

Adopt-an-Object: Reaching Donors Through Personalized Fundraising

Stefanie Mueller Terasaki

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

University of Washington

2017

Committee:

Jessica Luke

Kirk Laughlin

Mary Kay Gugerty

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Museology

©Copyright 2017  
Stefanie Mueller Terasaki

University of Washington

**Abstract**

Adopt-an-Object: Reaching Donors Through Personalized Fundraising

Stefanie Mueller Terasaki

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:  
Jessica J. Luke, PhD  
Museology

The purpose of this research study was to understand museums' use of adopt-an-object (AO) fundraising and their effects on donor base. The study focused on the rationale for implementing the campaign, the nature of the campaign, the museum's perceived impacts of this campaign on donor base growth and the change in the museum-donor relationship. Using a case study design, data were collected from 4 institutions through a questionnaire and interviews. Findings suggest that museums implemented their campaigns to meet the funding needs of collection object's conservation and artifact acquisition, and to create a connection between the public and museum objects. While some museums experienced an increase in donors through AO others have used it to work closer with already established museum supporters. Advantages of AO include reaching new donors, providing tangible items in exchange for funds, and creating a more personal museum-donor relationship. These results offer the field an understanding of AO as a more personalized form of fundraising and highlight other opportunities to understand the long-term impact of its use.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank the four museums and the five museum professionals that participated in this study. The time and stories that you were willing to share were insightful and your expertise were truly appreciated. I started this study with notions of what adopt-an-object could be and was blown away by the responses and in-depth understandings provided by each interview. I am truly grateful for the enthusiasm and support you offered throughout our communications.

I would also like to thank my committee, Kirk Laughlin and Mary Kay Gugerty for providing support, resources and encouragement. Your expertise and time spent reviewing and polishing each chapter made this study possible. I would like to especially thank my chair, Jessica Luke, for her continuous support and willingness to push me throughout this process. Her accessibility, ideas and unwavering confidence in my study were paramount during this process. Our discussions and time spent working through questions helped create a more thorough study.

Thank you to the University of Washington Museology department for providing the opportunity to study this topic in-depth and for all the assistance throughout this process.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and close friends who supported me throughout this endeavor. To my husband, Michael and my parents who provided encouragement and unconditional support every step of the way.

## Table of Contents

<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review</b>	<b>10</b>
Fundraising Theory	10
Individual Giving	11
Understanding Donor Motivations	11
Donor Stewardship and Acknowledgement	14
Relationship Fundraising	15
Collections Care	17
Preventative Conservation	17
Adopt-an-Object	19
Gap in the literature	21
<b>Chapter 3: Methods</b>	<b>22</b>
Research Purpose	22
Sampling	22
Research Sites	23
Data Collection	23
Data Analysis	24
Limitations	25
<b>Chapter 4: Results and Discussion</b>	<b>26</b>
Case Descriptions	26
Research Question 1: What are the rationale and impetus for implementing adopt-an-object campaigns in museums?	28
Need for funding	28
Desire to Create More Personal Connections between the Public and Objects	29
Research Question 2: What is the nature of adopt-an-object campaigns in museums?	31
Challenges	31
Advantages	32
Research Question 3: What impacts does the museum perceive this strategy has on the growth and diversity of its donor base?	33
Tracking Methods	34
Connection to museum and collection objects	35
Research Question 4: How have adopt-an-object campaigns changed museums' relationships with their donors?	37
Providing Tangible Items in Exchange for Funds	37
Creating a more personal connection	38
<b>Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>50</b>

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Funding is a critical issue for museums. American Alliance of Museum's (AAM) (2009) survey noted that 35%, the largest percentage, of museum funding came from community and individual sources, but that the prospect of increasing any percentage from these sources looked bleak. The lack of donor diversity and the changing characteristics of a new generation of donors requires a fresh look at traditional fundraising methods. Paulette Maehara (2003), former president of the Association of Fundraising Professionals and museum fundraising consultant, argues that art museum's "tried-and-true donor, the middle-aged white male, is rapidly disappearing and traditional solicitations will not be as successful as they used to be" (p. 33). Similarly Falk (2006) notes how museums "are in danger of residing on the sidelines or quietly disappearing-unless they can reexamine old assumptions and make dramatic changes in practice" (p. ix). Innovative fundraising strategies will be key in gaining new donors for museums and refreshing this source of revenue (Leventhal, 2015). Adopt-an-object campaigns could have the potential to increase donor diversity by appealing to and reaching out to the general public as opposed to already established major donors or granting agencies through a more personalized form of fundraising.

Adopt-an-object fundraising campaigns, also referred to as adopt-an-artifact or adopt-an-artwork, offer donors a range of objects/artifacts in need of conservation and preservation that the donor can financially support (Heritage Preservation and Institute of Museum and Library Science, nd.; North Carolina Connecting to Collections, nd). In their *Capitalize on Collections Care* publication (nd), The Heritage Preservation and Institute of Museum and Library Science recommends that "the institution chooses diverse projects with conservation price tags that appeal to donors with different budgets," when implementing an adopt-an-object campaign (p.

10). Some museums have found a collective model of giving as the best way to raise funds for their conservation projects. This involves a group of interested donors pooling their individual donations to take on larger projects with bigger price tags. Other museums have used adopt-an-object to fund acquisitions for the museum's collection. Similar to conservation-based adopt-an-object, the museum selects objects with varying price points, however, these are objects that the museum would like to procure for its permanent collection. Donors can then provide the funds for the museum to purchase these items for its collection. For this research study, these types of fundraising campaigns will be referred to as adopt-an-object unless referencing a specific museum campaign.

Museums have been changing their missions and visions over the years to be more relevant and accessible to the communities they serve. However, there is not much in the literature to reflect these updates in the department of fundraising. The impact of personalization in fundraising campaigns can be found in the literature of the broader non-profit sector and when looked at closely can be applied to museums. This includes understanding donor motivations for giving, donor stewardship and acknowledgement. As museum fundraising professional, Salvatore Cilella (2011) stated,

We must still understand the world in which we exist and know ourselves inside and out before we venture into the marketplace. We still must make and keep friends for our institutions in good times and bad. We must still care and nurture those who care and nurture our institutions. Fundraising is still "friendraising" (p. 25).

This also includes relationship-based fundraising or insuring you are developing a relationship with visitors and community members to cultivate a relationship that can lead to a financial donation (Jung, 2015).

A major tenant of adopt-an object campaigns is the plea to preserve collection items through proper collections care. The Smithsonian Institute (2005) provides a definition of collections care that emphasizes the importance of organizing and maintaining collections to keep them "safe, accessible and in good condition" (p. 110). The need for collections care has been cited in much of the literature and includes the plea to preserve cultural heritage for future generations (Ashley-Smith, 2003; Buck, 2010; Giuchen, 1982). While a variety of museums use adopt-an-object fundraising campaigns to meet this need of preserving specific collection items, this type of campaign has not been researched from a donor development stand point nor from the point of view of potential relationship building opportunities.

### **Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The purpose of this research study was to understand museums' use of adopt-an-object fundraising campaigns and their effects on donor base. Research questions that guided this study include:

- What are the rationale and impetus for implementing adopt-an-object campaigns in museums?
- What is the nature of adopt-an-object campaigns in museums?
- What impacts does the museum perceive this strategy has on the growth and diversity of its donor base?
- How have adopt-an-object campaigns changed museums' relationships with their donors?

### **Implications**

The results from this study shed light on the donor-museum relationship created through this campaign and its overall impact on number of donors introduced to the museum. It also

provides an overview of advantages and challenges of operating and maintaining such a campaign as well as the type of relationship formed between the museum and its donors. Thus, museum development and collections departments may both be interested in the findings to better their own fundraising strategy towards expanding donor base and preservation of collection objects through a more personalized form of donor engagement. The results demonstrate the effects of diversifying fundraising strategies away from traditional means. It may also be of use to museums interested in growing their presence in the community through allowing individuals to obtain a sense of ownership in their local institution.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The purpose of this research study was to understand the use of adopt-an-object fundraising campaigns to expand donor base within museum fundraising and development. This study drew from three main bodies of literature: fundraising theory including individual giving and donor motivations; relationship based fundraising; and collections care and creative solutions to increase collections care funding. A small fourth body of literature will be referenced that is specific to adopt-an-object fundraising campaigns. Due to how the literature on this topic is descriptive in nature, it is used to create context and inform key definitions and terms. Chapter two of this research study places this research study within the existing literature while highlighting any significant gaps that arise.

### **Fundraising Theory**

For many organizations in the non-profit sector maintaining daily operations, public programming and services relies on the development and fundraising capacities of the staff. A key element of this body of literature focuses on understanding the various aspects of individual donors and their motivations for giving. As traditional sources of funding have dissipated, competition for financial support has become increasingly challenging (Bose, 2015; Grace, 2005; Maehara, 2003). The American Alliance of Museum's (2012) report "Annual Conditions of Museums in the Economy" states that a regular source of funding for museums, government support, has decreased. The report also notes that "corporate support is especially uncertain...[and] cannot be planned or anticipated with any accuracy" (p. 3). With less traditional sources of funding available, competition for support has increased. This creates an opening for more innovative ways of fundraising that rely on creating positive relationships with donors and the public. Creating and cultivating a relationship between the organization and the donors is a

fundraising strategy used in the nonprofit sector and includes understanding individual donor motives for supporting an organization, donor retention and impacts of donor acknowledgment.

