaigns and fundraising initiatives. By far, the most common form of museum-community collaboration occurs within exhibit development. Similar to the concept of collaboration as a whole, “collaborative exhibits” often have hazy boundaries and frequently go by many different monikers. In general, the process of museum-community collaborative exhibit development involves working with individuals outside the museum who identify, at least in part, with a community. The variance occurs in the level to which the voices of community members are incorporated and prioritized in the process and final product of exhibit development.

In *Community Collaboration in Exhibitions: Towards a Dialogic Paradigm*, art historian and scholar Ruth Phillips offers “a spectrum of models...bracketed by two distinct types” of collaborative exhibit development: the community-based model and the multivocal model. In community-based exhibits, museum staff or individuals representing the museum take on new roles, primarily as facilitators who aid in the articulation of a community narrative. As she

describes it, museum staff put their “disciplinary and museological expertise at the service of community members so that their messages can be disseminated as clearly and effectively as possible” (Phillips, 2003, p. 163). Despite often being created as a group, this type of collaborative exhibit still privileges a single viewpoint, in most cases that of the community. In contrast, in the “multivocal” exhibit “museum staff and community consultants work to find a space of coexistence for multiple perspectives” (Phillips, 2003, p. 164). As Phillips explains,

“The difference between the community-based and the multivocal exhibition resides in the degree to which each seeks to explore its own dialogic tensions by giving voice to coexistent and multiple points of view and by revealing its own hybridity to visitors” (Phillips, 2003, p. 166).

More recently, Nina Simon’s popular book *The Participatory Museum* (2010) outlines four types of participatory exhibit projects: Contributory, Collaborative, Co-Creative, and Hosted. While Simon’s work primarily refers to exhibit design practices which incorporate general audience or visitor input, her descriptions of collaborative and co-creative projects can shed light on the types of exhibit development relationships which exist between museums and source communities as well. Simon refers to collaborative projects as “institutionally-driven partnerships in which staff members work with community partners to develop new programs, exhibitions, or offerings” (p. 231). According to Simon, collaborative projects may take two distinct forms: “consultative projects, in which institutions engage experts or community representatives to provide advice and guidance” or “co-development projects, in which staff members work together with participants to create new exhibitions and programs” (p. 235).

	Contributory	Collaborative	Co-Creative	Hosted
What kind of commitment does your	We’re committed to helping our	We’re committed to deep	We’re committed to supporting the	We’re committed to inviting

institution have to community engagement?	visitors and members feel like participants with the institution.	partnerships with some target communities.	needs of target communities whose goals align with the institutional mission.	community members to feel comfortable using the institution for their own purposes.
How much control do you want over the participatory process and product?	A lot - We want participants to follow our rules of engagement and give us what we request.	Staff will control the process but participants' actions will steer the direction and content of the final product.	Some, but participants' goals and preferred working styles are just as important as those of the staff.	Not much - as long as participants follow our rules, they can produce what they want.
How do you see the institutions relationship with participants during the process?	The institution requests content and the participants supply it, subject to institutional rules.	The institution sets the project concept and plan, and then staff members work closely with participants to make it happen.	The institution gives participants the tools to lead the project and then supports their activities and helps them move forward successfully.	The institution gives the participants rules and resources and then lets the participants do their own thing.
Who do you want to participants and what kind of commitment will you seek from participants?	We want to engage as many visitors as possible, engaging them briefly in the context of a museum or online visit.	We expect some people will opt in casually, but most will come with the explicit intention to participate.	We seek participants who are intentionally engaged and are dedicated to seeing the project all the way through.	We'd like to empower people who are ready to manage and implement their own project on their own.
How much staff time will you commit to managing the project and working with participants?	We can manage it lightly, the way we'd maintain an interactive exhibit. But we ideally want to set it up and let it	We will manage the process but we're going to set the rules of engagement based on our goals and capacity.	We will give as much time as it takes to make sure participants are able to accomplish their goals.	As little as possible - we want to set it up and let it run on its own.

	run.			
What kinds of skills do you want participants to gain from their activities during the project?	Creation of content, collection of data, or sharing of personal expression. Use of technological tools to support content creation and sharing.	Everything supported by contributory projects, plus the ability to analyze, curate, design, and deliver completed products.	Everything supported by collaborative projects, plus project conceptualization, goal-setting, and evaluation skills.	None that the institution will specifically impart, except perhaps around program promotion and audience engagement.
What goals do you have for how non-participating visitors will perceive the project?	This project will help visitors see themselves as potential participants and see the institution as interested in their active involvement.	This project will help visitors see the institution as a place dedicated to supporting and connecting with community.	This project will help visitors to see the institution as a community-driven place. It will also bring in new audiences connected to participants.	This project will attract new audiences who might not see the institution as a comfortable or appealing place for them.

Figure 3: Four Models of Community Engagement, Simon, 2010, p. 191

Viewed through the lens of community exhibits, consultative projects generally involve the use of community advisory boards. These board, composed of community members and cultural experts, provide advice, feedback, and direction throughout the exhibit production.

Unfortunately, the incorporation of advisory boards rarely provides community participants with real power to affect change. Alternatively, co-development projects invite community input at multiple levels of the exhibit development process. Taking this a step further, Simon introduces the concept of co-creative projects, which “originate in partnership with participants rather than based solely on institutional goals” (p. 263). These projects “progress similarly to collaborative projects, but they confer more power to participants” (p. 264).

Co-creative projects address a consistent theme throughout the literature of museum-community exhibit collaboration, that of power, authority, and control. In *How to Decorate a House*, Michael Ames (2003) describes the traditional exhibit development process as one that is governed by “curatorial prerogative” in which “final decision, authority, or prerogative for the exhibition...lies with the curatorial team” and “is led or authorized by a content specialist or knowledge expert”, generally the curator (p. 172). Co-creative exhibits, on the other hand, aim to democratize this process, allowing space for the voices of alternative types of experts, such as those with cultural or lived experience. This work often involves dramatic shifts in institutional practices. As Peers and Brown explain,

“At the core of these new perspectives is a commitment to an evolving relationship between a museum and a source community in which both parties are held to be equal and which involves the sharing of skills, knowledge, and power to produce something of value to both parties. This is very different from the traditional curatorial approach in which museum staff, on the basis of professional knowledge and authority, control exhibition content, storage facilities, and other museological functions” (Peers and Brown, 2003, p. 2).

A few key concepts help to define this evolving relationship: shared authority, contact zones, and engagement zones.

Introduced by Michael Frisch in 1990, the term “shared authority” refers to the “redefinition and redistribution of intellectual authority, so that it might be shared more broadly in historical research and communication rather than continuing to serve as an instrument of power and hierarchy” (Frisch, 1990, p. xx). The practice promotes a balance between scholarly authority and public or cultural authority. Frisch explains,

“The hegemony of scholarly authority indeed must be challenged and often qualified, but not by rejecting the insights of scholarship by definition, if only because such an approach vastly underestimates the power of new ideas to challenges deeply entrenched assumptions so often internalized in conventional, popularly grounded categories.

Similarly, the power of populist self-empowerment through public history can be as easily and romantically exaggerated; there is something offensively patronizing in the notion that ordinary people and communities have little capacity for communicating with and incorporating approaches to their history originating outside their own immediate experience and knowledge” (Frisch, 1990, p. xxi).

Beyond simply creating opportunities for source community participation, a responsibility to acknowledge the authority of source community partners is essential to the success of collaborative exhibit relationships. As Beverly Sheppard points out, “Nowhere is the imperative to share authority more critical than in the potential partnerships that exist between museums and their communities” (Sheppard, 2007, p. 186).

Allowing space for the distribution of authority creates a new type of relationship between museums and community members. “Contact Zones”, a term introduced by Mary Louise Pratt and later adapted to museums by James Clifford, represents the “space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (Pratt, 1992, p. 6-7). In *Museums as Contact Zones*, Clifford recounts a number of experiences which illustrate the power and practicalities of museums serving as contact zones. Clifford explains, “When museums are seen as contact zones, their organizing structure as a *collection* becomes an ongoing historical, political, moral *relationship* - a power-charged set of exchanges, of push and pull” (Clifford, 1997, p. 192). In the view of contact zones, museums and the practices which define them including the collecting of objects and the presentation of exhibits, create spaces in which truth, meaning, and power are continuously negotiated through complex relationships.

Taking the concept of contact zones a step further, Bryony Onicul introduces the concept of the “Engagement Zone”. The term is designed to place emphasis on the authority of community members. As she explains,

“Engagement zones emphasize the agency of participants and the potential for power fluctuations despite the inequalities in power relations. They enable consideration and exploration of internal community engagement, culture, and heritage prior to and beyond the experience of colonialism and allow for indigenization of the process” (Onicul, 2013, p. 83)

Engagement zone work often requires participants to step outside of their traditional roles and come to terms with uncomfortable fluctuations in power and authority. Within engagement zones,

“Participants continually negotiate the rules of exchange, challenging, and debating power and authority. Cultural concepts such as expertise, customary boundaries, and hierarchies come into question and negotiation and can change individual’ roles and status within the zone. Boundaries between insider and outsider blur, and temporary boundary crossings are enabled” (Onicul, 2013, p. 83)

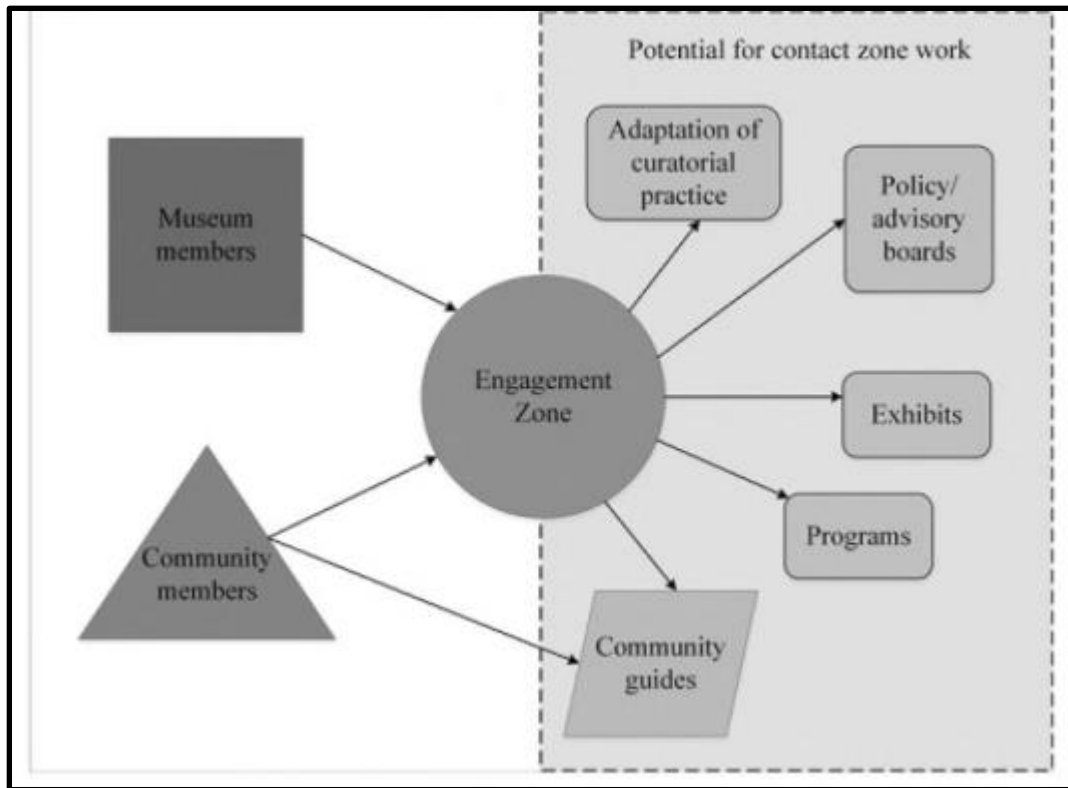


Figure 4: Engagement Zone, Onicul, 2013, p. 83

As such, the products of museum and community collaborations (exhibits, programs, policies, repatriations), are seen as “tangible manifestation of power negotiations between participants in engagement zones” (Onciul, 2013, p. 79). What shared authority, contact zones, and engagement zones hold in common is the negotiation or, at times, the lack of negotiation of authority in the process of collaborative work.

