

# WORKING ON WELLBEING

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A TOOLKIT FOR EMERGING MUSEUM PROFESSIONALS

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PROFESSIONALS NETWORK

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# FOREWORD

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## DEAR EMERGING MUSEUM PROFESSIONAL (EMP),

Museums can be amazing places to work, but they can also be exhausting places to work. Research suggests that many museum professionals experience burnout at some point in their career (Munro, 2014). This toolkit is designed to help you with that. This toolkit serves as a guide for managing your wellbeing as you navigate the museum profession. On the following pages you will find worksheets and other resources that will help you keep your thoughts organized. Use what you need and save what you might need one day.

Starting a new career can be daunting, but there's no need to stress. You have the tools you need to succeed, and there are more people in your corner than you realize. At the very least, I'm in your corner. The field needs your talents and perspectives, so take care of yourself.

## DEAR MUSEUM PROFESSIONALS,

Although this toolkit is designed for emerging museum professionals, there is always something new to learn. I suggest sharing this toolkit with new members of your organization, but also perusing the pages to better understand the wellbeing challenges all museum professionals face and to think about how you might be able to help facilitate positive wellbeing amongst your own colleagues.

There are many resources available in this toolkit, but even more valuable is your mentorship and allyship to emerging museum professionals. Each new generation of museum professionals brings new ideas, talents, and viewpoints to the table that make the value of our work even greater.

All My Best,

***Rebecca Lawler***

University of Washing Museology Graduate Program, Class of 2023.

# INTRODUCTION

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## I. FRAMING THIS TOOLKIT

Wellbeing is generally defined as one's emotional health and overall functioning. Ander et al. (2012) highlight markers of resilient mental health, or preventive and protected factors. They emphasize that wellbeing is largely about how you cope with the stresses that occur in day-to-day life, and how you maintain that level of resilience through certain activities or intentions in order to face stressful periods of life. Similarly, Dodge et al. (2012) review varying models of wellbeing and argue for the following definition: "the balance point between an individual's resource pool and the challenges faced" (p. 230). Therefore, wellbeing is largely based on gathering information and resources to develop resilience against external factors and build confidence through maintaining this equilibrium.

For Bakker and Schaufeli (2008) professional wellbeing, or wellbeing in the workplace, is dependent on positive organizational behavior, which evaluates the combined stressful and motivational job characteristics that impact professional wellbeing. They argue that job characteristics can be organized into two categories: job demands and job resources. If job resources (things that foster growth and development) outweigh the demands (things that require effort associated with physiological and psychological costs), then professional wellbeing is relatively positive—and vice versa. Basic benefits like a living wage, paid time off, and health insurance are not the only resources institutions should offer employees. While employee appreciation and support are not colloquially seen as job resources, Bakker and Schaufeli (2008) point to the importance of non-monetary appreciation as a key resource for workers.

Most museums are public, nonprofits that do not have large budgets. For museum workers in the cultural nonprofit and public sector, job demands usually outweigh resources provided to workers (Munro, 2014). Munro explains in his survey of community engagement workers in museums that due to their nonprofit status, many institutions cannot provide the

adequate resources to fully compensate demands of the job. This survey ultimately reports high levels of burnout caused by long working hours, inadequate training, and feeling underappreciated by administrations. In other words, the overall status of wellbeing the demands and needs in museums are increasing, but the resources are not increasing too, and so the museum field is running on exhaust fumes (Horowitz, 2020).

This toolkit aims to share information and resources that will help emerging museum professionals to focus on and maintain positive wellbeing in their work. Each section focuses on different aspects of wellbeing for new museum professionals, framed by Carol Ryff's Model of Psychological Wellbeing (2008), explained below. Section 1 addresses the most personal criteria of wellbeing, self-acceptance and purpose of life mostly through guiding worksheets. Section 2 focuses on networking as a form of relationship building and emphasizes the importance of supporting positive relations with others. Lastly, Section 3 offers resources for developing coping skills to support autonomy and environmental mastery

#### KEY TERMS

Wellbeing, Professional Wellbeing, Emerging Museum Professional, Networking, Coping

## II. WHO IS THIS TOOLKIT FOR?

This toolkit is designed for emerging museum professionals (EMPs). EMP is more of a self-defined term, meaning the individual can determine when they have “made it” or feel established in their career. Some emerging museum professionals are enrolled in higher education to learn about museums, and others recently began working at a museum and are curious about how they operate. According to the National Emerging Museum Professional Network, you could even be in museums for up to 15 years while considering yourself “emerging.” For the most part, it’s a state of mind. You decide when you relate to it, and when it no longer applies to you.