## **Individual Giving**

### *Understanding Donor Motivations*

As much of the literature notes, people give to organizations for various reasons, including personal experience, common interest, concern for current issues, and their financial capacity (Gardner, Seltzer, Phillips & Page, 2015; Grace, 2005). Donor motivations may vary, thus the museum must be prepared to cater to these motivations. Cilella (2011) notes, "to succeed, you must explain exactly why you seek the funding, why your project is compelling, who will benefit, and why the money is needed now" (p. 47). Although there are multiple motivations that spur donor giving, some such as Burnett (2002) and Sargeant (2010) believe that one of the more significant motivations for giving includes the desire for recognition amongst colleagues and friends. Other donor motivations include peer pressure, guilt, and sincerely believing in supporting the organization's or museum's mission (Cilella, 2011). Sargeant and Shang (2010) break down some additional motivation theories including the *public good theory* where donors recognize that society benefits from the work the organization is doing and "as a member of that society they too will derive benefit from [their] donation" and the *warm glow effect* where donors give "because they feel better about themselves for having made the donation" (p. 68). Maehara (2003) takes this a step further by stressing the importance of not only donor motivations for giving, but understanding how the change in donor demographics affects these motives.

Traditionally in museums, successful fundraising includes understanding "the internal contexts in which the museum operates: the internal culture of the institution; the marketplace in

which fundraising occurs, and the continuity of approach, or donor relations" (Cilella, 2011, p. 28). Understanding the prospective donors is key as "it is imperative to show that you are relevant to today's rapidly changing landscape" (p. 28). A survey of 1,526 self-reported donors conducted by Bhagat, Loeb and Rovner (2010) explored the charitable habits of four generations, Matures, Boomers, Gen X and Gen Y. The first form of engagement with an organization for 61% of Boomers and 71% of Matures was with a donation. Gen X and Gen Y were at lower percentages of 51% and 42% respectively, showing how other methods of engagement such as attending an event, engaging online or volunteering have increased. Bhagat, Loeb and Rovner's study suggests that the younger generations "more often go through one or more cultivation step prior to making their first donation" (p.16). The study furthers this by recommending that organizations look at multiple channels for engaging donors and evolve with the changes found within each demographic. Sargeant and Shang (2010) mirror this in how they note,

each generation is profoundly influenced by the times in which its members grew up. They listen to the same music; are exposed to the same media; experience the same major cultural, social and political developments...Nonprofits can thus use the icons, imagery, and language appropriate to each generation when soliciting gifts from or trying to grab the attention of a specific audience (p. 156).

The Millennial Impact Report (2015) provides current information and influences on the newest group of donors aged 20-35 years old. Researched by the Case Foundation, the report, based on 2,953 responses from online surveys of Millennials offers new insights into the youngest generation of donors and their giving trends. The report found that Millennials want to know how their donation has made an impact or resulted in "measurable, quantifiable outcomes" (p. 3). The Millennial Impact Report (2016) also found that education and health care were rated the highest issues of interest. Sargeant and Shang (2010) also note that Millennials draw from community and social networks, "both 'real-world' and Internet based" (p. 546). Similarly The Center for the Future of Museums stated in their 2014 TrendsWatch Report that "funders,

especially younger, high-wealth donors, fund according to measurable impact, rather than a fuzzy desire to “support the arts” or help their community” (p. 10). In museums, Cilella points out that donors prefer a cause to support rather than feeding the museum's budget and “want to see a vision, a notion of what lies beyond tomorrow. But they also want to respond to valid needs that have not been artificially concocted to raise dollars” (2011, p. 58).

A philanthropy movement that has heavily influenced Millennials, effective altruism, is described by Singer (2015) as a “social movement which applies evidence and reason to working out the ways to improve the world” and requires “charities to demonstrate their effectiveness” (p. 3). Effective Altruism places the question of “Where can I have the biggest positive impact?” before “What is most urgent?” and encourages thinking of “not just the biggest impact right now or this month or this year, but over the longest period for which it is possible to foresee the consequences of my actions” (p. 118). Effective Altruism requires donors to decide what to fund through “using reason and empirical evidence to ensure that one’s donations do the most good possible” (Rubenstein, 2016, p. 513). This requires donations to causes that allow for impact to be measured such as public health and cash transfers, creating a “measurement bias” in what effective altruism donors will support (p. 517). This bias is addressed in The Center for the Future of Museums' 2014 TrendsWatch where nonprofits with social service goals are compared to cultural nonprofits. “The latter are increasingly being seen as hobbies of the rich and undeserving of public support” (Merritt, 2014, p. 11-12). In order to meet for-profit competition and other nonprofits in measurable impact, “museums are working hard to document how they help meet essential social goals—to establish that they are ‘necessary rather than nice’” (p. 13). With the rise of effective altruism museums are left asking if they make a big enough impact and create meaningful change in the lives of others. The Center for the Future of Museums' 2017

TrendsWatch notes that leaders in the field are challenging "museums to develop bolder visions for the impact they can have on society" to remain relevant (p. 14).

### *Donor Stewardship and Acknowledgement*

Once donor's motives become clearer, optimizing donor retention and maintaining donor loyalty becomes the organization's priority and is often referred to as stewardship or in Grace's (2005) words as "the critical function by which organizations develop lasting relationships with the donor-investors" (p. 142). Donor retention relies on a relationship of trust (Sargeant, 2008) and mutual respect (Grace, 2005). Cilella (2011) notes that museums "must build trust. You do that by staying true to your mission" (p.25). For museums, staying mission driven centers fundraising efforts around what the museum has to offer. Cilella clarifies this offering "is authenticity-the objects in your care are authentic, and the stories behind them are real and, more than often, compelling" (p. 26).

Also important is insuring the organization meets donor expectations and nurtures the initial bond created from the first donation to the second (Sargeant, 2001). Additionally donor acknowledgement, signs of gratitude and recognition post-donation is a vital factor in donor retention and can include the basic thank you note or more lavish methods such as receptions or parties (Cilella, 2011; Grace, 2005; Sargeant, 2008). Cilella further states "the sincerest way to a donor's heart is simple and genuine gratitude. Saying thank you with no strings attached, [and] no additional asks or invitations" (p. 58). This point is furthered by the finding that "sixty-one percent of donors say they've received a request for a second gift with their 'thank you.' Eighty-one percent have been offended by this" (Burnett, 2002, p. 86). However, increasing communication to include ongoing feedback to donors with the specifics of how their funds have

been put to use is recommended for non-profits to foster a relationship with their donors and community.

### **Relationship Fundraising**

Conventional forms of fundraising place the organization and the organization's needs at the center of their fundraising efforts and often treat donations as transactions between the donor and the organization (Burnett, 2002). Relationship fundraising connects the donor through a cause to the organization and places the donor at the center of the fundraising. Maintaining the organization-donor relationship is considered successful, as opposed to receiving short-term transactional donations. This is a more donor-based approach to fundraising that values relationships with its donors, often called relationship fundraising (Burnett, 1996; Waters, 2009).

This type of fundraising has been defined by Burnett (2002) as the following:

Relationship fundraising is an approach to the marketing of a cause that centers on the unique and special relationship between nonprofit and each supporter. Its overriding consideration is to care for and develop that bond and to do nothing that might damage or jeopardize it (p. 38).

Jung (2015) more clearly defines relationship-based fundraising as caring "more about developing relationships with broader community members who can be future donors and supporters rather than focusing on conventional ways of raising funds from traditional wealthy patrons" (p. 256). Gathering continued support for the museum from a wider range of community members requires building lifelong relationships between supporters and the organization and transparency (Burnett, 2002; Cilella, 2011). This type of fundraising is predicted to be more sustainable than relying on single major donors. It encourages organizations to view donors as active participants in the organization, working towards a common mission and goal (Burnett, 2002). It focuses on "the specific interactions that motivate a customer to remain in the relationship, [and] to invest further in the relationship through additional support"

(Prince & File, 1994, p. 174). The relationship created between the donor and the museum assists in overall donor retention. This retention is paramount as it secures an immediate gift but also the donor's future potential as a continued ally of the institution (Burk, 2003). Burk continues that fundraisers have become systematic in how they interact with donors which has prevented the growth of a more meaningful individual relationship stating, "practitioners have become less and less focused on the single donor in an attempt to deal with the numbers instead of the people that those numbers represent" (p. 16). Although the term, relationship fundraising, has its roots in the fields of public relations and marketing, it has been referenced in the literature on non-profit management. It has, however, not been utilized extensively in the literature in reference to museum specific fundraising models or development.

Relationship fundraising allows for a more community-based approach to fundraising in a time when the traditional wealthy museum donor pool is shrinking (Jung, 2015; Maehara, 2003). With this revenue stream decreasing it is imperative that organizations look to diversify their donor base to include more of their community and a variety of ways to give (Lundquist, 2012; Waters, 2010). This includes younger donors who have different attitudes towards museums and giving money to support arts and culture organizations (AAM, 2013). While many donors are not satisfied with simply giving to an organization, and instead want to be more involved with the delivery of the organization's mission, the new generation of donors take this a step further and want to see the visible impact their donation has made (Johnson Grossnickle Associates, 2011). This mirrors the findings on Millennials and their motivations through effective altruism.