Why collaborate?

Over the years, many museums have been moving towards a policy of addressing issues of social inequities. The last two decades in particular, “have seen concerns for equality, diversity, social justice, and human rights move from the margins of museum thinking and practice, to the core” (Nightingale and Sandell, 2012, p. 1). As Richard Sandell’s examination of this practice explains, “museums have become increasingly confident in proclaiming their value as agents of social change and, in particular, articulating their capacity to promote cross-cultural understanding, to tackle prejudice and intolerance, and to foster respect for indifference” (Sandell, 2007, p. 2).

Today, museums are continuing to grapple with and work towards diversity and inclusion, both within the museum structure itself and as presented through its collections, content, and priorities. In recent years, many institutions and professional organizations have adopted diversity and inclusion policies. AAM, for example, considers “diversity and inclusion a driver of institutional excellence” and seeks out “diversity of participation, thought and action” (AAM, 2014).

These changes have been driven by more than a simple change of heart among museum professionals. As Sandell explains,

“Several factors have contributed to the reorientation of role and purpose and the widespread conception of museums as agencies with the potential to promote cross-cultural understanding and respect. These include the growing global influence of human rights discourses; the changing demographic composition of many Western societies; the ‘new social movements’ of the last 50 years that have led to a proliferation of previously marginalized voices; heightening international interest in multiculturalism, cultural diversity, and an approach to the politics of difference which rejects assimilationist policies in favor of those which affirm cultural and ethnic differences; and the introduction of increased demands for accountability, in much of the Western industrialized world, that have increasingly required publicly funded institutions to demonstrate their value to society” (Sandell, 2007, p. 6).

While it is outside the scope of this study to explore all of the factors which have contributed to a more pronounced museum effort to address inequity, there are a few areas which are particularly relevant to the practice of source community collaborations.

The world has changed dramatically throughout the 20th and early 21st century. As AAM’s Museums and Community Taskforce (M & C) states,

“Our nation, and indeed much of the world, has changed a great deal in the past 50 years. Previously silenced voices insist upon being heard. Traditional sources of authority in our communities have lost much of their clout—both because citizens insist on participating in decisions that affect their lives and because of economic, political, and corporate change” (M & C and AAM, 2002, p. 3).

New technologies and improved access to public platforms have provided a new means of participatory and democratic expression and, as a result, have hastened calls for accountability (Adair, 2011). As cultural institutions with the power to frame public knowledge surrounding a community or population, museums are being called on to provide space for more diverse and culturally-authentic narratives.

The efforts of individual activists, as well as organizations and groups calling for decolonized cultural spaces, have had an immeasurable impact on museum practice (Lonetree, 2012, p. 18).

In *Decolonizing Museums*, Amy Lonetree asserts “Museums have played a major role in dispossessing and misrepresenting Native Americans, and this has been a critical part of the identity of Euro-American museums” (Lonetree, 2012, p. 9). The work of decolonizing museums aims to address and repair the damage inflicted by centuries of repression. According to Lonetree, museums serve as sites for decolonization by,

“honoring Indigenous knowledge and worldviews, challenging the stereotypical representations of Native people produced in the past, serving as sites of ‘knowledge making and remembering’ for their own communities and the general public, and discussing the hard truths of colonization in exhibitions in an effort to promote healing and understanding” (Lonetree, 2012, p. 25).

When museums successfully engage in the work of decolonization, they “become places for building momentum for healing, for community, and for restoring dignity and respect” (Lonetree, 2012, p. 171). They “cease to function as places of oppression or for perpetuating colonizer-serving images and models” and become “places for promoting community healing and empowerment” (Lonetree, 2012, p. 171).

Decolonization has affected the conceptualization, development, and presentation of museum exhibits in dramatic ways. One of the most substantial changes has been the inclusion of Native voices in the process of collaborative exhibit development. It is the hope that these collaborations, along with many others, will “further access and inclusion with regards to diversifying audiences of the ‘mainstream’ museum, and at the same time...interrogate the museum’s narrative which supports and perpetuates its position of authority” (Keith, 2012, p. 46). Many museums which adopt collaborative work seek to “address issues of equity through

questioning the partiality of the museum's traditional narrative and expanding this through the inclusion of external, different, and potentially oppositional, voices" (Keith, 2012, p. 46).

The adoption of these values has certainly not been seamless (Sandell, 2007; Nightingale and Sandell, 2012). Many in the museum world feel that the new inclusive policies force institutions to take a political stance. For some, stepping out of the neutral zone (a position which museums have never truly held) undermines the objective authority of the institution and, as a result, may cause visitors to lose trust in the museum (Lavine, 1992). That said, the practice is on the rise. As Nightingale and Sandell explain, "attempts to construct new narratives that reflect demographic, social and cultural diversity, and represent a plurality of lived experience, histories, and identities - once the preserve of a few pioneering institutions - are increasingly widespread" (Nightingale and Sandell, 2012, p. 1).

How is Collaborative Exhibit Development practiced?

The process of community collaboration requires museums to operate differently and "raises questions about the traditions of institutional authority, curatorial prerogatives, and the suitability of customary museum procedures" (Ames, 2003, p. 173). As Sheppard explains, community-based collaboration "requires a new mind-set, one willing to let go of authority in exchange for open listening" (Sheppard, 2007, p. 186). Despite the challenges, many museums are working to incorporate source community input within the institutional practice either on a one-time or recurring basis (School for Advanced Research, 2009). As a result, numerous case studies have been published addressing the challenges and subsequent successes of individual collaborative projects. This body of literature suggests a number of guiding principles for museums to effectively engage community members in the process of collaborative exhibit development. The

sections below compile some of the most prevalent best practices addressed throughout this literature.

Organizational Buy-in

Success in collaborative exhibit development requires commitment from all levels of the organization, particularly from key decision-makers within the institution. In order to fully collaborate with community, “there must be a clear and explicit commitment by the governing body and senior management...it requires transformation of the museum at its core, in all its operation, and in its whole attitude to those audiences” (Black, 2012, p. 206-207). Without this, resources and relationships may be strained and, as a result, tensions may rise within and among partnering organizations. A clear commitment from those in leadership positions ensures that partnerships are built on a solid foundation and have room to grow as needs and resource change.

Intentionality

A clear understanding of the motivations behind collaborative partnerships is also essential. As mentioned above, the museum world often uses the term “community” as a substitute for “audience” or “public” (Crooke, 2007; Barrett, 2011). Adopting collaborative practices purely as a way of attracting underrepresented audiences is self-serving and rarely leads to the desired effect. Ellen Hirzy points out in the introduction to *Mastering Civic Engagement*, “When audience development is the focal point and “community” is a code word for race, class, ethnicity, education level, or other demographic characteristics, a museums effort can seem token and patronizing” (Hirzy, 2002, p. 16). These tokenistic efforts may, in fact, cause further damage to museum and source community relationships. As John Kuo Wei Tchen of the Museum of Chinese in America explains, “Short sighted tokenism often shuts the door more

tightly against future collaboration with traditionally underserved communities” (Wei Tchen, 1992, p. 290).

True Participation

In an effort to mitigate the anxiety felt by disagreement, museums often revert to methods of partnership which create the appearance of collaboration but in actuality allow the museum to maintain the bulk of control. These types of arrangements generally place community members as consultants rather than active participants.

“In the initial stages of realizing that their relationships with and representations of source communities were no longer adequate, museums began to consult with members of those communities, and are still doing so. However, consultation is often structured to provide outside support for the maintenance of institutional practices, and source community members are wary of contributing to museum-led consultation exercises which do not lead to change within museums or benefits to their people” (Peers and Brown, 2003, p. 2).

Some museums which engage in consultative collaboration may view community members as sources of information rather than active partners. As Conaty and Carter (2005) touch on in their discussion of community partnerships at the Glenbow Museum, when museums “invite a community to join in the exhibit-development process, they are most often asked to participate as advisors, as their special knowledge contributes to the veracity of the content. Their individual stories add richness and meaning to the subject and bring connectedness to the visitor. But, in the end, the exhibit’s content and the development process are defined by the museum as representative of society’s majority community” (p. 46).

Consultation certainly has its place in collaborative practice. However, it is imperative that consultation provides participants with real decision-making power. As Peers and Brown explain, consultation within the framework of collaboration “goes beyond simply asking for

knowledge and advice, but not otherwise altering the traditional relations of power between museums and source communities. It asks for partnership rather than superficial involvement” (Peers and Brown, 2003, p. 2). If consultation is the only viable method, it is essential that the roles of each participant are clearly defined and agreed upon at the outset. In addition, the priorities and goals of the project as determined by both the museum and the consulting partners should be in alignment.

Changing Relationships

Making space for true participation requires extensive changes to the ways that museum professional view, interact, and respond to communities. In other words, significant shifts in the relationship between museums and their communities are necessary.

First, as the work of decolonization points out, museums must acknowledge the damage inflicted by their policies, procedures, and practices. Trust cannot be built on an uneven foundation. Peers and Brown point out, “One of the effects of working with source community members is realising the political nature of museums, their histories, and their functions, as well as the need to acknowledge and address these dynamics when creating new relationships” (Peers and Brown, 2003, p. 9). When museums acknowledge the power and privilege which they have traditionally held they can begin to examine the ways in which they might rectify the damage and create more equitable relationships for the future.

While acknowledging past injustice is a critical component of decolonizing collaborative work, it is only the first step. Exclusion is not only a historic issue but an ongoing problem that requires constant reflection and renegotiation. In the work of collaboration, museum staff should be

prepared to examine the ways in which their current actions support the continued disenfranchisement of the communities they aim to support. As such, they should be prepared for opposition.

“Museums engaged in new collaborations with communities also must be realistic about the resistance they may experience. The disconnect between museums and many of the new audiences they wish to reach is vast. Whole segments of American society have found no records of their existence in museums or only records that have been misrepresented or fragmented. Museums must earnestly work to build trust and invite honest dialogue (Sheppard, 2007, 189).