The saying goes “there’s power in numbers,” and there’s certainly no exception when it comes to being an EMP. There are many ways to connect and network with fellow EMPs, like forming a club in your graduate program or organizing an outing with your peers where you work. If you want to meet even more EMPs like yourself, make sure you’re in contact with your local chapter of the National Emerging Museum Professionals Network! This organization was founded in 2015, with a mission “to engage and support self-defined emerging museum professionals in building vibrant, equitable, and inclusive communities of networking, collaborative practice, and exchange.” To connect, visit their website and click on the “chapters” section.

### III. WHY DO EMERGING MUSEUM PROFESSIONALS NEED A WELLBEING TOOLKIT?

#### OVERVIEW OF WELLBEING IN THE MUSEUM FIELD

In March 2021, the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) surveyed 2,666 museum professionals in order to understand the state of people in the field following the first full year of the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the most notable results from this report was that when museum professionals were asked to rate the impact of COVID-19 on their mental health and wellbeing (on a scale from 0=no impact to 10=very strong impact, they gave an average rating of 6.6 out of 10 (AAM, 2021). What's more, students, a core group of EMPs looking to join the museum field, reported an average of 8 out of 10 when rating the impact of the pandemic on their mental health and wellbeing. While this report feels grim overall, it shows an opportunity to reconsider what museum professionals need to be successful. Increased wellbeing concerns for students, and concerns over burnout throughout the report, indicate a need for more in-depth wellbeing resources for emerging museum professionals.

Further reading into the 2021 report by AAM shows us the broader picture of museum professionals struggling with maintaining their own wellbeing. For example, this phenomenon is more common among women and BIPOC museum professionals. Women reported that they had to increase their work hours, thus creating more stressors on their mental health and wellbeing, compared to their male colleagues. BIPOC professionals reported higher financial stress without the same financial resources as white respondents.

More positively, the same report notes that the most common concern amongst museum professionals was the wellbeing of their colleagues, which indicates a strong sense of community, something beneficial for wellbeing.

## WHAT MAKES MUSEUMS CHALLENGING PLACES TO WORK?

The truth is, museum work can be rewarding, but also challenging. We know this from research, and likely personal experience too. This was the case before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the situation has certainly not improved since. For emergent professionals in the museum field, the usual stress that comes with starting a career is amplified by experiences like low pay, poor work/life balance, and emotional labor (Erdman, Ocello, Salerno, & Van Damme, 2017). These external factors indicate a need to maintain positive wellbeing strategies and to advocate for more support from the field, especially for emerging museum professionals who are trying to establish themselves while supporting their wellbeing.

Numerous concerns have been raised about aspects of museum work that don't support healthy wellbeing. In 2016, a group of researchers connected at an AAM conference and surveyed over 1,000 participants the following fall about why they left or would leave the museum field (Erdman, Ocello, Salerno, & Van Damme, 2017). The most common response was low pay, with other participants reporting poor work/life balance, workload issues, and insufficient benefits. For participants who reported pay as their reason for leaving, they were also emerging museum professionals who had been in the field for less than 10 years. Overall, a third of respondents agreed that pay was their reason for leaving. The only respondents who reported poor 'work/life' balance as their reason for leaving were 16-25 years into their museum career. As longstanding cultural institutions, museums and the people who work in them must engage with social issues. In the process, many are subjected to triggering topics or concepts, volun-told to perform tasks of emotional labor, and experience frustration against steadfast museum hierarchies.

## STRESS OF HIGH HOURS, BUT LOW PAY AND LOW BENEFITS

In a 2008 research study, Kosny & Eakin conducted direct observation and interviews of nonprofit employees about the occupational hazards of nonprofit work. They also shared literature indicating that those who work in nonprofits like museums are struggling to meet their job demands due to long working hours and low pay. In addition to struggling to make

ends meet, in many museums, workplace culture enforces a view of work as an extension of yourself, resulting in many museum professionals working additional unpaid hours, driven (or manipulated) by their institution's mission (Thistle, 2011).

Many museum professionals are unionizing in an attempt to address these issues. Horowitz (2021) describes unions as a tool to achieve better pay. Unions have the potential to increase solidarity across different departments, investing workers in each other's experiences in order to organize collective bargaining. Any subsequent strike would then have the potential to expand the average museum worker's ability to shape the overall ethical landscape of a museum, and not just wage. In a research study interviewing the wellbeing of 11 art museum professionals in unions, Bell (2021) identified three ways in which unionization can have positive effects on professional wellbeing: increasing job resources and decreasing job demands, fostering community, and making room to dream. Therefore, unionization overall increases worker wellbeing.

## HIERARCHIES AND POOR MANAGEMENT

Museum professionals can be grouped into two categories: workers and administration. Workers are those situated lower in the institutional hierarchy, like those in education, programs, and visitor services. Administration professionals are those situated higher in the institutional hierarchy, like managers or directors.

Groups and social media platforms like *Museum Workers Speak* (@museumworkerspeak) and *Change the Museum* (@changethemuseum) are giving museum workers a platform to air their grievances and express their concerns about workplace issues, the majority of which are about poor management, and hierarchical systems. *Museum Workers Speak* is an action-oriented platform for social change at the intersection of labor, access, and inclusion. On Instagram, *Change the Museum* has almost 900 posts submitted anonymously by museum professionals detailing unfair working conditions.