Providing measurable results from fundraising campaigns or tangible outputs correlated to how donor funds were used, increases donor response to fundraising asks (Cilella, 2011;

Grace 2005). Maehara (2003) furthers the point that a younger generation of donors has the capacity to give and that organizations must update their methods of cultivation to meet the needs of the changing demographic. Providing a measurable impact requires communication between the donating community and the organization, especially in the museum field where a measurable impact is not always clearly noted or measured. Forging strong relationships through relationship fundraising leads to donor retention and individuals who are more willing to give back to the organization through donations or volunteering (Chung, Marketti & Fiore, 2014; Gardner, 2015). Burnett (2002) in his book, *Relationship Fundraising* includes a chapter on Creative Approaches to Relationship Building that states the most successful campaigns provide a clear picture of what the donation achieves: "many donors would prefer to give \$45 to an identifiable, comprehensible goal than to give \$10 to a general appeal" (p. 229). Structuring your fundraising asks with clear monetary amounts is a way to show the impact a donation will have on the organization.

### **Collections Care**

A large foundation of this research study is role of the museum in caring for museum collection objects and the costs associated with this. Collections care stated by the Smithsonian Institute is the museums task of keeping objects "safe, accessible and in good condition" (2005, p. 110). The need for collections care has been cited in much of the literature as a way to preserve cultural heritage for future generations (Ashley-Smith, 2003; Buck, 2010; Giuchen, 1982). Much of the literature on collections care uses the vocabulary and terms conservation and restoration that Gael De Giuchen (1999) differentiates as either increasing the life expectancy of collection objects (conservation) or restoring an object to its historic conditions (restoration).

#### *Preventative conservation*

A third term, preventative care, also called preventative conservation is one of the most cost-effective types of collections care (Buck, 2010). Preventative Conservation as defined by The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is "the mitigation of deterioration and damage to cultural property through the formulation and implementation of policies and procedures" (n.d.). These policies and procedures include regulation of temperature and humidity as well as proper artifact storage materials, thus adjusting the conditions in which the objects are housed (Staniforth, 2013). Purchasing materials for preventative conservation is a cost-effective way to care for collection objects and can assist in mitigating more expensive conservation costs later on.

Proper preventative conservation according to UNESCO includes "appropriate environmental conditions; handling and maintenance procedures for storage, exhibition, packing, transport, and use..." (n.d.). The effects of deterioration brought on by humidity changes, light exposure, and pollution can be irreversibly damaging to objects thus preventative conservation and awareness of best practices is the best solution for collections care (Buck, 2010; Plenderleith and Werner, 1971). However for many museums with limited funds, proper basic storage to mitigate these factors may seem unobtainable (Buck, 2010).

Proper storage, staff time and preventative conservation are all elements that fall under collections management expenses and many museums are turning to outside funding as a way to support or supplement the care of their collections. Much of the literature on the rising costs of collections care have pointed to a decrease in grants specific for artifact care and preservation. This has led to creative alternatives for raising the necessary resources and funds to care of the objects in the collection. These have included stories of museums creatively involving more student workers to underwrite costs and funding opportunities to support these workers and

interns. The National Museum of American History has created a partnership with local universities to create student practicum positions to assist in rehousing collection objects. This program was created in part to increase object-level storage of artifacts in a time when resources and collections care funding were stretched thin (Coughlin & Stout, 2015). Similarly the Durham Museum turned to student interns to assist in working through their photograph collections when their grant funding ran dry (Meyer, 2015). Their new fundraising campaign directed donors to funding the student workers themselves as opposed to the work involved in the care of the collection. This campaign led to "a few dedicated donors who are impressed with our process and are continuing to support the program year after year" (p. 58). These alternative methods of collections care fundraising provide the needed resources to properly care for important museum objects.

### **Adopt-an-object**

Adopt-an-object fundraising campaigns, offer potential donors a variety of objects, artworks, and artifacts that need conservation, preservation or proper rehousing and storage supplies that the interested donor can financially support through a monetary donation. Often times this includes the hiring of a conservator or specialist to preserve the piece. This can also include the purchasing of necessary archival supplies to properly handle and store the artifact or piece.

Museums have a variety of ways that they make this campaign known to the public. These include online web pages with a selection of objects available for adoption, or a webpage explaining the adopt-an-object process and who to contact at the museum to get involved. Some institutions select a specific artifact that is in need of care, removing the step of having a donor select their preferred object. The Museum of Anthropology at Wake Forest University in North

Carolina has a specific letter writing campaign geared towards individual donors, that highlights the conservation needs of a selected collection item, focusing the publicity and fundraising efforts on one item at a time (Bryner, 2012). Similarly the Williamson Museum in Georgetown, Texas has an "artifact of the month" based fundraising campaign where donated funds go to a pre-selected, specific item of the month (Williamson Museum, n.d.).

Adopt-an-object fundraising campaigns often include a follow-up or type of donor recognition that the donor receives for their generosity (Heritage Preservation and Institute of Museum and Library Science, nd; North Carolina Connecting to Collections, nd). The example that The Heritage Preservation and Institute of Museum and Library Science provides is at the Chicago History Museum where "each donor receives a personalized packet, which includes a certificate, a photograph of the chosen item, and a description of its historical significance." Similarly the North Carolina Connecting to Connections (n.d.) blog provides an example from the North Carolina Museum of History where donors are invited to an unveiling ceremony where the large artifacts that were restored are on view for the first time in their new condition.

Alternatively and sometimes in addition to other methods of recognition and gratitude, donors are recognized in exhibit labeling that corresponds to the object that was adopted (Heritage Preservation and Institute of Museum and Library Science, nd; North Carolina Connecting to Collections, nd). Another method of donor recognition is printing the names of those who have adopted an artifact in museum newsletters (Carr, 2012; North Carolina Connecting to Connections, n.d). This type of campaign allows for costs of necessary artifact conservation or preventative conservation materials or staff time to be paid for by a donor. Due to the range of artifacts often presented for adoption and costs associated with their preservation

this type of campaign has the potential to appeal to non-traditional donors who may respond to a more personalized funding plan with the museum.

### **Gap in the Literature**

While much of the fundraising literature available is focused on non-profit management, there is little written on museum fundraising specifically. This could be due to how museums have traditionally relied on the same funding sources such as grants and government funding. Individual donors have had the same profile as described by Jung (2015) and Maehara (2003) with little diversification over the years away from the wealthy older individual, until recently. Relationship fundraising, when applied to a museum setting, allows for a move-away from traditional sources of funding such as major donors towards more community based approaches that draw from more individuals within a larger audience. This is due to the personalized nature of the fundraising that is inclusive of all giving levels.

The literature available on adopt-an-object fundraising campaigns is mostly descriptive covering examples of how donors are acknowledged post-adoption and how a museum chooses to publicize its individual adopt-an-object fundraising campaign. Although these are helpful in defining the basics of this type of fundraising campaign, the role of this type of campaign in building relationships with donors and its impacts on museum donor base have not been looked at. The nature of adopt-an-object fundraising campaigns have also not been established nor situated within the literature regarding individual giving or donor-nonprofit relationships. Questions that have not yet been addressed that this study investigates include: How are museums using these fundraising campaigns to cultivate donor relationships? Does this method of fundraising provide a more sustainable individual giving donor base?

### **Chapter 3: Methods**

The purpose of this research study was to understand museums' use of adopt-an-object fundraising campaigns and their effects on donor base. The following research questions guided this study:

- What are the rationale and impetus for implementing adopt-an-object campaigns in museums?
- What is the nature of adopt-an-object campaigns in museums?
- What impacts does the museum perceive this strategy has on the growth and diversity of its donor base?
- How have adopt-an-object campaigns changed museums' relationships with their donors?

This study utilized a descriptive case study design (Yin, 2007) and collected data using online questionnaires to collect more quantitative and background information, and semi-structured interviews with museum professionals in museums that have a role in operating this type of fundraising campaign. The following chapter describes the research sites, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, and methodological limitations.

#### **Sampling**

Museums were selected to participate in the study based on the online visibility of their adopt-an-object fundraising campaign. Only museums with an online landing page describing this type of campaign and ways of donating were considered. This was to ensure that their campaign was publically accessible to the majority of potential donors. A stratified purposeful method of sampling was used to identify research sites. Different types of museums were approached including a textile museum, art museum, historical museum, and a subject specific museum. This method of sampling allowed a diverse range of museum types, potentially

developing trends that are more relevant to a broader range of museums. Within each type of campaign, museums were identified who had campaign longevity and significant donor buy-in visible online. These institutions potentially held the most data on their donors and the workings of their respective campaigns.

Within these institutions, museum professionals were identified who had knowledge of the campaign's workings and access to information and more quantitative data on how many donors participate in the campaign. Often these were the main managers of the campaign who were members of the museum development, curatorial or collection management team. Following each interview the museum professionals were asked to identify another potential person within their museum who held a role in the campaign and could be interviewed to corroborate the information given.

### **Research Sites**

Four museums participated in the study including two history museums, one art museum and one fashion and design museum. At each institution the manager of the campaign was identified. The job titles of these managers varied from institution to institution and included a collection manager, development coordinator, curator, executive director and paintings department assistant.