Sheppard touches on another critical component of collaborative work. Namely, allowing space for difference and dialogue. As educational institutions, museums have traditionally held authority over the transmission of knowledge, particularly as it relates to history and culture. As the power holders, museums have rarely been asked to engage in dialogue with source communities or the public at large. Collaborative work, especially the work of shared authority and decolonization, asks that museums open the dialogue to include the voices and viewpoints of the community even when those voices may be contradictory to the museum’s own concept of truth. This process often brings deep-seated concerns to the surface. As Black explains, “Sharing authority involves confronting a primary fear of all professionals, not just museum curators, of their expertise not being recognised and of losing control” (Black, 2012, p. 219).

Unfortunately, there is no easy fix for this. Effectively engaging in collaborative exhibit development with any community, particularly source communities, requires humility and respect especially in situations when the beliefs of the community differ from those of the institution (Lonetree, 2012).

“Handing over the interpretive process to others, whose interpretation is usually personal or rooted in tradition, requires a willingness to accept that there are other criteria than

scholarly research for knowing and understanding. If museums are to be effective collaborators with our diverse audiences, then we must develop strategies that respect the truth of another's viewpoint" (Sheppard, 2007, 187).

This work also calls for a rethinking of the role of the museum professional. Much of the literature suggests that the true value of the curator or exhibit developer in the collaborative process lies in their capabilities to facilitate and translate community knowledge into the exhibit format (Peers & Brown, 2003; Conaty & Carter, 2005; Iervolino, 2008; Adair, 2012; Yerkovich, 2016). As Conaty and Carter explain, "The community members were identified as content providers, building on traditional knowledge and rights to share that knowledge, and Glenbow staff agreed, as experts in exhibit development, to facilitate the translation of this knowledge into an exhibit" (Conaty and Carter, 2005, p. 48).

Finally, and perhaps most critically, museum professionals must overcome the "us vs. them" mentality. This dichotomy hinders the process of dialogue and preserves the traditional roles of power:

"Despite our openness and willingness to attempt new dialogues, I and the gallery staff generally thought of ourselves as the 'we' of 'art museum professionals' and of any individuals outside that museum culture as the 'they' of the 'community'. 'We' were inviting these people to our table of power, and 'they' would, we hoped, 'assist' us in producing an important exhibition" (Gonzalez and Tonelli, 1992, p. 273)

Adopting a practice of dialogue may help to repair this relationship. As Hutchison's examination of collaborative, shared authority, relationships points out, "Shared authority as exchange or dialogue between distinct expertises takes us right away from a dualistic either-or relationship between 'community' and 'scholarship'. But it also demands the presence of both as effective interacting players" (Hutchison, 2013, p. 145)

Reframing Success

The literature also makes clear that the fundamental process of exhibit development and the mentality of this process may need to be adjusted to in order for successful collaborations to develop. In traditional exhibit practice, the final product, i.e. the exhibit, is the eventual goal with the process of creating the exhibit viewed as the means to this end. In collaborative exhibit development, the process of the collaboration is viewed as an end in itself and is considered as, if not more, important than the final product. In other words,

“The emphasis on process in collaborative projects leads, then, to the redefinition of the scope of an exhibit, which is increasingly understood not just as a physical arrangement of objects and interpretive materials in a gallery, but as an interrelated set of activities that take place before, during, and after the show” (Phillips, 2003, p. 161).

Sustainability and Continuity

Many case studies cited continuity as an area of importance though one which is often overlooked (Peers & Brown, 2003; Keith, 2012). One successful collaborative exhibit is not going to repair centuries of exclusion and inclusion purely on the basis of an individual's cultural heritage feeds into a tokenistic practice that maintains the status quo (Peers & Brown, 2003; Lonetree, 2012; Hutchison, 2013). As mentioned, collaborative work calls for organization-wide change and a rethinking of the policies, procedures, and practices which led to exclusion in the first place.

“It is critical that all museums realize that serving their communities does not mean just a seasonal program or an annual exhibition in the ‘community gallery’. It is an ongoing activity that requires clear policy and sufficient resources. It is also a reflection of that institution’s mission and its vision of its role as a public educational institution” (Duitz, 1992, p. 242).

As with any relationship, it is essential to maintain a connection based on mutual respect rather than need. In other words, the collaborative relationship between museums and community

members must be tended to even when there isn't an exhibit or program in the works. Ideally, these collaborative relationships have their roots in other partnerships which aren't dependent on exhibits. For example, lending support to artists from the community by selling artwork in the museum gift shop, inviting community members to serve on the museum board, or attending events of significance to partnering communities. Building sustained, multi-dimensional relationships involves an acknowledgment and respect for the intersectionality of identity (Keith, 2012). Individual identity is complex and derives from our personal, professional, religious, ethnic, linguistic, and geographic connections, among others. Membership in a specific community does not preclude an individual from identifying with many other types of communities. For example, an individual may identify culturally as a tribal member, professionally as a firefighter and an artist, personally as a cisgender male, geographically as a Northwesterner, etc. In other words, just because an individual identifies with a particular source community does not mean that they won't provide valuable input on projects which don't explicitly involve that community.

Fair Compensation

Finally, an element which is infrequently discussed in the literature but which, nonetheless needs to be addressed, is the adoption of fair compensation for the time and expertise of community members. It is common practice in museums to pay academic content experts for their contributions (Keith, 2012). Yet, community members are rarely compensated for their work. As Keith explains, "Museums expect to pay for the expertise of academics and scholars who contribute to their catalog and exhibition content yet the same expectation is not held for community-heritage expertise" (p. 55-56). This practice inherently undervalues community authority and necessitates that community collaborators are in a position to undertake the work

for free. Unpaid arrangements also undermine the sustainability of such projects. Community members who feel unduly burdened by the work of collaboration may hesitate to engage in further collaboration. In order to maintain healthy, equitably beneficial collaborative relationships, it is important that community participants receive some compensation for their work. This compensation may or may not be monetary, depending on the preferences of the partnering community.

Reflexive and Critical Museological Practice

These shifts in practice being asked of the museum community all boil down to a particularly important element of community collaboration, the employment of reflexive and critical museology. Reflexive museology asks individuals and institutions to understand more fully the legacy of museum practice, the remnants of such practices, and the actions, language, and mentalities which help to reinforce these exclusionary traditions today. Critical museology takes this examination even further. Beyond simply questioning museum practice, critical museology requires a discriminating review with the intention to improve practice. In *Dynamics of Community Museums and Their Communities* the authors explain,

“Critical museum theory or critical museology...challenged institutions to make changes to museum practice. It consists in ongoing critical dialogue that encourages a constant self reflective attitude between museums and their stakeholders. Critical museum theory also provides encouragement to institutions to adopt more experimental practices, value openness and transparency and support community collaboration and engagement” (Hernandez, Clemmer-Smith, Calafell, & Gomez, 2017, p. 36).

Critically examining the history, motives, culture, and process of traditional exhibition development allows museum practitioners to understand the full complexity of the work being undertaken and provides a framework for new, more equitable relationships to grow.

Summary

There have been a plethora of case studies published on individual collaborations between museums and community members. However, these resources primarily highlight the successes of collaborative work and few examine the collaborative relationship beyond a one-time partnership or across multiple sites.

The move towards a community-based practice has been far from easy. In the process, museum professionals have been forced to confront the repressive history of the museum itself as well as the assumptions and privilege associated with traditional museum practice (Jones, 1992; Weil, 1999; AAM, 2002; Peers and Brown, 2003; Sheppard, 2007; Barrett, 2011; Black, 2012; Lonetree, 2012). For centuries, the collection, display, and interpretation of cultural heritage have been regulated by the dominant global powers, typically men of European descent (Peers and Brown, 2003; Lonetree, 2012; Golding and Modest, 2013). Even within the literature, the experience of collaboration has yet to be fully explored from the perspective of the community members involved, effectively placing control of the narrative surrounding collaborative practices in the hands of museum professionals. This ongoing legacy and the subsequent rift it has created between museums and the communities which they serve is not easy to overcome.

In order to reconcile the misrepresentation, manipulation, and exclusion of the past and establish a new trust between museums and source communities, museum staff must acknowledge their role in the disenfranchisement of communities, reevaluate their motives, methods, and definitions of success for collaboration, redefine the role of the museum and museum professional in the exhibit development process, and renegotiate their relationships with community (Karp, 1992; Peers and Brown, 2003; Adair, 2011; Lonetree, 2012; Black, 2012). Critically, the decolonization and democratization of collaborative exhibit development requires

the museum professional to step aside as the sole authority in the creation of museum content.

This research aims to provide a balanced, community-inclusive account of the ways in which these significant changes have been perceived.

Chapter 3: Methods

The purpose of this research study was to explore perceptions of the collaborative exhibit development relationship among museum professionals and community partners.

The exploration is guided by the following research questions:

- **Research Question 1:** How do museum professionals and community partners perceive collaborative exhibit development?
- **Research Question 2:** What similarities and differences exist in the ways in which museum professionals and community partners perceive collaborative exhibit development?

Sampling Method and Process

For the purposes of this study, it was necessary to work with institutions which had previous experience in collaborative exhibit development. Potential research sites were selected based on the following criteria:

1. Documented institutional philosophy of collaborative community-based exhibit development, indicated by meeting two or more of the following criteria:
 1. A defined collaborative process displayed on the institution's web page or published materials.
 2. A history of collaborative exhibit practices as evident in the literature related to the institution.
 3. Two or more collaborative community-based exhibits within the last 3 years.
 4. Collaborative community exhibits which are not restricted to designated "community galleries".

Research sites were discovered through a review of the literature as well as through suggestions made by museum professionals currently or previously engaging in collaborative exhibit development.

A review of the literature surrounding collaborative exhibit development suggests that the successes and failures of the collaborative exhibit development process are primarily discussed

through the voice of the museum professional. In the hopes of providing a balanced, equitable, and comprehensive view of the exhibit development relationship this study includes the perspectives of both museum professionals and partnering community members.

Building trust and transparency was essential for this research. To begin the process, an introductory email was sent to the director, curator, or community engagement specialist at each institution. An informal phone conversation was then conducted with a representative from each institution interested in participating in the research. This process aimed to clearly communicate the intentions, goals, responsibilities, and potential challenges of the proposed research. Community partners were recommended by those museum professionals agreeing to participate in the study. An additional phone conversation was held with each selected community representative to clarify the study, answer any questions, and confirm my commitment to open and honest communication.

A total of thirteen interviews were conducted, including six interviews with museum professionals and seven interviews with community partners (Figure 5).

Institution	Collaborative Exhibit	Museum Professional Interviews	Community Partner Interviews
Abbe Museum (Bar Harbor, ME)	<i>People of the First Light</i>	X	X X
Anacostia Community Museum (Washington, DC)	<i>How the Civil War Changed Washington</i>	X	X
Boston Children’s	<i>Native Voices</i>	X	X

Museum (Boston, MA)			
Heard Museum (Phoenix, AZ)	<i>Beautiful Games: American Indian Sport and Art</i>	X	X
Levine Museum of the New South (Charlotte, NC)	<i>K(no)w Justice, K(no)w Peace</i>	X	X
Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience (Seattle, WA)	----	X	X

Figure 5: Research Study Interview Sites and Participants

Theoretical Framework

This research was informed by Indigenous research methodologies, particularly the work of Shawn Wilson. In *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, Wilson calls for an examination of the Indigenous research paradigm with the goal of developing and spreading an “understanding of, and provision for the needs of Indigenous people” (Wilson, 2008, p. 20). Through this examination, Wilson highlights the benefits and necessity of “maintaining, transmitting and clarifying an Indigenous way of doing and being in the research process” (Wilson, 2008, p. 19). While Wilson’s work primarily addresses research conducted with Indigenous communities, his conclusions hold value for all research, especially research conducted with individuals who identify with disenfranchised communities.