## EMOTIONAL LABOR

Much of what specifically makes museum work challenging is emotional labor. At work, emotional labor includes not only the primary tasks of their job, but the secondary addition of managing others' emotions, whether it be coworkers or visitors (Zapf, 2002). An example of emotional labor in a museum can involve discussing sensitive topics with people in the museum. Museums can feature content that is triggering for people, and many people come to museums for restorative experiences. With all the different factors that make up museums and the people who visit them, there is a lot of emotional labor behind keeping interpersonal communication positive.

Another trait of emotional labor in nonprofits like museums is the manipulation and repetition of the organization's mission (Kosney & Eakin, 2008). As an intern at a national historical park, I learned the infamous "get paid in sunsets" joke in the National Parks Service. The meaning behind the quote is that while you won't get paid much, you'll at least be surrounded by the idyllic views of nature. However, it is a good example of how employers distract employees by appealing to passions or emotions, like a love of nature.

## IV. THE GOALS OF THIS TOOLKIT

### THIS TOOLKIT HAS FOUR KEY GOALS:

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

*Before you move to the next section, take a moment to reflect on your goals for engaging with this toolkit. What made you pick it up and start reading? What do you hope it will do for you?*

## V. HOW TO UNDERSTAND YOUR OWN WELLBEING WITH CAROL RYFF'S PSYCHOLOGICAL SCALES OF WELLBEING

Professor Carol Ryff at the University of Wisconsin-Madison is one of the foremost wellbeing researchers, having studied it for twenty years before she entered more mainstream status (David, 2020). Ryff argues that wellbeing has six dimensions (Ryff et al., 2007; adapted from Ryff, 1989):

**Autonomy** – self-determining and independent; able to resist social pressures to think and act in certain ways; regulates behavior from within.

**Environmental mastery** – has a sense of mastery and competence in managing the environment; controls complex array of external activities; able to choose or create contexts suitable to personal needs and values.

**Personal growth** – has a feeling of continued development; sees self as growing and expanding; is open to new experiences.

**Positive relations with others** – having warm, satisfying, trusting relationships with others; being concerned about the welfare of others; feeling empathy, affection, and intimacy; understanding the give and take of human relationships.

**Purpose in life** – has goals in life and a sense of directedness; feels there is meaning to present and past life; has aims and objectives for living.

**Self-acceptance** – possesses a positive attitude toward self; acknowledging and accepting multiple aspects of self, including good and bad qualities; and feeling positive about past life.

Ryff believed that wellbeing should not be restricted to medical or biological thinking—instead she saw it as a philosophical question about the meaning of a good life (Ryff & Singer, 2008). Simultaneously, Ryff believed psychological theories of well-being at that time lacked empirical rigor—they had not been and could not be tested or measured. To begin applying scientific empiricism to philosophical questions, Ryff researched centuries of wellbeing theories, from Aristotle to Carl Jung (Ryff, 1989). Through identifying recurring themes and cross referencing such diverse literature, Ryff built a foundation for her model of well-being.

Before you move to the next section, consider completing Ryff's wellbeing questionnaire, to reflect on your current wellbeing.

[Link to 18 Item Psychological Well-Being Questionnaire](#)

[Link to 42 Item Psychological Well-Being Questionnaire](#) (More Statistically Sound)

# SECTION 1: KNOWING WHO YOU ARE

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## 1.A – WELLBEING STARTS WITH YOU

Wellbeing is a deeply personal concept, not a one-size-fits-all notion. Consequently, this toolkit starts by addressing Ryff's dimensions of self-acceptance and purpose in life.

Status of Criteria	What it Feels/Looks Like
<b>High Self-Acceptance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- You feel positive about yourself, identify, and accept the multiple aspects of yourself, good and bad.</li><li>- You also look at your past life in a positive light.</li></ul>
<b>Low Self-Acceptance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- You are dissatisfied with yourself, disappointed in your past self, and concerned about your personal qualities.</li><li>- You would like to be different than who you are.</li></ul>
<b>Strong Purpose in Life</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- You have identified goals and your direction. You also see meaning in your current and past life.</li><li>- Your beliefs give your life purpose, and you have overall objectives for your life.</li></ul>
<b>Weak Purpose in Life</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- You lack any goals, directions, or sense of direction.</li><li>- You see no purpose to your past life, and no perspective or beliefs that bring meaning to your life.</li></ul>

## 1.B – KNOWING YOURSELF AS A MUSEUM PROFESSIONAL

### WHY DO YOU WANT TO WORK IN MUSEUMS?

Ryff believes that a sense of purpose – goals and directedness – is an important piece of wellbeing. For me, that sense of purpose is about being clear about why you want to work in museums, what work you do and don't want to do in museums, and where you see yourself in museums in the coming years.