### **Data Collection**

The first part of this study involved administering an online questionnaire (see appendix A) to gather introductory information about the museum's campaign and how much information they were collecting on their donors. Museum professionals who agreed to participate in the study worked with the lead researcher to set a timeline for participation in both the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview. The questionnaire was sent via email to all consenting

participants at a mutually agreed upon time and included a consent statement at the start of the questionnaire, informing participants that their participation was voluntary and that they could discontinue their participation at any time with no penalty. The lead researcher then scheduled the second part of this study, over the phone semi-structured interviews (see appendix B for interview prompts) with questions intended to dig deeper into the research study questions. Semi structured interviews were conducted with the same consenting individual about a week after the questionnaire had been sent out.

The researcher tried to obtain multiple interviews from each participating site. However they ended up with only one site that could provide two interviews. A total of four questionnaires and five semi-structured interviews were conducted with museum professionals across four sites. These interviews lasted about 30-45 minutes.

### **Data Analysis**

This case study design allowed analysis within each museum and then across each participating institution to analyze functioning adopt-an-object campaigns within their real-life context. The researcher first grouped each interview question under each research question. Because there were 2 interviews from one site, the researcher first looked for similarities and differences across these two interviews. She then looked for similarities across each interview question across all 4 sites, highlighting any large themes that arose under each research question. After similarities were identified across sites, differences we pulled out and highlighted. The answers to the questionnaires and interviews were analyzed using Excel to create a structure to highlight themes and sub-themes (see coding matrix in Appendix C). During this process there was an abundance of informative data that allowed the researcher to implement a fourth research question asking what the nature of adopt-an-object campaigns are in museums.

**Limitations**

The stratified purposeful sampling method focused on institutions with established campaigns that held more data on their donors and the impact the campaign had on their donors. This means that museums selected are potentially exemplary cases of adopt-an-object fundraising campaigns with larger budgets and resources. Some of the campaigns have been operating for some time so interview questions that asked the participant to reflect back on the steps of campaign implementation may include hindsight from the institution on what has worked well rather than what their original goals were.

A second limitation may be the small sample size of participants. In all but one instance, the participating museums only had one manager of the campaign who could speak towards the details of the campaign. This led to a lack of corroboration within almost all sites and to some gaps in the interviews. As some of the managers were not the first people to implement the campaign they were unable to elaborate on the early beginnings of the campaign and the rationale for starting the campaign.

Lastly, each museum used their adopt-an-object campaigns in different ways. The researcher had to expand the definition of adopt-an-object to encompass how each participating museum defined it differently. Due to the small sample of four museums it is possible that other museums may be using a similar campaign in different ways. However, this research strove to define the various ways adopt-an-object was found to be used among the 4 participating sites.

## Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

The following chapter provides the results and findings of this research study. Each participating institution is described in detail to provide context around their respective adopt-an-object campaigns and how they function. The results and findings of this study are organized by research question, followed by themes and sub-themes that arose from data analysis.

### Case Descriptions

#### *Museum 1*

Museum 1 is a medium to large state history museum focusing on the past, present and future of the state in which it is located. Its collection objects include a large civil war era collection which is where its adopt-an-artifact campaign has found its success. The museum's adopt-an-artifact campaign is based online and provides images and short descriptions of various artifacts in need of conservation that can be selected by the donor. Estimated costs of conservation are listed after the artifact's description. To adopt, the interested donor must contact the manager of the campaign whose contact information is provided at the bottom of the adoption page.

Launched in June 2007, the campaign is run by one staff member of the museum, the collection manager. Although the museum has an online presence for adoption options, the adopt-an-object campaign allows the potential adopter to suggest types of things they are interested in preserving and the collection manager tries to meet those needs and suggest potential objects. The campaign has found success with a collective giving model where an interested group of donors pool their funds and adopt an object together. The primary groups have been local civil war reenactment groups who collectively adopt a flag from that era and fundraise within their group to reach the required conservation amount for that chosen flag.

Museum 1's adopt-an-artifact campaign averages about 2-3 group adoptions of flags from their collection a year.

### *Museum 2*

The second institution in this study focuses on textiles, fashion, accessories and the importance of design. The museum categorizes itself as a "small-large museum" or a large museum that is on the smaller side comparatively to other well-known large museums. Museum 2's adopt-an-object campaign is tied to the museum's main volunteer group that supports and promotes the museum's exhibitions, programs and fundraising efforts. Members of this volunteer group are frequent adopters individually and collectively. The museum's adopt-an-object campaign was started in 2011 and is used to acquire objects for the museum's collection. A more recent aspect of this program is to conserve objects that may need some additional conservation. The museum's adopt-an-object webpage provides examples of previous adoptions. To select an object for adoption, the potential donors contact the manager of the program directly, the curator.

### *Museum 3*

The third museum participating in this study is an art museum with several curatorial areas. They started their adopt-a-painting campaign in 2009 with the goal of conserving the paintings and frames in their collection. Because of the diverse curatorial areas that the museum has, the adopt-a-painting program includes a range of painting styles and eras for adoption. Adopt-a-painting is run by the paintings department and one person manages the administration of the program, the Paintings Department Assistant. Museum 3's website provides step by step instructions for how the process works as well as a descriptive list of what the donors will receive in return for their adoption. Potential donors can select paintings from a list online that

includes a description of the artwork's conservation needs as well as a cost for the adoption.

#### *Museum 4*

The final site participating in this study is a history museum focused on the industrial history of America. Its adopt-an-artifact program includes various levels for adoption providing a range of funding amounts from \$100-\$50,000. Its website provides a list of benefits that the donor receives for adopting an artifact that changes depending on what level of giving is met. Alongside artifacts, the museum also provides exhibit interactives as potential adopted objects as a way to provide their visitors with educational and immersive experiences. Museum 4 started its campaign in January of 2016 as a way to engage the community before the museum opened its doors in August of 2016. The campaign is managed by a Director of Development with the help of a marketing and outreach coordinator.

#### 1) What are the rationale and impetus for implementing adopt-an-object campaigns in museums?

Two main themes emerged relative to the reasons why museums decided to start an adopt-an-object campaign – the need for funding, and the desire to create more personal connections between the public and the museum's objects.

#### *Need for Funding*

The first theme focuses on the need for funding and financial support. All four sites acknowledged that much of what drove them to develop adopt-an-object campaigns was the importance of raising funds either for the conservation of their collection objects or for the acquisition of new objects. Museums highlighted their need by stating that they had "so many works that needed to be conserved" and that "these things [artifacts] could use some help, we need some funding to do the conservation." One museum commented that they had always put efforts into fundraising for acquisitions, but that terming the campaign "adopting" made it stand

out from just "fundraising" and made it more fun. Those with adopt-an-objects that focused on conservation of collection objects mentioned how their museums hold many works in need of care and preservation. The need for funding and resources to aid the museum's goals was apparent. Museum 2 whose adopt-an-object is geared towards collection object acquisition stated that the goal is to "build up our collection and find resources to acquire objects that it would not necessarily have come in as donation."

For some museums the need became more apparent through interactions with others or through an institutional planning processes. A respondent at Museum 1 mentioned how a reporter for a local newspaper contacted him to discuss some of the artifacts from a nearby county in the museum's collection that might need some conservation or care. The respondent then thought, "Well that's a great way to look at it, if we could put out there these things could use some help, we need some funding to do the conservation, someone could adopt these pieces." Similarly inspiration struck for adopt-an-object at Museum 4 when their planned funding for their needs proved to be insufficient. Museum 4 had budgeted an amount for the care of their artifacts prior to installation: "When we started getting the bids and realized what the cost would be it was beyond what our original budget was for the activity. So we had to come up with a way to raise the additional funds."

#### *Desire to Create More Personal Connections between the Public and Objects*

Museum 4 is unique in that they started their adopt-an-artifact campaign before the museum was open. This allowed for the two respondents from Museum 4 to provide recent ideas on rationale for implementing the campaign as a tool for preparing the surrounding community for the role the museum would like to take on. One of the respondents stated a goal of implementing the campaign was, "to get our name out there before we opened. Get people

thinking about what they were going to see." Another respondent from Museum 4 took this a bit further in how the campaign would actively engage donors through the artifacts prior to having an open museum. She stated that the campaign built

"...awareness of the museum and the stories before opening and built up anticipation in the community by having sort of the sneak peek of these different objects and giving some ownership and buy-in of the members in the community because the first group of objects that we put on our site were objects being cleaned and prepared and moved into the gallery for opening."

Museum 4 used the campaign to not only create some publicity around the museum's opening, but also to actively engage the community with specific objects and stories.

Although other museums provided responses in the same vein of engaging donors through their collection objects, it seemed these comments included hindsight and some museums looking back at good reasons to implement adopt-an-object based on how their campaign currently operates. However, the reasons provided by Museum 1 and 2 share good rationale for other institutions interested in implementing this method of fundraising. Museum 1 stated that adopt-an-artifact was "just another way that people can connect with the museum and our objects." While Museum 2 took the idea of engaging donors further by describing the emotional connection that can be made and why they decided to use the term "adopt" for this fundraising method. The respondent stated:

"It's basically a way to raise funds and to have our patrons feel as if they really become a part of their object because it's not just giving money to buy an object. If you adopt an object, it's like you adopt a child or you adopt a pet. You know you really are putting an emotional connection into that and that's what we want our donors to feel for the objects that they adopt and that's why we ended up using that terminology."