Wilson identifies two underlying characteristics of Indigenous research: Relationality and Relational Accountability. The concept of relationality addresses not only the importance of understanding and building relationships with people, a key component of Indigenous research,

but also relationships between Indigenous people and the land, cosmos, and ideas (Wilson, 2008, p. 80-96). Relationality stresses the interconnectedness and significance of these relationships in the process of Indigenous research and an acknowledgment that “knowledge cannot be owned or discovered but is merely a set of relationships that may be given a visible form” (Wilson, 2008, p. 127). Relational accountability necessitates a methodology “based in community context (be relational)” and which demonstrates “respect, reciprocity, and responsibility (be accountable as it is put into action)” (Wilson, 2008, p. 99). In other words, relational accountability calls on researchers to conduct research in a way that honors and harmonizes with the community itself. Remaining accountable includes the acknowledgment of researcher bias and the insider or outsider status of the researcher as well as overcoming the “logical” teachings of dominant research systems in favor of the relational model. Most importantly, Indigenous research methodology calls for a continuous evaluation of the motives and methods undertaken to ensure that each step is conducted for the benefit of the community.

Ethical Guidelines

In addition to the work of Shawn Wilson, this research is also heavily influenced by Amy Lonetree’s *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*. These influential works make abundantly clear the power I hold as a researcher and member of the museum community, particularly in terms of who I interviewed, how I interviewed, and how I analyzed the resultant data. Though this work is intended to support the practice of collaborative exhibit development and provide community members with a voice in how this work is perceived, I essentially control the outcome. As such, it was important to

intentionally establish a set of ethical principles to guide this research and ensure the utmost integrity of the work.

Motivations, Beliefs, and Reflection

1. I will strive to be an ally to community members, particularly those who have been excluded from the telling of their own stories.
2. I actively acknowledge that the past and current actions and practices of museums and museum professionals, myself included, have silenced and disenfranchised individuals and communities. I believe that collaborative exhibit development, when undertaken with a view to understand and uplift community, has the power to address these injustices and build more equitable relationships for the future.
3. I will engage in continuous reflection of my own thoughts and actions to ensure that community and community members are treated with respect and honor.

Relationships, Trust, and Transparency

1. Though the duration of this project makes it difficult to establish deep, meaningful relationships, I will do my utmost to build trust between myself and research participants through respect and honesty.
2. I will treat and view the individuals partaking in this research as active participants, not as subjects or data sets to be used to support my conclusions.
3. I will preserve the confidentiality of all participants through the use of general terms such as “Museum”, “Museum Professional”, and “Community Member”. A copy of the final version of this research will be shared with each participant.
4. I will critically examine my own role as gatekeeper in sharing the experiences and perceptions of community members and museum professionals in this study. While I cannot include every detail of the completed interviews, I will use the participants own words and means of expression whenever possible.

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

As much as possible, the interviews focused on a particular exhibit currently or recently on display at the museum. This was intended to provide participants with a personally relevant entry-point to discussing the process and nuances of collaborative exhibit development and to encourage participants to share information relating to specific, concrete, collaborative relationships existing in the recent past. Some of the questions asked of participants included: “Do you feel your voice or authority was respected in the exhibit development process?” and “In

your opinion, what are the benefits of collaborative exhibit development? What are the biggest challenges?” (See Appendix B). All participation was voluntary and both verbal and written consent was collected from each participant prior to the interview (See Appendix A).

Analysis Protocol

Once conducted, the interviews were minimally transcribed and compared to identify underlying themes, commonalities, and differences using emergent coding. From this process, a coding rubric was developed (Appendix C). Each interview was then coded according to the themes listed in the coding rubric. A final read through was done to analyze the data for more nuanced differences in the ways in which participants perceived or described certain elements or themes.

Chapter 4: Results

This study addresses the following questions:

- How do museum professionals and community partners perceive collaborative exhibit development?
- What similarities and differences exist in the ways in which museum professionals and community partners perceive collaborative exhibit development?

Across the interviews, the answers to the two research questions fell into 5 topical areas:

- **Identity:** Addresses what or who the participant felt they were representing during the collaborative exhibit development process.
- **Roles:** Addresses the ways in which participants perceive their role, responsibilities, and contribution to the collaborative exhibit development process. This category is further broken down into “Museum Role” and “Community Role”.
- **Benefits:** Addresses participant perceptions of the benefits or reasons for undertaking collaborative exhibit development.
- **Challenges:** Addresses perceived challenges of the collaborative exhibit development process.
- **Relationships:** Addresses participant suggestions for healthy working relationships in the process of collaborative exhibit development.

The similarities and the differences in the ways in which museum professionals and community members perceive each of these categories are presented below along with potential implications of these results. The following chapter summarizes the findings and presents a set of practices which support healthy collaborations as suggested by the participants of this study

Identity

The majority of museum professionals interviewed indicated that they approached their work from multiple angles, i.e. as a member of their institution, a professional, a community member, a historian, etc. For example, one museum professional explained “I felt like this [project] involved every aspect of myself... We’re members of this community. In many ways, we bring

that social capital to the table as well”. Another museum professional explained that her identity and, as a result, her priorities evolved over the course of the project,

“This is a tough question because I think at different moments, at different times during the course of the project, all three of those could be true. In the beginning, obviously, I was representing the museum. As we got further along in the development process, particularly because I was the tribal liaison...the needs of the individuals and particularly the tribal members began to weigh more prominently than the needs of the museum...And then of course along the way, my feelings about certain aspects of the exhibit obviously dominated my thinking”.

Similarly, about half of community members indicated that they also felt that they were representing more than just the community to which they identify. As one community partner described it,

“[I was representing] a little bit of everything actually. At the time that we were invited to the table, I was a museum professional and I'm a tribal member and so I was there sort of representing myself and my viewpoint and my life vision”.

However, community members were more likely than museum professionals to feel they were representing a specific community. One community member said, “If I had to choose one though, I probably understood [the exhibit] as more of a representation of the community”.

Overall, these findings appear to indicate that individuals who participate in collaborative exhibit work do so while representing multiple aspects of their identity. Perhaps as a result of this work, the line between museum professionals and community member is somewhat blurry. Museum professionals may work on an exhibit to which they have a personal connection or may develop close relationships with members of the partnering communities. Community members may approach a project with a professional background in museums or museum-related fields. This falls in line with current literature on the intersectionality of identity. An individual's identity can derive from many aspects of their personality, including their profession, community

membership, gender, sexuality, ethnic or religious background, etc. (Peers and Brown, 2003; Keith, 2012). These identities inform the way we understand and interact with the world around us. Though collaborators may be expected to contribute based on one aspect of their identity, their membership to a specific group (i.e. a community group, profession) does not preclude their membership to another group and, thus, their ability to contribute from that aspect of their identity.

Given the fact that collaborators are approaching their work from a variety of angles, museums may benefit by providing opportunities for participants to contribute outside their traditional role or public-facing identity in the collaborative exhibit process. By recognizing and providing space for these contributions, museums acknowledge the dynamism and multidimensionality of their partners. This means of interacting and collaboratively building content was used by a number of the institutions interviewed for this study. For example, many exhibits featured community partners both as advisors in content and as creators of artistic or cultural exhibit materials.

Museum Role

Both museum professionals and community partners, about three quarters overall, perceive the museum as the expert in facilitating the sharing of community voices. However, participants expressed different ideas of what this expertise entailed.

Many participants spoke about the museum's ability to gather and translate community knowledge into a museum format, typically an exhibit, which can be understood by visitors. As one museum professional explained,

“So, the role of the museum is...providing a platform and, interpretation may not be the best word, but it's the word that I think of in terms of taking community knowledge and making it accessible to a museum audience, providing a platform and then doing that process of making it into an exhibit as opposed to just the knowledge that's shared with you through conversations or published sources”.

In connection with this, participants referenced the museum's administrative skills, such as marketing, budgeting, fundraising, etc. A partnering community member had this to say, “Museums have their role and they know how to do exhibits and planning for their events and educational materials. All the little moving parts that go along with that. But what they've done is, they have allowed a tribal voice within that”.

Part of this work of managing moving parts is the ability to connect the right people at the right time and create a space that is conducive to collaboration. Some participants referenced the museum's ability to bring together the right people, facilitate the process of sharing and creating, synthesize the information presented, and occasionally mediate in times of disagreement.

A community member explained,

“I feel like the museum staff sort of guide. I feel like that's really their job, to do the heavy lifting of a project. It's the staff's job to do outreach. It's the staff's job to include the people. It's the staff's job to learn how to make a situation feel comfortable so that the community that you're spotlighting will engage with you and will become open. It's also their job to value those people and respect them. It's their job to create that tone of that mutual respect”.

These results fall in line with the literature on collaborative exhibit development, particularly Ruth Phillips' model of “community-based exhibits”. The community-based model suggests that museum professionals serve as facilitators rather than directors of the process of collaborative exhibit development (Phillips, 2003).

However, participants also expressed notions which align more closely with traditional

exhibiting practice, where museums control the flow of information. Some participants, primarily museum professionals, viewed the museum as a fact checker or the party in charge of ensuring scholarly integrity. As one museum professional described, “I think the role of the museum is quality control. By quality control, I mean that we’re exercising and utilizing standards of excellence as it relates to the research and the scholarly integrity of the information”. This last role of the museum indicates that museums may still be struggling to relinquish control of the exhibit development process. Understandably, museums are concerned with presenting an exhibit which falls in line with industry best practices. It’s unclear though whether this particular need holds more value to museums than allowing for community expression, particularly if that expression falls outside the traditional standards of an exhibit. The suggestion that museum professionals serve to ensure scholarly integrity also highlights the continued privilege of academic knowledge over traditional knowledge or knowledge gained as a result of lived experience. In other words, museums are open to incorporating community voices provided they align with trusted academic sources.

Community Role

Similarly, participants were asked to share their perceptions on the role of community members in the collaborative exhibit development process. The results reveal that participants perceive community members as either content experts or guides throughout the process of exhibit development.

Just over half of participants, both museum professionals and community partners, indicated that the primary role of the community is to serve as content experts. In other words, community

partners serve as the authority for the exhibit topic, generally calling on their lived experience or traditional and academic knowledge. One museum professional elaborated,

“I see the museum as the expertise in how you create an exhibit. And the community partners, depending on the exhibit because sometimes it's not always true, are the content experts. So, you're bringing those two things together to create something that is important to both communities”.

Community members speak of their role in a similar way. As one participant put it, “The community has the information, they have the history”.