Here are some questions to reflect on your own sense of purpose in your early museum profession. Before you move to the next section, take a moment to answer these questions for yourself here.

Why do I want to work in a museum?
How do I present myself as a museum professional currently?
How do I want to be perceived by other museum professionals?
Prior to now, what strengths of mine have been noticed by others?
What weaknesses of mine have been noticed by others? How do I plan to manage them?

## 1.C – WORKSHEETS TO HELP GROUND YOURSELF

Write, type, draw, collage, or more through these prompts! Just do whatever you need to do in order to make this toolkit your own. These prompts are meant to guide you toward more in-depth questions about your professional wellbeing. Use these prompts and their answers anytime you feel the need to center yourself. This can help you on your journey to self-acceptance by encouraging you to embrace the unique aspects of yourself through noting what makes you happy.

### CREATE YOUR OWN WELLBEING MENU

*List all your comfort meals, shows, movies, etc. so you have it whenever you need a quick reference list.*

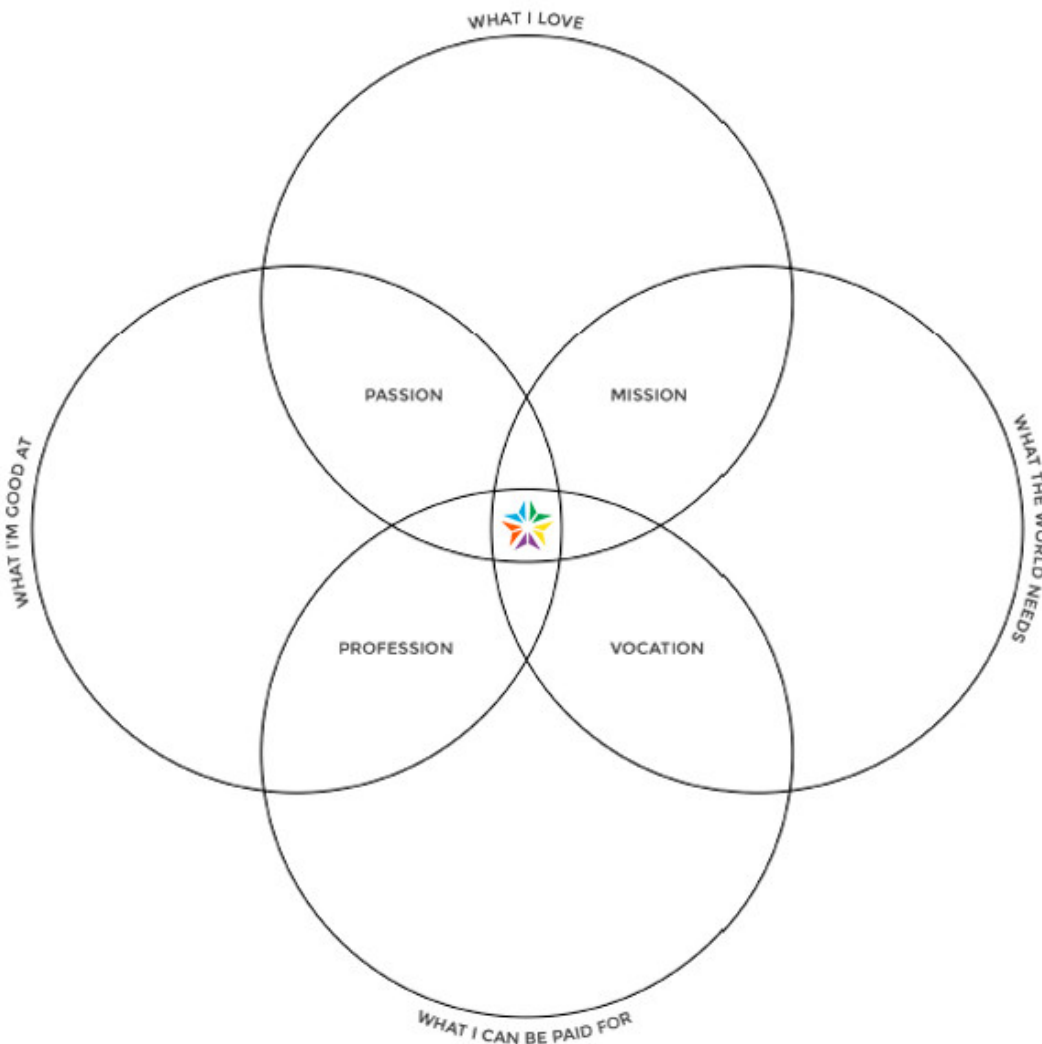
Things to Watch	Things to Do	
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

## IKIGAI DIAGRAM

Ikigai is a Japanese word that roughly translates to “life worth living”, and is basically a general sense of purpose in life (Sone et al. 2008).