The breakdown of the term "adopt" clarifies why these museums chose to implement adopt-an-object not only for fundraising purposes, but because of the relationships and connections it can cultivate between the public and objects in the collection.

## 2) What is the nature of adopt-an-object campaigns in museums?

Data from this study speak to several aspects of adopt-an-object campaigns, including their goals, advantages and the primary challenges inherent in implementing and sustaining such campaigns.

### *Challenges*

Across all institutions time was brought up as a challenge to implementing and running adopt-an-object but was also something each museum reportedly deals with to continue operating their campaign. From working with the institution's donors to matching up internal museum timelines to work with staff, time management of adopt-an-object took different forms. Museums 2, 3 and 4 mentioned time directly. Museum 2, when speaking about providing their donors with the best possible experience stated, "There is never enough time. This, adoption takes a lot of time and energy." The participant expanded on this by saying that each donor wants to feel like they are the only ones adopting and receiving that exclusive personal access to the museum. While Museum 2 spoke of time in regards to donor management, Museum 3 mentioned time in regards to internal museum timelines and matching up the painting department's timeline with the conservation department's schedule. On a broader scale, Museum 4 pointed out that running the museum and preparing for their opening while trying to maintain their campaign put a strain on time and resources. Finally Museum 1 mentioned time indirectly having an impact on their adopt-an-artifact through the need to meet the demand of their donor base. The respondent stated,

"The hard part for us early on was to meet the demand because 10 groups wanted something done right now and that's impossible. We can really do one or two [artifacts] a year with something that's really expensive and difficult. It's also difficult to find a conservator in private practice who can actually do the work for you. It's funny, it's feast or famine."

Because each museum has continued their campaign regardless of this challenge it is seen as a factor that can be overcome through each museum's unique system of management.

### *Advantages*

Two museums brought up how adopt-an-object was a mechanism through which they could connect with potential donors and meet their development goals. Museum 1 talked about their adopt-an-artifact as a way to connect with people who reach out to the museum asking how they can provide support, stating that "it puts a structure on this type of thing..and I think that structure is nice because if they call out of the blue and ask a question you can say, "Check this out, this might give you some ideas." It provides a way for the museum to showcase some artifacts and provides interested supporters with a way to donate to the museum. Adopt-an-object also provided another way for museums to reach larger goals that they had set forth. Museum 2 stated that their adopt-an-object goals were to "build up our collection and find resources to acquire objects that it would not necessarily have come in as a donation."

An advantage that one museum pointed out was its educational purpose in how the campaign shed light on an often hidden aspect of museums, collections care. The participant contrasted how visitors often are not familiar with the process of collection management and preservation: "I think that it brings awareness of the museum's role that's happening behind the scenes and gives an understanding to our donors, our visitors to this whole other side of the museum that they're really not privy to...it helps build awareness for that role as steward and what's really involved in that."

One museum also described another advantage, the creation of inter-departmental work within the museum. The participant described how the campaign has reached across different curatorial departments and including the conservation lab, leading to more involved relationships

within the museum. She described how the campaign has brought together different museum departments and how it "creates cross-departmental work, which is nice."

Across 3 institutions every respondent provided the same tip for those interested in implementing an adopt-an-object campaign, know your audience. Museums 1 and 4 mentioned how understanding your collection needs as well as those who you are trying to engage is essential to making the personal connection. This included understanding the collection objects and how they fit into the community that the museum is a part of. Museum 1 stated, "What are the things in your collection that need the most care and do you think you can find a group to adopt...I think the targeted nature of this makes it so nice. You can adapt it this to be just about any type of object you just got to figure out which group you got to reach out to." Museum 4 stated something similar in how the museum must first understand its collection and then reach out to interested people. The participant recommended, "The number one thing, is to think about what your collection is and who it appeals to and make sure you are trying to reach those people as best you can." This was mirrored in Museum 2 as well who stated the "institution has to look at its supporters, the people that are most interested in it for whatever reason and get to know them and then tailor a capital campaign to those individuals."

3) What impacts does the museum perceive this strategy has on the growth and diversity of its donor base?

Through discussion of museum tracking/correspondence procedures, museum membership groups, and donor habits, three themes emerged that speak to museums' perceived impacts of their adopt-an-object campaign on donor growth and diversity: 1) tracking methods vary; 2) connection to the museum; 3) connection to the collection objects.

*Tracking methods vary*

Determining museums' impacts on donor growth and diversity was hindered by the fact that sites took varying approaches to tracking adopt-an-object donors and donations. Some museums reportedly track different amounts of information about their donors ranging from solely the name of the donors to if they are museum members, and how often they attend museum programs or events. There was also a range in how the museums tracked donor information. While some museums used membership databases or their own spreadsheet system, some museums relied more on the institutional and personal knowledge collected by the campaign managers and those involved. Museum 2 mentioned that "donors are tracked through [their] registrar's office whenever [they] have something adopted," but further explained that they "maintain personal relationships with all of our donors and that's kind of how we track them. And find out about their interests and things." This personal method of tracking donors was also visible at Museum 3 where standard information is retained in the museum's accounting but that, "It's still a more one-to-one personal kind of stuff...So basically it's a first name basis for our program really. I have a simple spreadsheet that we keep track of our conservation priorities and then it's first names in there of who we know is going to take what work."

Contrastingly one participant at Museum 4 reportedly collects information such as if the donor is a museum member and if they have donated to other things alongside their adopt-an-artifact information. Interestingly they are able to tell that their adopt-an-artifact donors come pretty regularly to their programs. This has also allowed them to differentiate between those donors who live nearby and are able to attend museum events as opposed to those who are adopting via their online platform from outside of the museum's immediate area.

*Connection to the museum*

Data across all four sites suggests that museums see adopt-an-object campaigns impacting donors' connections to the museum, although the nature of that connection varied. Two of the sites felt that adopt-an-object enhanced donors' connection to the museum itself, however this was with an already established set of museum supporters, while two sites emphasized connections to museum objects as creating growth in the museum's donor base.

Two of the participating institutions identified that there was no or little growth in their donor base as their adopt-an-object donors were already supporting the museum in some way before they gave through the adopt-an-object campaign. For example, Museum 3 acknowledged that some of their adopt-a-painting donors were also major gift donors and that all of the donors had an already established relationship with the museum in some capacity. For example this past year, since January 2016, the museum had 3 adopt-an-object donors who were already museum members and were not new donors to the museum. To further this point the respondent predicted that new donors to the adopt-a-painting campaign would

"...probably be from a pool that already exists within the museum membership. We kind of have our constituents that want to invest here, that's sort of a well established set of people, not that they're not cultivating more of course, always."

Similarly, Museum 2's donors have frequently come out of their main volunteer group that already has an established relationship with the museum. The museum has had approximately 20 adopt-an-object donors this year, since January 2016, with approximately 7 of these being new donors to the museum. Members may be new to adopt-an-object providing minimal growth to the donor base of this museum, but have already connected to the museum in some other capacity. This process was described by the respondent in the following way:

"Generally it's first to an event so they get introduced to the museum and then we get to know them more and more, and then we find out informally

what their interests are and how involved they might like to be in the museum and that often can lead to a potential adoption."

Although this process relies on the donors having a pre-formed relationship with the museum, adopt-an-object holds an important role in increasing engagement. The respondent from Museum 2 stated, "For us, adopting objects has become a natural part of the museum's outreach."

For the other two sites, growth in donor base has come from an interest in the collection objects and histories themselves rather than from a connection to the institution. The two history based museums found instances of adoptions based on the stories that were connected to the objects and their significance. Museum 1 had two new adoptions over the last year from groups who had strong historical connection to their civil war era flags. The respondent stated,

"In this case these were flags and their groups are very tied to, some of them it's even their relatives who were in a particular regiment or whatever. So their history is tied to what they're adopting, even their family history so it means a lot to them."

This connection to the collection objects has brought in new groups of donors, civil war reenactment groups, for this institution.

Similarly, Museum 4 reported instances of adoptions based on strong connections between the donor and the artifact. Because Museum 4 recently opened its doors one respondent noted that almost all their donors are new donors so donor base growth has been substantial with 16 new donors this year. However potential reasons for bringing in donors to their campaign is the connection to the artifacts that they have. One respondent stated, "I know we get a lot of people who adopt the artifacts who have some kind of connection, familial connection to the industry...actually I know a couple people bought things in memory of somebody who had passed who worked here."

4) How have adopt-an-object campaigns changed museums' relationships with their donors?

The researcher asked how the institutions acknowledged donors who donate to adopt-an-object, in what ways the institution interacted with donors post- adopt-an-object donation and how the museum would describe its relationship with adopt-an-object donors. Participating institutions were asked to elaborate and reflect on how these interactions differed from other types of donor interactions, for example compared with a major gift or in-kind donor. Two large themes emerged from this study: 1) providing tangible items in exchange for funds; and 2) creating a more personal connection.

*Providing Tangible Items in Exchange for Funds*

Across institutions, donors received some sort of recognition and acknowledgement for their adoption. This could include a credit line that lives with the object but more often included more such as follow-up photographs of the conserved object, a visit to the conservation lab to see the work being treated, a certificate, a plaque in the museum, or a behind-the-scenes museum tour. Museum 4 reportedly changes the type of acknowledgement dependent upon the donor's level of giving. All of these forms of acknowledgement provide something in exchange for the donation to adopt-an-object.