The example above illustrates a unique difference in the ways in which community members express their role. Community members, rather than simply calling on acquired knowledge, use words which denote a level of ownership and responsibility towards the knowledge they possess. In another example, one community member discussed their role as a “steward over the work... Our job was not only to be able to help provide this information from the community that was being served but also to serve as a steward to make sure that it wasn't being compromised”.

Participants also indicated that a significant role of the community is to guide the underlying direction of the exhibit. As one community member eloquently explained,

“[It's] analogous to being in a canoe: So, you have a Stern Man in the canoe and Bowman. When you're in a canoe, the stern man tracks you down the river. So, they're responsible for River Right, River Left. We're going to go down this channel. We're going to go down that channel. The person in the bow has a more immediate concern. Are we going to hit that rock? Is this the best line to hold when going down through this whitewater? How that works at [the museum] is that the [museum] board is the one in the stern, in the front, with the day to day operations of the museum, making quick decisions. But it's the [tribal] council that's leading us down the river to decolonization”.

Some museum professionals echoed this take on the role of community as directors rather than advisors in the exhibit process,

“I want to start with the community. They're really the core of the process. They're advising on the content and help shape the exhibit. And then the museum staff are here to [help with] the process. They do a lot of the outreach. They help with engaging community members. They work with contractors. They plan programs. Mainly, we oversee the timeline and the budget, production, and installation...The community are the idea people and we're helping create their vision”.

For the most part, participants saw the role of the community *either* as content expert or guide.

Only one participant mentioned community members potentially acting in both roles. The split view on the role of community members as either content experts or guides speaks to the concept of true participation as addressed in the literature on collaborative exhibit development. As the literature points out, consultation with content experts, in this case, community members, is an essential component of exhibit development. However, collaborative exhibit development also calls for a shift in the role of the community from consultants to active, decision-making participants. Though the inclusion of community knowledge and expertise are essential to the success of collaborative exhibits, it is equally important that the individuals who possess this knowledge help to guide the overall exhibit experience. When serving purely as content experts, community members are denied creative control and true decision-making power; subject to the power structures which have defined the relationship between museums and communities for centuries. This research makes clear that the need and potential for true participation may not be fully realized by either museums or community members.

Benefits

Overall, participants understand the primary benefit of collaborative exhibit development to be “authenticity” or the ability to create more accurate and authentic exhibits. As one museum professional explained,

“Ultimately our goal was to ensure that it was an authentic story, that our community could see themselves in the story and that we were charting this history and those stories in a way that captures the reality of what was happening in our city. So, it was really about authenticity”.

Participants tend to speak about this authenticity in terms of adding a unique form of knowledge, one that can only be accessed through working with community members. One museum professional explained the necessity of community collaboration in this way,

“Knowledge is a social construction. So, we had to learn by conversations and engaging others. And we also find, if you want the story, and this is important, you have to go get it. You can't sit behind the walls of the museum and get all the story. You can get some of it but there's a lot more out there when you get out there and move around”.

This sentiment was echoed by community members. As one participant explained, “The stories and things were passed down to me from elders, tribal elders. It wasn't done through the Internet or through books and videos. It was passed down and I think that's what they wanted to portray”.

Participants, particularly community members, also spoke about the ability of collaborative to shed light on stories and people that may have been ignored or misrepresented by the museum in the past. One community member explained it in this way, “I'm always looking for a chance to have the truth be told and for our people to become visible...Our history and the way that it unfolded makes us very invisible in our own homeland and the museum pushes against that”.

Authenticity is also spoken about in reference to first-person narrative, or the framing of history and culture through the voices and stories of individuals affected by it. Participants referenced first-person narrative as a tool for promoting democratization and shared authority but also as a way of infusing exhibits with an element of humanity and empathy. One museum professional spoke of the necessity of first-person narrative,

“We knew the exhibit had to be in first person voice. We had heard that...We had no authority to speak on behalf of these people. That was very, very clear. If we were going to talk about contemporary Native lives, we needed it to be done in a voice of contemporary Native people”.

A community member contributing to the same exhibit expressed the benefits of authenticity and first-person narrative in this way,

“[The Museum’s] exhibits are extraordinarily authentic because they have that first-person voice and representative of the community and the diversity of every community. When people [develop exhibits] in isolation, they tend to grab to the stereotypes and the misconceptions without meaning to. Even when they're doing their research, they're just drawn to the things that, kind of, promote the stereotypes...When you bring the people in, it reminds you that there are people, and families, and communities...There's the historical context but there's also the contemporary”.

While both museum professionals and community members saw “authenticity” as a key component of collaborative exhibit development, each group also highlighted additional benefits which were unique to their position in the work. More specifically, museum professionals tended to cite improved community relations and an opportunity to address the colonial history of museum practice. On the other hand, community members cited recognition of skills and knowledge as a benefit of their participation in the exhibit development process.

A majority of museum professionals also spoke of collaborative exhibit development as a means for building and improving relationships between the museum and the community. One professional explained, “For the museum, it's a really wonderful benefit for us to be able to connect with these communities, to share their stories with a broader public”. Another professional expressed the benefit in this way, “You make these mutually beneficial relations. It just grows. It’s a way of nurturing community...collaboration is kind of the best way to make that happen”.

Individuals who work in museums and are keenly aware of the colonial history of such institutions also highlight a sense of obligation towards collaboration as a means of repairing some of the damage done by our predecessors. As one museum professional put it,

“Museums were agents of colonization and took away authority and took away material culture and retold stories and histories in ways that were convoluted and destructive and harmful...As museums and similar organizations increasingly decide to do the right thing and the good thing, not just what they're required to do, it's recognized that if you have caused harm in the past and you want to make that right...do that because it's the right thing to do”.

Museum professionals in smaller or more community-focused institutions also feel a sense of obligation to the communities which they serve. One museum professional explained, “We are a community museum so it's important for the museum that our exhibits reflect that. That we bring in the community, not only as spectators or visitors but as part of the exhibit”. Another professional echoed this sense of duty to community, “We definitely feel obligated to the community that we're working for. So, there is a lot of pressure too from that. It's like working for your family. You want to do well and you want to represent well”.

Unlike museum professionals, community members tend to express their motivations and perceived benefits of collaborative exhibit development in terms of gaining recognition or appreciation for their unique knowledge or skills. As one community member put it, “It ended up being quite an event for me as a genealogist. Wow, I'm the little rookie and yet I could see that the work I had done was significant because a lot of that history had been forgotten”. Another explained, “It was an honor to have them ask me, a great honor for me because that's my purpose, that's what I like to do”.

Essentially, these findings seem to indicate that museum professionals tend to approach their work from an institutional perspective, engaging in collaborative exhibit development as a means of building and repairing institutional relationships with community. Community members, on the other hand, approach their work on a more personal level, seeking acknowledgment and respect of their community or their personal expertise. That said, the difference in the way that each group perceives their motivations highlights an ongoing power imbalance. Museum professionals, who have traditionally controlled the exhibit development process, understand the necessity of democratizing this process and repairing the damage done by their predecessors. However, community members, who have traditionally been excluded from the exhibit process and, as a result, from sharing their knowledge and skills in a way that is personally beneficial, still understand their participation in this process as a privilege rather than a necessity. This attitude calls attention to the fact that collaborative exhibit development, conducted for the benefit of the community rather than the museum, is still an emerging practice. It is essential that museum professionals continue this practice and do so in a way that encourages community members to feel that they are a crucial part of the institution. As discussed in the literature review, there are a number of best practices, such as sustained, multi-dimensional community collaboration or fair compensation, which may help to establish a collaborative relationship based on mutual respect and appreciation rather than need.

Challenges

The challenges of collaborative exhibit development were also frequently brought up. Overall, issues of communication and trust building are cited as the most prevalent challenges of collaborative exhibit development.

Building trust requires a commitment to communicate fairly and openly. 38% of participants cite communication issues as a significant challenge of collaborative work. Collaborative work is, at its heart, an exercise in working with people. As one museum professional explained, “it's about people and that people are different and varied and have personal opinions and have personal emotions”.

The work of communication is partly influenced by the inequitable and exploitative relationships which have typically defined the relationship between museums and communities. Both museum professionals and community partners cited difficulties in building and maintaining trust as a considerable challenge of collaborative work. One participant explained, “I think that once there has been such a contentious relationship between community and representation, it can be difficult to get the trust”. Another specifically highlighted a personal struggle with recognizing and acknowledging past oppression and the effects it has on collaborative relationships today,

“The challenges were basically finding a way to sort of navigate through, at least in the United States, 500 years of really complicated relationships between colonists and Native Americans. It's funny to say that because, obviously, I don't think of myself as a colonist. My entire upbringing is based on colonial influences and the relationship that I have to these people really needed to acknowledge that bridge, that gap, and understand that they were still very, very much involved and fighting hundreds of years of repression”.

Though museum professionals and community members, for the most part, agree on the challenges of collaborative work, there are some telling differences as well. For example, museum professionals are more likely to mention a lack of time and time management as a challenge of such work. This is understandable considering the fact that museums are often asked to produce a finished product within the parameters of a specific budget and timeline. As the literature indicates, the work of building and maintaining meaningful relationships requires additional time.

As one museum professional described,

“Our museum's really about relationships and [these] are key to our work and we also know that it takes time to develop those relationships. When we're working with a new community that we haven't worked with before, we have to be able to build trust with them first. So, that takes time”.

Another participant explained, “It's always time. Time consuming work. It's also very labor intensive. We're always pushing our deadlines and trying to watch over our budget and see what we're able to do”.

Community members, on the other hand, question whether or not collaborative work can truly help to decolonize museum spaces. As one community member expressed, “Well, I think the challenge is, can they really truly become decolonized? And what does that mean?”. He continued, “Are they willing to turn over the keys to the communities to truly decolonize? Can they ever really get there? That's what I see as a hurdle. But I don't know if that's even possible”.

These findings call attention to the fact that building trust is a time consuming, complex, and ongoing process. In working with community members, simply establishing a relationship is not enough. Though a museum may work successfully with a community group, it does not preclude that there is a relationship of trust. Even when trust is established, it does not preclude that that relationship will continue, especially when collaborative exhibits are viewed as a one-off rather than sustained practice. The findings also make clear that a foundational element of trusting relationships is a willingness to acknowledge and address the exclusionary practices of museums. As a final note, it also seems that each party perceives challenges specific to their role in the collaborative process. Museum professionals, who are tasked with overseeing the production of the exhibit, worry about time and money. Community members, who are being

asked to trust museums despite decades of exploitation, continue to question the motivations and effectiveness of collaboration as a tool for decolonization.

Relationships

When asked to provide advice for museums/community member interested in pursuing collaboration, participants indicated that the promotion of dialogue and early/ongoing relationships with communities were the most essential components of collaborative exhibit development work.

The majority of participants suggested open communication or dialogue as the key to successful collaborative work. As one museum professional recommended, “Be nice and listen. Listen first. That’s the most important thing to developing solid relationships with community groups”. A community member partnering on the same exhibit expressed similar sentiments,

“One of the things that I would say as someone who’s trying to undertake this process of reaching out to communities, is that it is a little messy. It’s a little cumbersome at first and they really need to take the consultancy strategy in the sense of having somebody who’s listening to all of that...It just needs to be someone good at that. Listening to everything and making everybody feel heard and then kind of synthesizing the main points and where they overlap and how they go together so that people feel their thoughts and ideas were valued”.