Answer the prompts in the diagram below to articulate your passion, mission, vocation, and profession.

## Finding The Purpose of Life - IKIGAI



OTHER QUESTIONS TO GUIDE REFLECTION:

What are you proudest of?

What helps you relax?

Where do you feel at home and most balanced?

Where do you want to go, and how do you want to get there?

Who do you want to become?

## SECTION 2: YOUR CAREER & WELLBEING

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### 2.A – RELATIONSHIP BUILDING, AKA NETWORKING

Another core component of Ryff’s model of wellbeing is relationship building or social connectedness. This section of the toolkit focuses on positive relations with others and personal growth.

STATUS OF CRITERIA	WHAT IT FEELS/LOOKS LIKE
<b>Strong Positive Relations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- You have a fulfilling and trusting relationships and understand the give and take of human relationships.</li> <li>- This could feel like the “sense of belonging” you have to your school or work.</li> </ul>
<b>Weak Positive Relations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- You have few close, trusting relationships with others, and are isolated and frustrated in interpersonal relationships.</li> <li>- It’s difficult to strengthen positive relationships despite effort.</li> <li>- Ex. a dysfunctional workplace, or school.</li> </ul>
<b>Strong Personal Growth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continued development, being open to new experiences, and having the sense of realizing your potential.</li> <li>- You also see improvement in yourself and behavior over time and changing in ways that reflect more self-awareness.</li> </ul>
<b>Weak Personal Growth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- You feel personal stagnation, lack the sense of development over time, and feel uninspired by life.</li> <li>- This experience can be hard to break out of without a good support system to encourage new attitudes and behaviors.</li> </ul>

As an emerging museum professional, building community through relationship building (aka networking) is essential. Through networking, you not only have potential to advance your career, but also to foster a sense of belonging in your organization or overall field. It comes as a surprise to many, but networking is important to supporting wellbeing.

## INFORMATION ON NETWORKING

Many EMPs think about social connectedness in their work in terms of networking. They think that the goal is to meet as many people as possible, or to have as many LinkedIn connections as possible. However, Ryff argues that what is critical for wellbeing isn't how many people you know, but rather having trusted relationships. I'm advocating for a shift from networking to relationship building.

Ansmann et al. (2014) conducted a meta-analysis of research on the benefits and challenges of networking within the academic field, focusing on the experiences of early career academics. They found many benefits, including more perspectives and access to more opportunities. In professional societies, the opportunity to transfer professional norms across age groups was significant, indicating a possible avenue for promoting professional wellbeing in the workplace.

An additional research study conducted a diary study over 5 consecutive working days with 59 employees and found that there was a positive link between daily networking and career optimism (Volmer et al., 2021) Results also indicated that the need for affiliation (whether it be a professional society or just general sense of belonging) influenced the relationship between daily networking, task performance and career optimism.

## HOW TO START A CONVERSATION

As you work to build relationships with others in your workplace, it could be helpful to create a template for when you engage in conversation with them. This helps make sure you don't forget any important questions, and make you look more prepared. I'll share an example on the following page to give you an idea, but I suggest altering it to make it your own.

## Essential Information

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Information: \_\_\_\_\_

How I know them: \_\_\_\_\_

Current role, how long have they been there: \_\_\_\_\_

Experience prior to current role: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Optional Questions

What is a typical work day like?

What has surprised you most about your current role?

What do you wish you knew before you started in this field?

Do you recommend that I enroll in any classes or pursue certain certifications?

What do you see as the major trends and/or challenges in the field today?

What would you recommend that I read to keep me informed on trends in the field?

Who do you recommend that I talk with? May I tell them that you referred me to them?

Notes

Follow-up

## EXAMPLES OF PLACES TO EXPAND YOUR NETWORK

Larger Organizations	Descriptions
<a href="#"><u>The American Alliance of Museums (AAM)</u></a>	<p>The largest museum professional organization in the world, they offer a student membership rate. Also, many workplaces and study programs will offer to help with the cost of membership, so don't be afraid to ask!</p>
<a href="#"><u>AAM Museum Junction</u></a>	<p>Online forum where you can join or start a conversation with the AAM online community about topics important to you</p>
<a href="#"><u>Emerging Museum Professionals (AAM)</u></a>	<p>Library of resources ranging from career management, salary advice, and programming.</p>
<a href="#"><u>National Emerging Museum Professionals Network</u></a>	<p>One of the best places to start when you're looking to expand your network. On their site, you can find past webinars, newsletters, and a directory of museum studies programs with reviews, available whenever you need them!</p>
<a href="#"><u>International Council of Museums</u></a>	<p>A unique network of more than 35,000 members and museum professionals who represent the global museum community.</p>