Providing something tangible for their donation, as opposed to abstract giving to a general fund, was further discussed at Museums 1 and 4. The respondent from Museum 1 described the adoption process that relies on museum donor interactions around their shared object. He described a particular interaction between the museum and a civil war reenactment group:

“I'll have our textile conservator talk to them about ‘Okay, this is what this needs’ and kind of educating them about why we're not just going to slap it up but take our time and conserve it correctly and frame it in a frame that's going to last 20 or

30 years. It's interesting, it's kind of like we're training them, here's the reason you're spending this much money it's because it needs...So it's kind of neat because I think they know a lot, especially the ones who have been doing this for 5 or 10 years now, they know almost as much as we do about materials and things.”

This process culminates with a planned event held at the museum for their group of adopters:

"We usually have a special day where the group can come and meet in our auditorium and we have a fancy unveiling and then they get a production. For the members." This day provides a way to celebrate the completed conservation and see the preserved object that the group's funds supported. Similarly Museum 4 commented on how this type of campaign provides something tangible in exchange for donation, something that museums have struggled with in the era of effective altruism. One of the respondents stated,

“From a donor perspective, I think it gives us an opportunity to offer people something that museums don't get to do a lot. Which is a tangible show of where their money is going and so I think it's an easier sell sometimes to say to somebody give me \$100 to preserve this artifact instead of how bout you donate \$100 to the museum to help us operate. It's a tangible way where people feel like their money is doing something real.”

#### *Creating a more personal connection*

Participants across all four institutions expressed the personal connections that this campaign allowed the museum to create with its donors. Adopt-an-object created a way for donors to connect with the museum on a personal level through their shared interest, a collection object. Adopt-an-object provided a sense of ownership for the donor over their object as described by the respondent from Museum 2 who stated that they selected the term "adopt" so that donors "would feel a personal connection and know also that that object would forevermore be theirs, it just happened to be stored at [Museum 2]." Similarly Museum 4 mentioned how this personal connection draws people in who would not normally donate to the museum: "It [adopt-an-artifact] seems to rally a group that wouldn't necessarily be satisfied with making, say a \$200

gift to the museum. But if they are seeing 'Oh, I can adopt a steel workers hard hat,' that has more of a personal connection for them." This interviewee further explained how the personal aspect of the campaign allows for the museum to reach donors who are not directly in the museum's community:

"Because there is a very rich history of people who worked in these local industries, so a lot of family stories, I think that engaged someone from like Nebraska who adopted something in honor of a family member, I don't think that would have happened if we hadn't had a program like this."

This was echoed by Museum 1's respondent:

"I don't think they would have been interested in just a general thing. They wanted something that was very personal to them. So I think maybe that's the whole hook, you have to find that way to show that these objects will be personal to you."

This same theme of creating a personal connection between donor and museum was also present in Museum 3 but was present more from the museum professional's viewpoint. The respondent stated, "The inter-personal relationship with the donors, it's really the best part. And developing ongoing relationships with them on a more permanent basis." She also pointed out how the campaign is just fun and is centered on enthusiasm for both sides:

"They interact with me directly so they are not going through an office and passing messages around. They call and email me directly to arrange their visits, that kind of stuff. It's just very informal... It's all very simple and it's all fun. Everybody enjoys seeing something go from a mess to this beautiful thing. There's a lot of levity to it. And enthusiasm, the whole thing is based around enthusiasm..."

## Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this study was to understand adopt-an-object fundraising campaigns and the impact they have on donor base through exploring: the rationale and impetus for implementing adopt-an-object; the impacts adopt-an-object had on the growth of donor base; and how the campaign changed the museum-donor relationship. Using a case study design, data were collected through an online questionnaire, followed by in-depth interviews with museum professionals managing adopt-an-object at 4 institutions. This chapter highlights conclusions from the study and situates them within the literature, and suggests further implications for practitioners and the field.

### Conclusions

*What are the rationale and impetus for implementing adopt-an-object?*

The findings of this study suggest that museums choose to implement adopt-an-object in situations where additional funding is needed for collection object conservation and preservation. This decision was influenced from the museum's budget needs as well as the ongoing need to preserve various objects held in the museum's collection. In one instance the museum that was using adopt-an-object as a way to acquire new objects for the museum's collection was interested in procuring objects that would not have entered into the museum's collection through a normal object donation.

The need to preserve artifacts and objects for future generations has been cited in much of the literature around the importance of collections care (Ashley-Smith, 2003; Buck, 2010). Collection management includes expenses such as staff time, materials for proper storage and often times the hiring of a conservator or specialist. The need to fund these expenses have led to

museums implementing creative alternatives such as student practicum or internship programs to meet the mounting costs of collections care (Coughlin & Stout, 2015; Meyer 2015).

The second theme that arose from the interviews of this study was how adopt-an-object campaigns provided more personal connections between the public and the collection objects. While one museum was able to claim this as rationale for implementing adopt-an-artifact prior to the museum opening, other museums interviewed also mentioned this in hindsight as a good reason for museums to use this type of campaign and an outcome of them using it. There is no literature specific to adopt-an-object that discusses the stories and connections that the objects can provide to donors. However, Cilella (2011) mentions how museums stand apart from other non-profits in how the objects that museums hold in trust for the public are authentic and often are compelling for fundraising efforts that are mission driven.

*What is the nature of adopt-an-object campaigns in museums?*

Through interviews with museum professionals at each site the researcher sought to understand the workings and variances of adopt-an-object campaigns. It became clear through the initial questionnaire data collection that museums were not only using the campaigns in different ways but also receiving support in different ways. This question led to the broadening of the term adopt-an-object to not only include fundraising for object conservation but also procuring funds to acquire objects for a museum's permanent collection. This also allowed the broadening of understanding of how each campaign was being utilized. While one museum had instances of group collective giving only, two museums were drawing from their already established museum supporters for the campaign. These instances of drawing on already established museum supporters mirrors the literature in how Bhagat, Loeb and Rovner's (2010)

study suggests that institutions maintain multiple "channels of engagement" with their supporters to capture all generations of interested donors.

This question also allowed the exploration of challenges and advantages to using adopt-an-object. Three participating museums encouraged those interested in such campaigns to research and understand their potential donors prior to starting such a campaign. This includes understanding the needs of the collection objects and the community that the museum is a part of. This idea is mirrored in the literature around donor stewardship and understanding donor motivations as Cilella (2011) notes, this allows museums to remain relevant in the ever changing landscape of donors and their motives.

*What impacts does the museum perceive this strategy has on the growth and diversity of its donor base?*

Participating museums tracked varying amounts of information about their donors of adopt-an-object. While two museums reported drawing from their already established donor or volunteer base with little or no new donors participating, the other two museums had instances of new donors adopting objects. While only a few museums had growth of their donor base, all museums saw the campaign impacting the amount of engagement between the donor and the museum.

*How have adopt-an-object campaigns changed museums' relationships with their donors?*

Museums reported that adopt-an-object allowed for the museum to offer tangible items in exchange for donor funds. This took the form of photographs, certificates and credit lines for the object that was provided to the donor. During the conservation process often times museums provided updates or educational information on the object's progress. The literature around donor acknowledgements encourages this ongoing feedback with the specifics of how funds are being

utilized. Some participating museums mentioned that their donors probably would not have donated to just a general fund or to support the museum's operation costs.

This change in donor acknowledgement and providing tangible items to donors is explained in the literature around newer generations of donors and the shift towards effective altruism as a giving philosophy. Effective altruism encourages non profits to demonstrate their impact and effectiveness (Singer, 2015). While adopt-an-artifact does not fall under the most popular category that effective altruists support, social service, it does allow the donor to see measurable impacts from their funds.

Lastly, adopt-an-object was reported across all four institutions to create a more personal donor-museum relationship that could be built upon. These relationships could have been created by the donor's emotional connection to the particular object that they adopted or with the museum itself. The literature suggests that building these close relationships with donors and regarding each instance as unique is more sustainable (Burnett, 2002). Museums commented on how creating a personal connection with each donor requires time but mirrors the literature on relationship based fundraising in how creating these connections is better than just a short-term transactional exchange (Burnett, 1996; Waters, 2009).

## **Implications**

These four museums with their associated data offer the field an example of adopt-an-object fundraising in practice including reasons for implementing such a campaign, the challenges, the rewards and if it has an impact on museums and their donors. As Museum 2 commented, adopt-an-object allows for the donor to feel a sense of ownership in their museum through their act of adopting, and to create a connection to the object as well as with the museum. While each participating institution had a different origin story to their campaign, there

was a consistent reason for implementing or why they thought it should be implemented, the personal, sometimes emotional connection it creates between the donor and the object.

The conclusions of this study offer practitioners in the field, ranging from collections managers to development coordinators, an alternative approach to raising funds for conservation or object acquisition while building more personal relationships with donors. This study strove to include a variety of museum types to show trends more applicable to a broader range of museums. Although this was partially accomplished, the study more shows two different types of adoption campaigns and the variety of ways that museums have made it work for their fundraising needs. Because museums were only included in the study if they had donor buy-in or campaign longevity, the four cases represented may be exemplars in the field that may be challenging to replicate in other institutions depending on budget constraints, staff capacity and understanding the specific museum's donor interests.