They went on to say:

“Go into it with an open mind and not a preconceived notion. Do some things that break down the barriers to make people feel comfortable and able to share because you’ll find that, initially, people will have nothing to say. And if you don’t ever break down the barriers and make an environment that is comfortable, they may never say anything”.

Establishing meaningful relationships and promoting a culture of dialogue essentially comes down to respect. Nearly half of respondents cited the importance of respect throughout the

process of collaborative exhibit development. The concept of respect is spoken about in a variety of ways. Some participants address the issue in terms of respect for time and more pressing priorities,

“[I suggest] trying to structure projects in such a way that you're not putting a new burden of time and energy on the community members. Because for the most part, whatever the big priority project is for the museum is not the biggest priority for that community...they have their own project, their own priorities. So, recognizing that”.

Museum staff tend to approach the necessity of respect as a moral obligation. One museum professional, citing Shawn Wilson's *Research is Ceremony*, explains,

“Respect, relations, reciprocity, and responsibility...What that is, is ethics actually. Those are the things that don't change. Those are very human. The morals change with time and space, but those ethics, they don't change”.

Community members, in particular, emphasize the importance of respect and gratitude for the sharing of information to which the individual has a sacred or emotional attachment,

“Whenever elders or people within the community tell you a story, it's actually a gift. It's a gift to learn that story. These are stories that are not told everywhere. Just to hear it...shows that they trust you enough to share their story or something that's valuable or even puts them in a place of vulnerability, which is really great to recognize. So always having an open heart and recognizing that a lot of these communities are pretty much putting themselves out there to share their culture, their heritage”.

Community partners also highlight respect and, more importantly, compensation for time and expertise,

“I will say bluntly, from a Native perspective that often cultural knowledge is not valued and people think that we should just want to share it. And it's not that you don't, but they don't get that people are doing this as a job just as anybody else...Their time is valuable like anyone else in the mainstream. It's the 21st century and we all have to live and have to pay our bills. The last I knew I couldn't spend all my time foraging and hunting and fishing”.

Participants also caution that collaborative exhibit development, particularly with communities that have been disenfranchised from their narrative, can be uncomfortable. They suggest embracing that discomfort and being open and willing to share the creative process. As one

museum professional succinctly puts it, “Have an open mind and be ready to be uncomfortable”.

Other museum staff echoed this sentiment, specifically highlighting the role of the museum as a platform for community voices,

“I think the most important thing is to check your ego at the door because it's an incredibly humbling process. You're not the curator, you're helping these community curators develop their exhibit. So, they're really going to teach you a lot”.

Community members had similar things to say, particularly in regard to the discomfort surrounding the sharing of authority,

“I think that there needs to be...making sure that you move forward with an open mind and that you include them [the community] in ways that best represents them, even if it can create some level of uncomfortability and being willing to share in that control and power of narratives”.

Participants emphasize the necessity of embracing this uneasiness as a critical step to changing the nature of inclusion in museum spaces,

“The point is that sometimes in these processes we have to get uncomfortable to learn and to grow and to make the best exhibit, to cooperate and engage a new community and to truly be inclusive. Because there's lip service to inclusivity and then there's true inclusivity”.

Finally, both groups of participants also suggested establishing meaningful relationships prior to requesting community collaboration for the purposes of an exhibit. One museum professional explained,

“You have to have established a relationship long before you ask them to be involved in a particular project. So, that's where you spend the time to get to know people and build trust on completely unrelated things: buying from them as an artist, going to community events, going to basket making sales, that sort of thing. Interacting with them across a broad variety of experiences”.

Community members echoed this sentiment, calling for sustained relationships which extend past the boundaries of the exhibit. As one community member explained, “Try to create, engaged sustained relationships with the Native community, as opposed to one-offs, and to also respect

and hire Native artists and Native educators”.

Participants highlighted the importance of involving community members from the beginning, rather than as a sign-off on decisions which have already been made by the museum.

“I think it's important to be as intentional as you can about having community partners engaged in the process on the front end. I think true community collaboration is not when you've already decided what the product is going to be. It's when you're working collaboratively in the truest form, and you're deliberating, and being thoughtful, and engaging each other, at the very beginning rather than at the end”.

The participant continued:

“The other thing I would add is that you have to continue that collaborative framework after the exhibit goes up...The idea was that we're not just going to stop talking to community members just because they've already shared their stories. How do we curate other visitor experiences that invite not only engagement with the exhibits but invite engagement across those silos in our community...How do we pass the mic to those who normally aren't on the stage, who normally aren't at the table, and how do we make sure we're talking across those echo chambers?”.

Overall, these results demonstrate a number of best practices present in the literature on collaborative exhibit development. As both the literature and these results indicate, fundamentally changing the relationship between museums and communities involves a commitment to shared authority, dialogue, and true participation, the willingness to acknowledge pain caused by our predecessors, and an ability to work through the discomfort caused by these shifts in practice. Critically, these relationships should not be based on need but rather, on mutual respect. To ensure sustainable collaboration, relationships should be established early on and should be tended to regularly. Those contributing knowledge or skills should be compensated as an expert in the field would be.

It is interesting to note that, rather than suggesting advice related to the content of the exhibit,

fundraising, etc. participants provided advice on building and maintaining healthy relationships. suggested methods for building equitable, sustained relationships. This finding illustrates the central role that healthy relationships play in the collaborative process and the fact that both parties understand the importance of such relationships.

Finally, looking across the emergent topics discussed above revealed some interesting findings as well. Overall, museum professionals and community partners who work together tended to express similar feelings on the collaborative roles, benefits, best practices, etc. of collaborative work. On the surface, these results can be viewed optimistically. This could suggest that the process of collaboration enables museums and communities to develop shared values and work towards common goals. However, these results can be viewed in a variety of other ways and may speak to a larger power imbalance. To begin with, the existence or development of these shared perceptions may simply indicate that individuals with similar motivations and goals are more likely to collaborate. It could also suggest that museums are actively seeking out community members with similar priorities and views. It might also indicate that the collaborative group, perhaps unintentionally, may gradually push out voices which do not align with the dominant values of the group. In any case, it is clear that further research may be necessary to discover the true cause of this value alignment.

The model above suggests a few of the key elements which appear to support equitable collaborative relationships between museums and community members (Figure 6). These practices or methods of working with community, combined with the effective practices

suggested in the literature on collaborative exhibit development, may encourage the shift from traditional museum practice to community-focused practice.

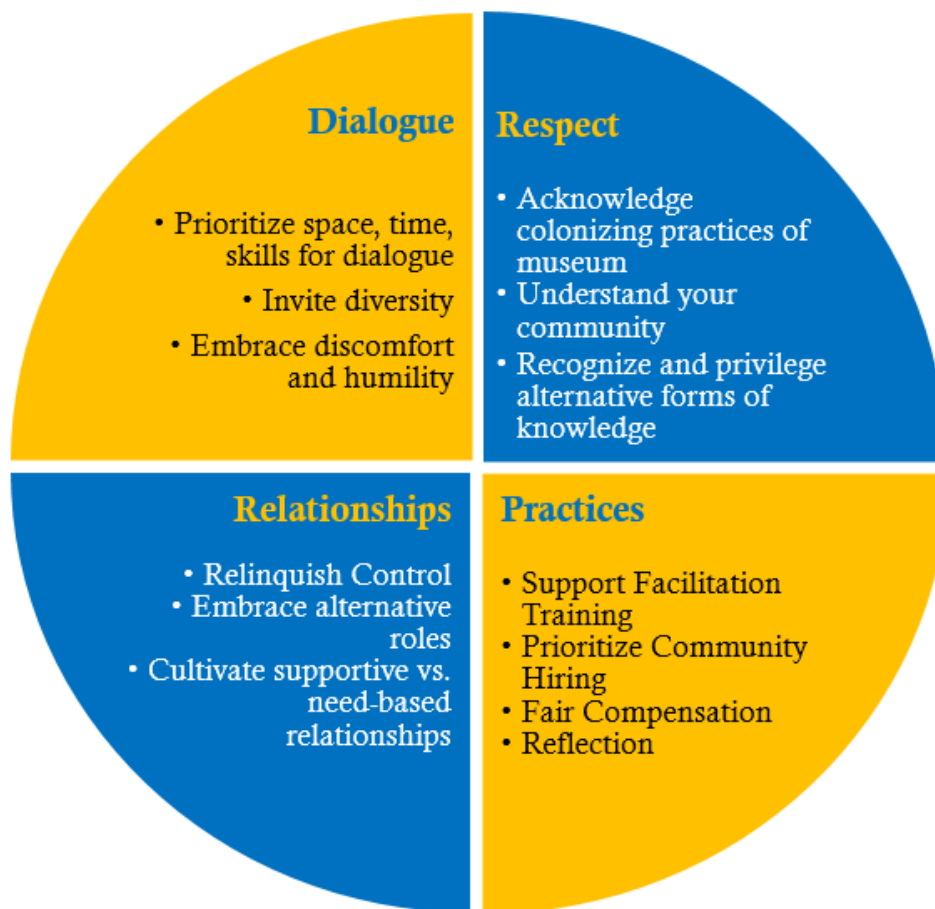


Figure 6: Supporting Practices for Collaborative Exhibit Development

First, the results of this study emphasized the importance of dialogue and healthy communication in the process of collaborative work. It is essential that museums understand and portray themselves to be sites for dialogue, where individuals with potentially conflicting views are given the space, time, and tools to engage in respectful exchange. Doing so requires a broad spectrum of individuals to be included in such dialogue and an ability to process and learn from potential discomfort and disagreement.

Building this dialogic space necessitates healthy relationships between collaborators. This is a time consuming and complex process which requires much from museum professionals. First, effective collaborations require a relinquishing of at least some measure of control, placing community members as the ultimate guides in the exhibit development process. The process of relinquishing control may be more effective when museum professionals embrace the new roles that collaborative exhibit development requires, namely as facilitators and advocates of community knowledge. Healthy collaborative relationships are also built on supportive arrangements and true relationships rather than need-based requests. Museums can better serve the communities they partner with by using their resources to support community initiatives, events, etc. The perspectives and expertise of community members are valuable outside the boundaries of community-specific exhibits. Establishing meaningful relationships requires the acknowledgment of this fact and a commitment to involving community collaborators in exhibits and programming which may not be directly related to the community. When community members have a voice in the overall direction and focus of the museum, they are one step closer to becoming active partners rather than tokenistic contributors.

This study has made abundantly clear that any and all successful collaborative work must be built on a deep sense of respect among participants. The experience of collaboration can and should be a humbling one. The first step in developing a sense of respect is acknowledging the exclusionary and discriminatory history of museum practice. It is also important to understand and respect the priorities, values, and struggles of the individuals and community members who have chosen to collaborate. Rather than simply inviting community voices, these voices should

hold as much, if not more authority than the traditional scholarly voices which have controlled museums for the last several centuries.