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Organization</b>
<b>History</b>	<p><a href="#"><u>The American Association for State and Local History (AASLH)</u></a></p> <p>National association that provides leadership and support for its members who preserve and interpret state and local history to make the past more meaningful to all Americans.</p>
	<p><a href="#"><u>National Trust for Historic Preservation</u></a></p> <p>The National Trust for Historic Preservation protects significant places representing our diverse cultural experience by taking direct action and inspiring broad public support.</p>
<b>Science</b>	<p><a href="#"><u>The American Zoo and Aquarium Association</u></a></p> <p>The Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) is a non-profit organization dedicated to the advancement of zoos and aquariums in the areas of conservation, education, science, and recreation.</p>
	<p><a href="#"><u>Association of Science Technology Centers</u></a></p> <p>ASTC is a global organization providing collective voice, professional support, and programming opportunities for science centers, museums, and related institutions, whose innovative approaches to science learning inspire people of all ages about the wonders and meaning of science in their lives.</p>
<b>Children’s Museums/Learning Centers</b>	<p><a href="#"><u>Association of Children’s Museums</u></a></p> <p>ACM is a professional member service organization for the children’s museum field. ACM is the only organization representing museums and professionals dedicated to early childhood play, the starting point in the continuum of lifelong learning.</p>
<b>Art</b>	<p><a href="#"><u>College Art Association</u></a></p> <p>Promotes excellence in scholarship and teaching in the history and criticism of the visual arts and in creativity and technical skill in the teaching and practices of art</p>

<b>Specialty</b>	<b>Organization</b>
<b>Interpretation</b>	<p data-bbox="431 268 932 298"><a href="#"><u>National Association for Interpretation</u></a></p> <p data-bbox="431 323 1435 705">NAI is a not-for-profit professional organization dedicated to advancing the profession of heritage interpretation, currently serving about 5,000 members in the United States, Canada, and over thirty other nations. Individual members include those who work at parks, museums, nature centers, zoos, botanical gardens, aquariums, historical and cultural sites, commercial tour companies, and theme parks. Commercial and institutional members include those who provide services to the heritage interpretation industry.</p>
<b>Education</b>	<p data-bbox="431 735 841 764"><a href="#"><u>Museum Educators Roundtable</u></a></p> <p data-bbox="431 789 1435 936">Publishes the Journal of Museum Education four times per year. There is a Greater Boston Museum Educator’s Roundtable, like their Facebook page for discussion and networking.</p>
<b>Conservation</b>	<p data-bbox="431 970 997 999"><a href="#"><u>International Institute for Conservation (IIC)</u></a></p> <p data-bbox="431 1024 1419 1171">IIC is an independent international organization supported by individual and institutional members. It serves as a forum for communication among professionals with responsibility for the preservation of cultural heritage.</p>
	<p data-bbox="431 1201 964 1230"><a href="#"><u>American Institute for Conservation (AIC)</u></a></p> <p data-bbox="431 1255 1419 1524">AIC is the national membership organization supporting conservation professionals in preserving cultural heritage by establishing and upholding professional standards, promoting research and publications, providing educational opportunities, and fostering the exchange of knowledge among conservators, allied professionals, and the public.</p>
<b>Visitor Experience</b>	<p data-bbox="431 1554 773 1583"><a href="#"><u>Visitor Studies Association</u></a></p> <p data-bbox="431 1608 1435 1877">The Visitor Studies Association (VSA) is a membership organization dedicated to understanding and enhancing learning experiences in informal settings through research, evaluation, and dialogue. This organization works with researchers, practitioners, policy-makers, organizational leaders, and funders advance the field of informal learning.</p>

<b>Regional-Based:</b>
<a href="#"><u>New England Museum Association (NEMA)</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Association of Midwest Museums (AMM)</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Mid-Atlantic Association of Museums (MAAM)</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Mountain Plains Museums Association (MPMA)</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Southeastern Museums Conference (SEMC)</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Western Museums Association (WMA)</u></a>

[Link to State Museum Associations](#)

Affinity Organizations

[Association of African American Museums, \(AAAM\)](#)

[Council of American Jewish Museums, \(CAJM\)](#)

## 2.B – MAXIMIZING YOUR HAPPINESS

Create a blank document and save it on your desktop, start a tab in the notes app of your phone, or make a page in your journal to log your progress at work.

This can be a reference on days when you feel imposter syndrome, to show you how valuable your efforts are to your organization and remind you of the obstacles you've overcome. As a bonus, you can also easily refer to past projects when applying to jobs.

### Sample Work Log

Date: \_\_/\_\_/\_\_

Intention: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Gratitude: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Meetings:

\_\_:\_\_ > \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_:\_\_ > \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_:\_\_ > \_\_\_\_\_

Things to do:

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

Blockers: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## 2.C – UNSOLICITED ADVICE FROM A CURRENT EMP

### *Can I Share Some Advice?*

If you'll allow me to take a departure from the evidence-based elements of this toolkit, I'd like to share my top three recommendations for EMPs, based on my own experience.