While this study outlines some sites bringing in new donors through adopt-an-object, a larger study across more institutions could verify that adopt-an-object is a definitive method of reaching new donors. Across all sites, the respondents spoke of the positive relationship this campaign has created. However, this study focused on the museum professional's perceptions of this campaign and the ideas of how the museum-donor relationship has changed. Research has yet to be done on the donors perceived change in relationship around this fundraising method and how adopt-an-object creates a similar or different relationship between the donor and museum compared to other giving methods. Further research along these lines would give strength to understanding the uses of adopt-an-object fundraising and enrich how museum professionals implement and operate their campaigns with their donors at the center.

## References

- Adopt An Artifact. (2011, December 9). North Carolina Connecting to Collections. [blog]  
Retrieved from <https://collectionsconversations.wordpress.com/2011/12/09/adopt-an-artifact/>
- American Alliance of Museums. 2013. *Trendswatch 2013: Back to the Future*. <http://www.aamus.org/docs/center-for-the-future-of-museums/trendswatch2013.pdf?sfvrsn=4>
- Ashley-Smith, Jonathan. (2003). Sustainability and Precaution. In Staniforth, S., & Getty Conservation Institute (Eds.), *Historical perspectives on preventive conservation* (354-360). Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute.
- Bose, B. (2015). *Essays on nonprofit competition*. Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1722484634).
- Bryner, Kyle Elizabeth, Sarah Cromwell. (2012). Creative Conservation Funding at the Museum of Anthropology, Wake Forest University. Retrieved from <https://collectionsconversations.wordpress.com/2012/04/20/creative-conservation-funding-at-the-museum-of-anthropology-wake-forest-university/>.
- Buck, R., Gilmore, Jean Allman, & American Association of Museums. (2010). *MRM5 : Museum registration methods* (5th ed.). Washington, DC: AAM Press, American Association of Museums.
- Burk, Penelope (2003). *Donor-centered fundraising : How to hold on to your donors and raise much more money* (US ed.). Chicago, IL]: Burk & Associates/Cygnus Applied Research.
- Burnett, Ken (1996). The Future of Relationship Fundraising: What's Next. In *The Future of Relationship Fundraising*. Retrieved from <https://www.tgci.com>.

- Burnett, Ken (2002). *Relationship fundraising : A donor-based approach to the business of raising money* (2nd ed., Jossey-Bass nonprofit and public management series). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Capitalize on Collections Care: Generate New Contributions, Increase Support Foster New Audiences. (n.d.). Heritage Preservation and Institute of Museum and Library Science. Retrieved from <https://www.heritagepreservation.org/PDFS/COClo.pdf>
- Carr, Meegan. (2012). The National Quilt Museum of the United States, Raising Funds For Collections Care [PowerPoint Slides]. Retrieved from <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B4jeMQtIQsXQNUhuTD11bk1jQ2s/view?pref=2&pli=1>
- Cilella, S. (2011). *Fundraising for small museums : In good times and bad* (American Association for State and Local History book series). Lanham, Md.: AltaMira Press.
- Chung, T., Marcketti, S., & Fiore, A. (2014). Use of social networking services for marketing art museums, *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 29:2, 188-205. DOI: 10.1080/09647775.2014.888822
- Coughlin, M. & Stout, S. (2015). The Increase and Diffusion of Collections Care Knowledge: A Partnership. In Decker, Juilee (Ed.) *Collections Care and Stewardship* (35-42). Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Gardner, Liz, Seltzer, Trent, Phillips, Andrea L. & Page, Rachel E. (2015). The Influence of Message Source and Cultivation Strategies in a Nonprofit Public Relations Context. In Waters, Richard D. (Ed.), *Public Relations in the Nonprofit Sector: Theory and Practice* (219-231). New York: Routledge.
- Grace, K. (2005). *Beyond fundraising : New strategies for nonprofit innovation and investment* (2nd ed., AFP fund development series). Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons.

Guichen, Gael De. (1982). A challenge to the profession. *Museum International*, 34(1), 4-5.

Johnson Grossnickle Associates. 2011. Millennial Donors Report 2011. [http://casefoundation.org/resources/millennial donors 2011 report.pdf](http://casefoundation.org/resources/millennial%20donors%202011%20report.pdf)

Jung, Y. (2015). Diversity Matters: Theoretical Understanding of and Suggestions for the Current Fundraising Practices of Nonprofit Art Museums. *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society*, 45(4), 255-268.

Lindqvist, K. (2012). Museum finances: challenges beyond economic crises. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 27(1), 1-15. DOI: 10.1080/09647775.2012.644693

Maehara, P. (2003). Seeing the Forest: New Donor Demographics. *Museum News*, 82 (5), 32-35.

Merritt, Elizabeth. (2009, March 4). Forecasting the Financial Future of Museums Part II: What Are Our Options?. *Center for the Future of Museums*. [blog] Retrieved from <http://futureofmuseums.blogspot.com/2009/03/forecasting-financial-future-of-museums.html>

Merritt, Elizabeth. (2014). *TrendsWatch 2014*. Center for the Future of Museums. Retrieved from <https://aam-us.org/ProductCatalog/Product?ID=4520>

Merritt, Elizabeth. (2017). *TrendsWatch 2017*. Center for the Future of Museums. Retrieved from <https://aam-us.org/docs/default-source/center-for-the-future-of-museums/trendswatch-2017.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

Meyer, C. (2015) Collection Curriculum: Caring for Objects, Educating Students. In Decker, Juilee (Ed.) *Collections Care and Stewardship* (53-61). Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.

Millennial Impact Report: 2015. (2015). Retrieved from <http://casefoundation.org/resource/millennial-impact-report-2015/>

Millennial Impact Report: 2016. (2016). Retrieved from

<http://casefoundation.org/resource/millennial-impact-report-2016/>

Plenderleith H.J. & Werner A.E. (1971). The Conservation of Antiquities and Works of Art:

Treatment, Repair and Restoration. In Staniforth, S., & Getty Conservation Institute (Eds.), *Historical perspectives on preventive conservation* (288-301). Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute.

Prince, Russ & File, Karen. (2001). *The seven faces of philanthropy : A new approach to cultivating major donors* (1st ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Rubenstein, J. (2016). The Lessons of Effective Altruism. *Ethics & International Affairs*, 30(4), 511-526.

Sargeant, Adrian (2001). Relationship Fundraising: How to Keep Donors Loyal. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 12(2), 177-192.

Sargeant, Adrian. (2008). Charitable Giving: Donor Retention: What Do We Know and What Can We Do About it? Retrieved from

[http://www.afpnet.org/files/ContentDocuments/Donor\\_Retention\\_What\\_Do\\_We\\_Know.pdf](http://www.afpnet.org/files/ContentDocuments/Donor_Retention_What_Do_We_Know.pdf)

Sargeant, A., & Shang, Jen. (2010). *Fundraising Principles and Practice* (Essential Texts for Nonprofit and Public Leadership and Management). Chichester: Wiley.

Smithsonian Institution. Office of Policy Analysis. (2005). Concern at the core: Managing Smithsonian collections : Executive summary, April 2005.

Staniforth, S., & Getty Conservation Institute. (2013). *Historical perspectives on preventive conservation* (Readings in conservation). Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute.

Waters, R. (2009). The Importance of Understanding Donor Preference and Relationship Cultivation Strategies. *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing*, 21(4), 327-346.

- Waters, R. (2010). The value of relationship and communication management in fundraising: Comparing donors' and practitioners' views of stewardship. *PRism Online PR Journal*, 7(1), *PRism Online PR Journal*, 01 January 2010, Vol.7(1).
- Yin, R. (2014). *Case study research : Design and methods* (Fifth ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE

**Appendix A: Questionnaire**

## Adopt-an-Object and Donor Base Questionnaire

1. How long have you worked at your museum? (in months)
2. What is your job title?
3. What is your role with the adopt-an-object campaign?  
(Is there a particular part of the campaign that you manage?)
4. In what MONTH did the adopt–an-object campaign start at your museum?
5. In what YEAR did the adopt–an-object campaign start at your museum?

Donors

1. How many objects have been adopted since January 2016?
2. How can a donor choose an object to adopt?
  - a. Can choose from a variety of objects pre-selected by the museum
  - b. The museum chooses their object
  - c. There is only one object that people can contribute any amount to
  - d. Other\_\_\_\_\_
3. What information do you record about the donors of Adopt-an-Object? (Check all that apply) - Donor information that is tracked
  - \_ If they are a first time donor
  - \_ If they have ever been to the museum
  - \_ How many times they have donated to the museum
  - \_ If they are a current/or have ever been a member of the museum
  - \_ What programming or events they might be interested in attending
  - \_ The donors reasons for donating to the campaign
  - \_ Other\_\_\_\_\_
4. How many donors has the campaign had since January 2016?
5. How many of these donors are museum members?  
  
Please type zero if none are members, or N/A if this data is unavailable.
6. Not including adopt-an-object donors who are members, how many adopt-an-object donors attend museum programs (lectures, tours, etc.)?

New Donors

1. How many of the adopt-an-object donors are new donors? (never donated to the museum in any capacity before)
2. How many of these new donors are museum members?
3. Have any of these new adopt-an-object donors donated in other ways?