Developing dialogue, relationships, and respect requires more than a few slight shifts in museum practice. They also require changes to the organizational structure of the museum itself. To begin with, it is essential that museum professionals, in taking on the role of facilitator, possess the competencies and tools necessary to encourage effective dialogue. In order to ensure that community voices are incorporated on multiple levels, museums should prioritize the involvement of community members, either at a volunteer, intern, or professional level. For those community members who do contribute to collaborative projects, fair compensation should be adopted as a standard practice. This may be monetary or otherwise as agreed upon with community members. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the practice of collaboration will only be moved forward through continued reflection. Effective collaboration asks that we question our motives and methods as museum professionals and reexamine how our privileged position may be used to empower those who have been disenfranchised from their own cultural heritage.

Chapter 5: Summary

This study aimed to uncover perceptions of collaborative exhibit development among both museum professionals and community partners. Collaboration as a model for exhibit development is becoming more prevalent, in part due to increasing calls for diversity, inclusion, and decolonization in museum spaces (Spock, 2009). This study both acknowledges the wide-ranging benefits of such work and supports the use of collaboration as a tool to connect and benefit communities. However, it also calls for constant and critical examination of such practices to ensure that these benefits are equitably distributed.

While numerous scholars have examined community collaboration as a method of exhibit development, few have investigated the practice from the perspective of the community members involved. In order to gain a fully nuanced and balanced understanding of the current state and future direction of collaborative exhibit development, a deliberate decision was made to invite the full spectrum of voices engaging in the practice, including both museum professionals and partnering community members. Using semi-structured interviews, the study sought to answer the following questions:

- How do museum professionals and community partners perceive collaborative exhibit development?
- What similarities and differences exist in the ways in which museum professionals and community partners perceive collaborative exhibit development?

The results of the study revealed a number of key findings. First and foremost, as a whole, museum professionals and community partners perceive the collaborative exhibit development process in similar ways. However, subtle differences exist in the ways in which these collaborators understand this process, its challenges, and benefits. This study also indicated that

the line between museum professional and community member is somewhat blurry and individuals who collaborate for the purposes of exhibit development often approach their work from many different angles. Second, the role of the museum is perceived to be that of a facilitator for the expression of community knowledge. The role of the community is perceived to be that of content expert or guide for the exhibit development process. This study found that participants perceive the overall benefit of collaborative exhibit development to be “authenticity”. Museum professionals also perceive improved community relations and a sense of reconciliation as a secondary benefit for collaborating. Community members cite recognition of their skills or knowledge as a significant benefit. In terms of challenges, participants referenced the building of trust and meaningful communication as a significant barrier to collaborative work. Museum professionals cite a lack of time as the secondary challenge. Community members question the true impact of collaboration to decolonize the museum. The promotion of dialogue, as well as early/ongoing relationships with communities, were suggested as best practices in collaborative exhibit development. Both museum professionals and community members recommend coming from a place of deep respect and cautioned the uncomfortable nature of such work.

These findings help to shed light on the state of collaborative exhibit development and community engagement in museums today. As a whole, it seems that museum professionals who engage in collaborative exhibit development appear to understand the power and complexity of such work. Though it is also clear that this work is still in its infancy and that museums may be struggling to move past the boundaries and ingrained attitudes of traditional museum practice. For example, museum professionals, even while engaging in collaborative work, often still view

their work from an institutional perspective rather than a community-centered one. They acknowledge their role as facilitators in the process yet still privilege objective or scholarly truth over community knowledge. On the other side, community members see themselves as content experts, yet they still struggle to gain the respect and recognition awarded to more scholarly authorities and question the ability of collaboration to truly equitize the museum space.

The difficulty here may lie in the museum institution itself. As museum professionals pursue collaborative work they are faced with the challenge of conducting such work within the framework of an organization which has traditionally not been collaborative. Over the history of museum practice, the authority and control of exhibition content, focus, and direction has typically laid in the hands of museum professionals. Community members have been viewed as subjects rather than partners in this process. At their core, traditional museums are primarily concerned with attracting and educating visitors. Their overall revenue and value in society depend on these factors. The very values which define the traditional museum may hinder the collaborative process. Unfortunately, even in the process of collaboration, these values may take precedence over the priorities of community.

Addressing the misalignment of collaborative practice and traditional museum values will require a radical shift in the practice of the museum. Advancing the state of community collaboration requires museums to place a greater emphasis on serving as active participants and allies to communities, allocating museum time and resources to supporting community members, events, and advancement. The full value of collaborative work may be realized when museums and communities work towards actively supporting and contributing to one another's success.

Essentially, “Passing the Mic” to community goes beyond introducing more community-focused exhibits or allowing community input. It requires the true participation of community members at multiple levels within the institution, a level of participation that can only be achieved when museum professionals actively acknowledge the value of community voices and pursue their role as allies and champions of community.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Consent Form

**UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
CONSENT FORM
Perceptions of Collaborative Exhibit Development**

Researcher: Theresa (Terri) Ball, Student, Museology Graduate Program, University of Washington, tball333@uw.edu, 207-240-8355

Faculty Advisor: Kris Morrissey, Lecturer, Museology Graduate Program, University of Washington

Researchers' statement

We are asking you to be in a research study. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, what we would ask you to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a participant, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When we have answered all your questions, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." We will give you a copy of this form for your records.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore perceptions of the collaborative exhibit development relationship among museum professionals and community partners.

STUDY PROCEDURES

Information for this study will be collected through interviews with museum staff members and partnering community members. One interview will be conducted with each participant. In total, each interview will take 30-60 minutes. You may refuse to answer any question with no penalty. I will be audio-recording.

RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT

This study asks you to share your perceptions, both good and bad, on the collaborative exhibit development relationship. You may feel uncomfortable or nervous sharing information or your personal feelings towards a professional relationship. As mentioned above, you may refuse to answer any of these questions. Additionally, your information will be entirely confidential. Your name and/or title will not be shared with other participants or published in the final report.

BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

The practice of collaborating with community members for the purposes of exhibit development is being utilized more frequently in the museum field. A more complete and

nanced understanding of this relationship, particular the perceptions of community members involved in this work, may allow museums to engage in this work ethically, equitably, and responsibility.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF RESEARCH INFORMATION

Your data will be entirely confidential. The information you share will not be linked to your name in any way.

OTHER INFORMATION

You may refuse to participate and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

RESEARCH-RELATED INJURY

If you think you have been harmed from being in this research, contact Kris Morrissey, Lecturer, US Museology Graduate Program, morriss8@uw.edu, 206-685-8207

Subject's statement

This study has been explained to me. I agree to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later about the research, or if I have been harmed by participating in this study, I can contact one of the researchers listed on the first page of this consent form. If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I can call the Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098 or call collect at (206) 221-5940.

Printed name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Copies to: Researcher
 Participant

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Question 1: In your collaborative work, do you feel that you are representing a specific institution, community, or aspect of your identity (professional, personal, etc.)?

Question 2: Why do you think it was important for the museum to include community voices?

Question 3: In your opinion, what is the role of the museum in the collaborative exhibit development process? What is the role of the community?

Question 4: What were your expectations and/or goals in collaborating? In your experience, did the collaboration meet these expectations/goals?

Question 5: Do you feel your voice or authority was respected in the exhibit development process?

Question 6: Did you experience any moments where differences in perspective arose? If so, how were these dealt with? Do you think they were handled appropriately?

Question 7: In your opinion, what are the benefits of collaborative exhibit development? What are the biggest challenges?

Question 8: Do you feel that collaboration has changed your/the community's/the institution's relationship? If so, how?

Question 9: What advice might you have for other museums or communities considering collaborative exhibit work?

Appendix C: Coding Rubric

Category 1: Identity

- **Basic Description:** “Identity” addresses what or who the participant felt they were representing throughout the collaborative exhibit development process.
- **Representative Question:** On this collaborative project, did you feel that you were representing a specific institution, community, or aspect of your identity (professional, personal, etc.)?

Code	Title	Description	Representative Quotes
0	No Response	No response was given to the questions	
1	Institution	Participant felt they were primarily representing the institution they worked for or with.	“Usually I'm the facilitator. I don't feel, usually, like I would be a community member contributing to this process”
2	Community	Participant felt they were primarily representing a community, either one they consider themselves to be a member of or one with which they have partnered.	“Definitely a specific community. Our nation. I'm the director of Cultural and Historic Preservation. So, I have a very distinct voice”.
3	Combination	Participant felt they were representing multiple identities, i.e. the institution, the community, and themselves.	“This is a tough question because I think at different moments at different times during the course of the project, all three of those could be true. In the beginning, obviously I was representing the museum. As we got further along in the development process, particularly because I was the tribal liaison, I spent a lot of time talking to tribal members and I think particularly when you're dealing with an exhibit that is confronting issues of colonization and also thinking about the process of creating a decolonizing exhibit, the needs of the individuals and particularly the tribal members began to weigh more prominently

			<p>than the needs of the museum. We really had to meet the needs of the people who were intrinsically part of that exhibit before we could really deal with the needs of the museum. And then of course along the way, my feelings about certain aspects of the exhibit obviously dominated my thinking”</p>
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Category 2: Museum Staff Role

- **Basic Description:** “Museum Staff Role” addresses the participants perceptions of the role of the museum in the collaborative exhibit development process.
- **Representative Question:** In your opinion, what is the role of the museum in the collaborative exhibit development process?

Code	Title	Description	Representative Quotes
0	No Response	Participant did not respond to this question.	
1	Facilitator	Participant views the role of the museum as the expert in translating community knowledge into a museum format using exhibit skills, museum resources, and best practices.	<p>“The role of the museum is...providing a platform and, interpretation may not be the best word, but it's the word that I think of in terms of taking community knowledge and making it accessible to a museum audience, providing a platform and then doing that process of making it into an exhibit as opposed to just the knowledge that's shared with you through conversations or published sources”</p> <p>“Museums have their role and they know how to do exhibits and planning for their events and educational materials. All the little moving parts that go along with that”</p> <p>“In many ways, I think the role of the museum as it relates to the</p>

			exhibit was to ensure the scholarly integrity, that the information was well presented, and that we created an experience for visitors”
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Category 3: Community Partner Role

- **Basic Description:** “Community Partner Role” addresses the participants perceptions of the role of the community partner in the collaborative exhibit development process.
- **Representative Question:** In your opinion, what is the role of the community in the collaborative exhibit development process?