### NETWORKING VS. RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Networking can seem slimy and cringey, and it honestly can be if you're approaching people only interested in how they can further your career. But, since my early museum days, I've made a point to connect with the people I work and study with. If I notice someone new joins at work, I make an effort to at least introduce myself. In school, I connected with classmates about different crafting interests. The point of this is to not force my classmates or coworkers to be my best friends, but rather to intentionally connect with my community.

And for the record, I don't feel great in many social settings. But it's so much better to be a little uncomfortable for a moment when you're getting to know someone new than to isolate yourself. Through networking, you can connect with professional opportunities, but more importantly, you could learn about a podcast that might become your favorite, the most affordable place to shop for groceries, or even find a new resource that can improve your wellbeing. After working mostly in museums but in a few other fields over the years, I can certify that no one has quite as many 'life hacks' or 'fun facts' as a museum professional.

### SETTING EXPECTATIONS EXTERNALLY & INTERNALLY

In one of my internships, my supervisor would always ask me to just inform them if the workload was too much for me. This had a lot of problems, mainly that as an EMP I didn't exactly know how much was too much, or if there was a certain measurable threshold of misery I had to be in order to ask for help. The same went for asking for accommodations, every workplace is different and has different workarounds. I've learned a lot more about what I can expect of myself and what accommodations I need since, but I wish in the beginning I knew how to articulate the above.

You don't need to know everything about your professional capacity when you begin in museums. When starting out, do not cave into the pressure to perform at the level of people

who have been in the field for longer. It is much better to slowly test yourself. When I started my current job, I made a point of asking the 'dumb questions' as soon as I had them, which saved me a lot of worry. I also let my supervisor know that my accommodations might change depending on the workload and my own life outside of work.

### GET A LIFE

Museum work is challenging, especially on an emotional level. There have been seasons of my EMP days where all I think about are museums, which usually leads me to frustration and burnout. But I truly do see the potential for good in museums so I've learned to balance my life a little better so I can keep doing this work. And I'm not talking about the type of passive work/life balance where I come home, sit on the couch, and let the Real Housewives of Wherever melt my brain until I must go back to school or work again.

Balancing museum work with an actual life means setting the intention to either spend meaningful time with yourself or with friends and family. Now when I come home, I give myself 30 minutes to not have to talk with anyone to decompress from the workday. And on the weekend, you can catch me having fulfilling experiences exploring my community with friends I've made by birding, crafting, and forcing myself to say 'hi' to my neighbors.

## SECTION 3: STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT WELLBEING AS AN EMP

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### 3.A – WHY YOU SHOULD DEVELOP COPING STRATEGIES

Coping strategies are behaviors and thoughts that are designed to help us manage the stress of daily life. Unfortunately, we are not given a handbook on how to foster good wellbeing. It is up to us to develop coping strategies that work for us. This section of the toolkit focuses on Ryff's dimensions of **autonomy** and **environmental mastery**.

<b>Status of Criteria</b>	<b>What it Feels/Looks Like</b>
<b>High Autonomy</b>	You can regulate your behavior from within despite other social influences.
<b>Low Autonomy</b>	You seek external validation in order to regulate your emotions and subsequent behavior.  Developing positive coping strategies supports wellbeing by taking responsibility for how your own behavior affects your ability to regulate your emotions.
<b>High Environmental Mastery</b>	You have an overall sense of competence and control in managing your environment and other external factors
<b>Low Environmental Mastery</b>	You struggle to manage daily happenings, and overall feel an inability to break this cycle and gain control over your external environment.  By developing coping strategies, you can regain control of how you interact with your environment.

## MORE INFORMATION ON COPING STRATEGIES

Schools are a great setting to advocate for developing coping strategies. A study from Salana et al. (2020) evaluated schools that implemented wellness programs for medical students. Group meditation, writing poetry, volunteering, and participating in student-organized events were just some of the coping strategies that students took part in to enhance their wellbeing.

Another study by Roca et al. (2021) gathered qualitative data in order to explore individual experiences and emotional responses of final-year nursing students adjusting to the COVID-19 pandemic. The coping strategies used in professional settings were teamwork, psychological care from the healthcare institution they were employed at, and peer support, primarily through social networks. In the study, participants planned their daily routines, incorporating coping strategies and observing their rest periods. The study also concluded it was essential that during and after work, the nurses prioritized their wellbeing as much as possible by ensuring they met their basic needs for drink, food, rest, and sleep.

Both of these studies show us that implementing coping strategies into daily life can be simple as scheduling a rest period in our day, or collaborating with a coworker, yet still be effective in supporting positive wellbeing.