- a. If yes, how many?
- b. If yes, what type of donation:
  - Adopt-an-object (donated more than once)
  - Capital Campaign
  - Exhibit sponsorship
  - Event sponsorship
  - In-Kind
  - Other\_\_\_\_\_

4. Have any of these new donors participated in museum programs since donating to Adopt-an-object?
  - a. If yes, how many?
  - b. If yes, what type of programs?

Is there another person at your museum who assists in maintaining the campaign and might be interested in participating in my study? If yes, please share their information below.

Name:

Position:

Email:

Phone Number:

Questions or Comments?

## **Appendix B: Interview Guide**

Researcher: Stefanie Terasaki // Email: sterasak@uw.edu // Phone: 425-213-0591

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Jessica Luke, Museology Graduate Program, University of Washington

Phone: 206-685-3496 // Email: jjluke@uw.edu

### Interview Questions:

How long have you worked at [Museum]?

How would you describe your adopt-an-object campaign to someone who knows nothing about it?

### **Rationale/Impetus for Implementing Adopt-an-object Campaign**

1. In what year did the museum first initiate its adopt-an-object campaign?"
2. What were the reasons your museum decided to implement an adopt-an-object campaign? Probes: Why did you decide to do an adopt-an-object campaign as opposed to some other type of fundraising campaign? How did your museum become aware of this type of campaign? Were there other organizations using this campaign strategy that inspired you?
3. How many Development staff are involved in running the adopt-an-object campaign? Probes: At what FTE? How many volunteer hours, if any, are devoted to it?
4. Describe the beginning steps of the campaign, what was the first step, second, step, etc. until now?
5. How was the campaign advertised to the public? Other forms of outreach?
6. What do you see as advantages to implementing an adopt-an-object campaign?
  - a. and challenges?
7. Have you encountered any staff resistance around the campaign?
  - a. If so what kind?
8. What are the museum's goals for the adopt-an-object campaign? How will you know if it's been successful?

### **Impacts on Growth and Diversity of Donor Base**

9. How do you track donors to this campaign? Probes: What information do you collect about these donors?

10. What do you know about donors who give to the museum through your adopt-an-object campaign?
  - a. How are they similar to and different from other donors?
  - b. What is their relationship to the museum? Do they tend to be museum members? Frequent visitors? Non-visitors?
11. Has this campaign brought in new donors?
  - a. If yes, why do you think that's the case? What do you know about these new donors?
  - b. If not, why do you think that's the case? Were you expecting it to?
12. Has it increased the number of individual donors?
  - a. Family donors?
  - b. Corporate donors?
  - c. "In memory" donors?
  - d. Other specific types of donors?
13. If donors to this campaign are new, have they participated in the museum in other ways since donating?

**Relationships with donors**

14. How do you acknowledge donors who donate to adopt-an-object?
  - a. How do you acknowledge donors of other fundraising campaigns/major gifts? (similarities? differences?)
15. In what ways does the museum interact with the donor after they support an object?
  - a. Specific correspondence relating to the object?
  - b. Further donor solicitation?
  - c. Other?
16. How would the museum describe its relationship with adopt-an-object donors? In what ways is it similar to and different from the museum's relationship with other donor types?
17. What can other museums learn from your institution in terms of implementing and sustaining an adopt-an-object campaign?

**Appendix C: Interview Coding Matrix****Rationale/Impetus for Implementing**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>Example</b>
Funding Need	<p>The goals are to build up our collection and find resources to acquire objects that it would not necessarily have come in as a donations. (Museum 2)</p> <p>When we started getting the bids and realized what the cost would be it was beyond what our original budget was for the activity. So we had to come up with a way to raise the additional funds. (Museum 4)</p>	<p>Our adoption program is basically a way for people who want to invest in the museum but are not necessarily able to take on the purchase of a new work for the museum and we have so many works that need to be conserved. (Museum 3)</p>
Desire to create personal connections	<p>Build up anticipation in the community by having sort of the sneak peek of these different objects and giving some ownership and buy-in of the members in the community because the first group of objects that we put on our site were objects being cleaned and prepared and moved into the gallery for opening. (Museum 4)</p>	<p>It's basically a way to raise funds and to have our patrons feel as if they really become a part of their object because it's not just giving money to buy an object. If you adopt an object, it's like you adopt a child or you adopt a pet. You know you really are putting an emotional connection into that and that's what we want our donors to feel for the objects that they adopt and that's why we ended up using that terminology. (Museum 2)</p>

**What is the nature of adopt-an-object campaigns in museums?**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>Example</b>
Challenges	<p>There is never enough time. This, adoption takes a lot of time and energy. Huge amounts of energy. Because every single person who adopts wants to feel like they</p>	<p>The hard part for us early on was to meet the demand because 10 groups wanted something done right now and that's impossible. We can really do one or two [artifacts]</p>

	<p>are the only person and the most important person who's adopting for the museum. Even if they know all these other people are adopting objects they want that personal connection, that personal touch, that personal access. (Museum 2)</p>	<p>a year with something that's really expensive and difficult. It's also difficult to find a conservator in private practice who can actually do the work for you. It's funny, it's feast or famine. (Museum 1)</p>
Advantages	<p>I think it kind of, it puts a structure on this type of thing because people could twenty, thirty years ago, people were asking how could they help the museum. It's really nice if you have, like we have some artifacts on here now, on our page, which give people kind of an idea of what we have, how much it would cost to adopt something. (Museum 1)</p>	<p>I think that it brings an awareness of the museum's role that's happening behind the scenes and gives an understanding to our donors, our visitors to this whole other side of the museum that they're really not privy to by walking through and learning and being educated. So I think it helps build awareness for that role as steward and what's really involved in that. (Museum 4)</p>
Tips for Implementation	<p>What are the things in your collection that need the most care and do you think you can find a group to adopt; I think the targeted nature of this makes it so nice. You can adapt it this to be just about any type of object you just got to figure out which group you got to reach out to. (Museum 1)</p>	<p>That would be the number one thing, is to think about what your collection is and who it appeals to and make sure you are trying to reach those people as best you can. (Museum 4)</p> <p>And what works for [Museum 2] may not necessarily work for another institution. That institution has to look at its supporters, the people that are most interested in it for whatever reason and get to know them and then tailor a capital campaign to those individuals.</p>

**Impacts does the museum perceive this strategy has on the growth and diversity of its donor base**

Theme	Example	Example
Connection to museum	But it will probably be from a pool that already exists within the museum membership. We kind of have our constituents that want to invest here, that's sort of a well established set of people, not that they're not cultivating more of course, always. But at this point we kind of have our core group and then we would be able to identify where they would come from, our already existing members or donors. (Museum 3)	Generally it's first to an event so they get introduced to the museum and then we get to know them more and more, and then we find out informally what their interests are and how involved they might like to be in the museum and that often can lead to a potential adoption. (Museum 2)
Connection to objects	In this case these were flags and their groups are very tied to, some of them it's even their relatives who were in a particular regiment or whatever. So their history is tied to what they're adopting, even their family history so it means a lot to them. (Museum 1)	I know that we get a lot of people who adopt the artifacts who have some kind of connection familial connection to the industry, the people who have been adopting the steel artifacts often had some kind of connection to, their father, their ... actually I know a couple people bought things in memory of somebody who had passed who worked here. As they've come in, so we've even got some from people who are far way, who's family maybe came from here or had some connection or story that relates. So I think there are a lot of people who did this because of that connection. (Museum 4)

### How have adopt-an-object campaigns changed museums' relationships with their donors?

Theme	Example	Example
Tangible Items in Exchange	I'll have our textile	From a donor perspective, I

for Funds	<p>conservator talk to them about okay this is what this needs and kind of educating them about why we're not just going to slap it up but take our time and conserve it correctly and frame it in a frame that's going to last 20 or 30 years. It's interesting, it's kind of like we're training them, here's the reason you're spending this much money it's because it needs.. So it's kind of neat because I think they know a lot, especially the ones who have been doing this for 5 or 10 years now, they know almost as much as we do about materials and things. (Museum 1)</p>	<p>think it gives us an opportunity to offer people something that museums don't get to do a lot. Which is a tangible show of where their money is going and so I think it's an easier sell sometimes to say to somebody give me \$100 to preserve this artifact instead of how bout you donate \$100 to the museum to help us operate. It's a tangible way where people feel like their money is doing something real. (Museum 4)</p>
Creating personal connection	<p>It seems to rally a group that wouldn't necessarily be satisfied with making, say a \$200 gift to the museum. But if they are seeing 'Oh, I can adopt a steel workers hard hat,' that has more of a personal connection for them. (Museum 4)</p> <p>If you can make anything personal, it's going to be advantageous to whatever it is you're doing. So and you never know when funds are going to come in, not only adopting an individual object but multiple objects. So if you get that person involved and emotionally attached to your institution, most likely they are going to be willing to do more than one "one-off" kind of an adoption. (Museum 2)</p>	<p>I don't think they would have been interested in just a general thing. They wanted something that was very personal to them. So I think maybe that's the whole hook, you have to find that way to show that these objects will be personal to you. (Museum 1)</p> <p>The inter-personal relationship with the donors, it's really the best part. And developing ongoing relationships with them on a more permanent basis. (Museum 3)</p>