Code	Title	Description	Representative Quotes
0	No Response	Participant did not respond to this question.	
1	Content Expert	Participants perceive community partners as content experts and individuals with academic, traditional, or lived experience in the exhibit topic area	<p>“So I see the museum as the expertise in how you create an exhibit. And the community partners, depending on the exhibit because sometimes it's not always true, are the content experts. So you're bringing those two things together to create something that is important to both communities”</p> <p>“The community has the information, they have the history”</p> <p>“I think that it also was to serve as a steward over the work... Our job was not only to be able to help provide this information from the community that was being served, but also to serve as a steward to make sure that it wasn't being compromised.”</p>
2	Human Element	Participants perceive community partners as individuals whom add	“The critical part too is that your balance that scholarly help

		<p>an element of humanity and relevancy to the exhibit content.</p>	<p>and that professional execution with being able to connect it to our visitors. And one of the surest ways to do that is to make sure people see themselves in the work that you produce. And that's really where the community came in. The community helped us ensure, not only that the information was well curated and the history was intact and scholarly, but that people showed up in those spaces that that would create an effective and intentional sort of engagement with our visitor”</p>
<p>3</p>	<p>Direction/Guide/ Decision Makers</p>	<p>Participants perceive community partners as the leaders of the exhibit project, the ones that guide and determine the direction of the work.</p>	<p>“Analogous to being in a canoe: So you have a Stern Man in the canoe and Bow Man. And when you're in a canoe, the stern man tracks you down the river. So, they're responsible for River Right, River Left. We're going to go down this channel. We're going to go down that channel. And the person in the bow has a more immediate concern. Are we going to hit that rock? Is this the best line to hold when going down through this white water? How that works at [the museum], I said that the [museum] board is the one in the stern, in the front, with the day to day operations of the museum. Making quick decisions. But it's the [tribal] council that's leading us down the river to decolonization. But it's the staff at [the museum], those people on the front lines, that have work to do to make sure we're safely down the river”</p>

			<p>“I want to start with the community. They're really the core of the process. They're advising on the content and help shape the exhibit. And then the museum staff are here to[help with] the process. They do a lot of the outreach. They help with engaging community members. They work with contractors. They plan programs and then, mainly, we oversee the timeline and the budget, production, and installation. So, we're trying to get things together and produce and installed so that we have the exhibit. The community are the idea people and then we're helping create their vision”</p>
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Category 4: Reasons/Benefits

- **Basic Description:** “Reasons/Benefits” addresses the participants perceptions of the benefits or reasons for undertaking collaborative exhibit development.
- **Representative Questions:** Why did you feel it was important for the community to be involved in this project? What were your expectations and/or goals in collaborating? In your opinion, what are the benefits of collaborative exhibit development?

Code	Title	Description	Representative Quotes
0	No Response	Participant did not respond to this question.	
1	Decolonizing	Participants cite that collaborative exhibits help to decolonize and democratize the museum by placing power, authority, and agency into the hands of community members.	<p>“A collaborative approach returns, to at least some extent, depending on how you do it, returns of agency and authority and decision making to communities”</p> <p>“I think that's kind of the key role of it [collaborative exhibit development] is that it reasserts that agency that</p>

			<p>authority over their own stories.”</p> <p>“I saw [the exhibit] not just as an exhibit but as an experiment in democratizing the curatorial process”</p>
2	Authenticity	<p>Participants cite that collaborative exhibits add an element of authenticity, accuracy, and truth as they utilize knowledge directly from individuals with lived experience and traditional knowledge.</p>	<p>“The stories and things were passed down to me from elders, tribal elders. It wasn't done through the Internet or through books and videos. It was passed down and I think that's what they wanted to portray” (DS - Abbe Museum)</p> <p>“[The Museum's] exhibits are extraordinarily authentic because they have that first person voice and representative of the community and the diversity of every community. When people [develop exhibits] in isolation, they tend to grab to the stereotypes and the misconceptions without meaning to. Even when they're doing their research, they're just drawn to the things that kind of promote the stereotypes...When you bring the people in, it reminds you that there are people, and families, and communities...There's the historical context but there's also the contemporary.”</p> <p>“Ultimately our goals was to ensure that it was an authentic story, that our community could see themselves in the story and that we were</p>

			charting this history and those stories in a way that captures the reality of what was happening in our city. So, it was really about authenticity”
3	Inclusivity/Diversity	Participants cite that collaborative exhibits create spaces for diversity and multiple perspectives, helping to build empathy among visitors and community	<p>“We really felt that all of these individual stories were so crucial to understanding how we actually lived together as a community, a broad, big community, Americans, Bostonians, whatever it was, and that by bringing these more personal and more intimate stories to light, we all benefit from that”</p> <p>“Oh, the benefits are the strength of the exhibits. There's no question about it...there's a richness of multiple voices and multiple perspectives”</p> <p>“I think when we include people, we break down those barriers and we look at how all our stories are about humanity and that even though we're different, we're the same in lots of ways as well as human beings.”</p> <p>“I think that this is a way to be more inclusive and holistic...this whole idea of inclusiveness and understanding people's voices as mattering in the process”</p>
4	Education	Participants cite that collaborative exhibits help to pass down traditions and knowledge that might otherwise be lost.	“We have to preserve what we have.”

5	Obligation	Participants cite a moral, ethical, or institutional obligation to engage with community members	<p>“Museums were agents of colonization and took away authority and took away material culture and retold stories and histories in ways that were convoluted and destructive and harmful...As museums and similar organizations increasingly decide to do the right thing and the good thing, not just what they're required to do, it's recognized that if you have caused harm in the past and you want to make that right...do that because it's the right thing to do.”</p> <p>“We are a community museum so it’s important for the museum that our exhibits reflect that. That we bring in the community, not only as spectators or visitors but as part of the exhibit”</p>
6	Staff Capacity	Participants cite that collaborative exhibits increase staff capacity	<p>“The reality is we also had a very lean staff. Co-curating this exhibit with community partners was one way to build capacity, to do this in a way that invited multiple voices and multiple vantage points without taxing our entire team.”</p>
7	Recognition	Participants cite personal gains as a benefit of collaborative exhibits, such as skills, recognition, or confidence	<p>“It ended up being quite an event for me as a genealogist. Wow, I'm the little rookie and yet I could see that the work I had done was significant because a lot of that history had been forgotten”</p> <p>“It was an acknowledgement of the work I had done over</p>

			25 years at that point”
8	Community Relationships	Participants cite that collaborative exhibits help to build relationships and improve relations with and among communities	“For the museum, it's a really wonderful benefit for us to be able to connect with these communities, to share their stories with a broader public.”

Category 5: Challenges

- **Basic Description:** “Challenges” addresses the participants perceptions of the major challenges or difficulties in collaborative exhibit development.
- **Representative Questions:** In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges of collaborative exhibit development? On this project, did any differences in perspectives arise and, if so, how were these dealt with?

Code	Title	Description	Representative Quotes
0	No Response	Participant did not respond to this question.	
1	Time	Participants cite the expanded timeline of collaboration and subsequent need for time management as a challenge of collaborative exhibit development.	<p>“This is a challenge that hasn't been met, is setting a timeline within which you don't have to impose deadlines that are going to interfere with other priorities”</p> <p>“Our museum's really about relationships and are key to our work and we also know that it takes time to develop those relationships. When we're working with a new community that we haven't worked with before, we have to be able to build trust with them first. So, that takes time”</p> <p>“It's always time. Time consuming work. It's also very labor intensive. I think that we're always pushing our</p>

			deadlines and trying to watch over our budget and see what we're able to do”
2	Resources	Participants cite a lack of money and other resources as a challenge of collaborative exhibit development.	“In a very practical sense, for smaller and mid-size museums and the whole non-profit fundraising thing is, the ability to raise, and to help donors understand that, collaborative work takes more money and more time” (JG - Abbe Museum)
3	Communication	Participants perceive communication and managing conflict as a challenge of collaborative exhibit development.	<p>“Just the fact that it's about people and that people are different and varied and have personal opinions and have personal emotions”</p> <p>“The difficulties that you might have, I think more broadly, with community-based is always going to be communication” (JJ - BCM)</p>
4	Building Trust	Participants perceive relationships building, repair, and maintenance as a challenge of collaborative exhibit development.	<p>“The challenges were basically finding a way to sort of navigate through, at least in the United States, 500 years of really complicated relationships between colonists and Native Americans. It's funny to say that because obviously I don't think of myself as a colonist. My entire upbringing is based on colonial influences and the relationship that I have to these people really needed to acknowledge that bridge, that gap, and understand that they were still very, very much involved and fighting hundreds of years of repression.”</p> <p>“I think that once there has</p>

			been such a contentious relationship between community and representation, it can be difficult to get the trust”
5	Decolonization	Participants questions whether this type of exhibit development can actually create change and succeed in decolonizing the museum.	<p>“Well, I think the challenge is, can they really truly become decolonized? And what does that mean?”</p> <p>“Are they willing to turn over the keys to the communities to truly decolonize? Can they ever really get there? That's what I see as a hurdle. But I don't know if that's even possible.”</p>
6	Objectivity	Participants cite objectivity as a challenge of collaborative exhibit development	“I also struggled with those various parts of myself. There was the part of me, probably the more activist proclivity, then there was the intellectual me to make sure that none of that activist proclivity denied other voices. So, really trying to make sure that I went into this work as objective as possible”

Category 6: Best Practices

- **Basic Description:** “Best Practices” addresses the participants perceptions of best practices or ways of interacting and working with community in the process of collaborative exhibit development.
- **Representative Questions:** What advice might you have for other museums or communities considering collaborative exhibit work?

Code	Title	Description	Representative Quotes
0	No Response	Participant did not respond to this question.	
1	Create Dialogue	Participants recommend creating honest, respectful dialogue by	“One of the things that I would say as someone who's trying to undertake

		<p>listening and asking questions</p>	<p>this process of reaching out to communities, is that it is a little messy. It's a little cumbersome at first and they really need to take the the consultancy strategy in the sense of having somebody who's listening to all of that....It just needs to be someone good at that. Listening to everything and making everybody feel heard and then kind of synthesizing the main points and where they overlap and how they go together so that people feel their thoughts and ideas were valued.”</p> <p>“We try to provide an atmosphere where everyone can have their say and hopefully folks can come to a consensus.”</p>
<p>2</p>	<p>Respect</p>	<p>Participants recommend being respectful of time, expertise, other commitments, etc.</p>	<p>“Asking a lot of questions and listening and trying to structure projects in such a way that you're not putting a new burden of time and energy on the community members. Because for the most part, whatever the big priority project is for the museum is not the biggest priority for that community. For them, it's, you know, things like economic development or the opioid crisis and they can recognize that what we're doing as a museum contributes to that kind of wider understanding. But it's just not always the...they have their own projects, their own priorities. So, recognizing that.”</p> <p>“[Respect, relations, reciprocity, and responsibility....What that is is ethics actually. Those are the things that don't change. Those are very human. The morals change with time and space, but those ethics, they don't change.”</p>

3	Establish Early/Ongoing Relationships		<p>“You have to have established a relationship long before you ask them to be involved in a particular project. So, that's where you spend the time to get to know people and build trust on completely unrelated things: buying from them as an artist, going to community events, going to basket making sales, that sort of thing. Interacting with them across a broad variety of experiences.”</p> <p>“Certainly it's building relationships well before you need to ask something of community members. So much is take, take, take and even if it's knowledge that you want and you're just going and saying we need you to give us your knowledge for this exhibit and I've never talked to you before, you're not going to have much luck.” (JG - Abbe Museum)</p>
4	Embrace Discomfort		<p>“Have an open mind and be ready to be uncomfortable”</p> <p>“The point is that sometimes in these processes we have to get uncomfortable to learn and to grow and to make the best exhibit, to cooperate and engage a new community and to truly be inclusive. Because there's lip service to inclusivity and then there's true inclusivity.”</p>
5	Know Your Community		<p>“Don't come into it blind. You set yourself up to put your foot in your mouth if you haven't gained a basic understanding, ideally from Indigenously authored sources”</p> <p>“If people don't do their homework and it just rings really hollow.”</p>