What helpful coping statements could you try at your job or school? Examples might be *'my manager's criticism or lack of feedback says more about them than me'* or *'I'm still worthwhile and have something to contribute even without a current working role.'*

*List some of them here.*

- \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## 3.B – COPING STRATEGIES

### Creativity

Immerse yourself in an art practice. Davies et al. (2016) found that people who participate in 100 or more hours/year of arts engagement (which comes out to two or more hours/week) reported significantly better mental well-being than other levels of engagement. Whether you sketch, paint, write, knit, compose, or play music, being creative focuses attention, boosts your confidence and can help you find community in your shared interests.

*What is your preferred creative method(s)? Consider keeping them in an area you can always see so you have the visual cue.*

*Have you taken the time to find groups in your community that meet for a certain creative pursuit that interests you?*

### Nature

Sitting on a park bench listening to birdsong or walking along the beach watching the tide lapping the shore are gentle ways of putting everything into perspective. This practice derived from the Japanese practice of *Shinrin-Yoku*, which translates to forest bathing, and has been medically proven to be effective in improving people’s physical and psychological health (Wen et al., 2019) Just a short time spent in the natural world is all it takes to lower stress levels, improve your mood, and boost feelings of happiness. An additional study by Bratman et al in 2015 found the specific ways nature improved wellbeing were through decreased stress and negative affect, increased subjective wellbeing and positive affect, and regulating affect.

*How do you access nature near you? Create your own reference list.*

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*Even if you don’t have regular access to greenspace, opening your window for fresh air or walking to your errands can be beneficial if you remember to stop and smell the roses.*

## Laughing

“Laughter is the best medicine” sounds simple, but laughter relaxes your whole body and can diffuse tense feelings. A hearty chuckle can also lighten burdens, release anger, and connect you to others, helping you to view frustrations from a more enlightened perspective. A meta-analysis was conducted in order to determine what effect laughter therapy had on anxiety and found through randomized controlled clinical trials that laughter does decrease anxiety (Demir, 2020). The studied this article analyzed identified anywhere from 30-60 minutes of laughter once to several times a week.

*What are shows, people or jokes you always find funny? List them here for future reference.*

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Gratitude

Begin a daily log of 3-10 things you are grateful for. This practice has gained popularity in recent years, due to its simplicity and effectiveness. Better sleep and lower stress are just the beginning of the reported wellbeing effects of this practice (Wood et al., 2010). This study also supported recognizing gratitude in clinical psychology due to its strong explanatory power in understanding wellbeing, and the potential of improving wellbeing through simple exercises. The research reviewed suggested gratitude is related to a variety of clinical aspects of wellbeing, including adaptive personality characteristics, positive social relationships, and physical health (particularly stress and sleep). Another study found within 4 weeks of beginning a weekly practice, a group of adolescents reported healthier eating habits (Fritz et al., 2019).

*What are three things you're grateful for right now?*

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

*In the 2019 study, students wrote weekly gratitude letters. If you're up for the challenge, try writing 1 'thank you' note each week to send to someone.*

## Journaling

A classic wellbeing tool that you can modify to fit your lifestyle! Sohal et al (2022) recognized the prevalence of journaling in mental illness treatment but did not see clear evidence-based guidelines for healthcare providers to refer patients to, which led them to synthesize the research that was available to create a guideline. In their research, they found that across many modalities and writing practices, journaling was overall beneficial for numerous mental health concerns. In one study, students given a writing assignment in their Calculus I course reported lower anxiety and higher overall enjoyment related to the course (McCarty et al., 2020). Overall, journaling is a great way to process a range emotions and experiences.

*To maintain a journaling practice, do what works for you. A journal does not need to be a notebook with your daily activities, but instead could be a notebook filled with your creative doodles, poems, collages and more. You can also ditch the notebook entirely and make video or voice recordings on your phone, or use an online platform to create your own safe idea space.*

## Breathing

This is one of the most tried and true wellbeing resources. Raghavendra et al. (2016) is just one example of the many clinical trials that show the benefits of yoga breathing exercises for improving respiratory health. Another study by Gholamrezaei et al. (2021) comparing the efficacy of four breathing techniques concluded that pursed lip breathing was the most effective in improving cardiovascular health and one's emotional state. Most breathing exercises can be done anywhere, from sitting at your desk, to your commute, in class, and even in the galleries where you work.

*Search the internet to find more exercises and select a few to keep in the back of your mind as you go about your day.*

## A CONCLUSION THAT ISN'T AN ENDING

I hope you enjoyed reading this toolkit and learned a thing or two about how to promote positive wellbeing. Please know that this toolkit is not meant to be used only once, but rather as something to return to and see yourself grow in.

I wish you the best of luck in your wellbeing and professional journey. Remember to touch some grass to ground yourself once in a while and stop to smell the roses. You got this. (:

Take Care,

Rebecca

## DEDICATION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This toolkit is dedicated to my grandparents, thank you for passing down your resilience, passion, and humor.

I also want to thank my parents, who first introduced me to museums and who taught me to enjoy the restorative powers of a good nap.

Thank you to my advisor, Dr. Jessica Luke, for sticking with me and helping me see this through.

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