

**A Compilation Report and Guide for Re-Engaging With The Museum of Northwest Art's
Education Community Partners**

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Executive Summary

This document will explain when, how, and why resources in this guide can be utilized by a Museum of Northwest Art (MoNA) museum educator when interacting and working with their community partners. Included in this document are community engagement resources from American and Canadian museum associations, thorough explanations on appropriate language use in emails, and a framework for community engagement. The background section gives context to MoNA's ongoing issue of finding opportunities to remain engaged with their partners through multiple programs and resources that the museum has. Following this first section is a summary of findings from an evaluation survey that was distributed to both the MoNA's education staff and their community partners. The evaluation survey results would end up influencing the recommendations discussed in the final three sections of the report highlighting communication strategies, deepening relationships and resources from the field. Section 2: Communication Strategies discusses when and how to approach community partners, as well as stressing the importance of the language used in both emails and meetings. Templates for outreach and follow up emails, in addition to evaluation questions can be found in the Appendix section. In the Next Steps To Building Relationships section, suggestions such as when evaluations should be done, emailing frequency, connecting community partners to each other as well as developing internship opportunities are mentioned as missed opportunities that can strengthen MoNA's relationship with their affiliated communities.

Section 1: Project Background

This project began when the University of Washington's Museology program approached museums throughout Washington state or museums that have worked with the program in the past and asked for project proposals that they would like to be addressed in a student's thesis project. The Museum of Northwest Art was one of the museums on the list specifically stating that through a student's thesis project, they hoped to "get a better understanding of how to develop deep connections with our community partners, artists, and visitors who don't regularly utilize MoNA as a resource." After several discussions, this thesis project was finalized with the goal of producing a report that analyzed MoNA's strengths and weaknesses with community engagement as well as guidelines on how to deepen relationships with their education partnerships, specifically organizations involved with the Outside In Gallery. The Outside In Gallery is a popular program at the museum as partners find it exciting to have a public space to express themselves and raise awareness about their community. The quality outcome that is achieved through this program is an exhibit for the museum, awareness for the community partners and a growing relationship for both groups. Having this space and bringing attention to what the local community partner stands for can also connect them with interested visitors at the museum showcasing that MoNA can be used as a tool, a resource to connect with the rest of the world around them, thus boosting community engagement.

Community engagement, as defined by the American Alliance of Museums, is when "individual museums work with their communities to assess their relevance and create a plan to deepen their relationship with the community, in turn increasing the sustainability of the museum." This looks different to every museum and the partners they work with. Being well connected in the community gives museums the support they need to utilize their resources and

limited hours, no matter how small the staff members are. For the Museum of Northwest Art (MoNA), community engagement includes, but is not limited to, partners being a part of the Education Committee, Outside In gallery partnerships, working with school districts and teachers as well as with libraries and other non-profit organizations in Skagit County. In other museums, community engagement may come in the form of partners creating exhibits such as at the Seattle Art Museum, where K-12 and other age groups utilize gallery space to express their identities.

Despite the differences in how community engagement is portrayed throughout non-profit organizations especially in museums, the core values remain the same. In museum director Nina Simon's 'The Participatory Museum', she writes that what encourages participation is "personal fulfillment...quality outcomes...[along with] tools to connect with others" (Simon). Some of these strategies are seen in museums such as at the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture, when the exhibits team worked with individuals of various backgrounds to install an exhibit highlighting the importance of museum decolonization by displaying artwork of indigenous artists. Doing so helps with the personalization and fulfillment part of community engagement, since it may demonstrate that the museum is inclusive, hearing their community's voices and further amplifying them.

Section 2: Evaluation of MoNA's Community Engagement with Education Partners

Method

Before recommendations could be made, MoNA's relationship with their education community partners needed to be understood. Two different evaluation surveys were developed for museum education staff and community partners using a combination of a 5 point Likert scale and open ended questions to prompt more detailed responses. Copies of the surveys can be found in the appendix from pages 22 to 24.

The community partners and the museum's education staff were contacted via email and distributed the evaluation form/survey link to a Google Form. One week after the initial email, a follow up reminder email was sent to encourage participants to respond. The community partners contacted were a mix of after school programs like the Boys and Girls Club, and YMCA along with several other museums in the county, such as Skagit County Historical Museum and the Children's Museum of Skagit County. These non-profit organizations utilized MoNA's art kits as well as their school tours. Other community organizations included Children of the Valley, Padilla Bay Reserve, and Brigid Collins Family Support Center, all of whom participated in curating MoNA's Outside In Gallery with artwork from their own communities. A total of 11 responses from the 25 community partners was collected. All members of the MoNA education team participated in the evaluation survey.

Results

The results from the 5 point Likert scale questions show that there was strong consensus on MoNA's communication style; it was generally consistent, helpful and transparent with what

they expected from their partners, despite having a few outlying responses. For example, the first statement was “Communication with staff members of MoNA was consistent”, and the responses to this statement seemed to be the most mixed with one response being a 3. This could have meant that they were unsure if communication with MoNA was consistent or communication was not as consistent as they would have liked it to be. This issue was further clarified as a lack of consistency in the open-ended responses when one partner wrote “MoNA has had a lot of turnover in staff so at times it has been challenging to connect with the right people.” MoNA’s education staff felt that communication could always be improved while answering the Likert scale questions, with the responses varying between 4 and 5.

In the open-ended question responses, partners said that MoNA was able to provide physical resources for their organization such as art kits, art supplies, and exhibit space at the museum. This is an ongoing strength that the museum’s education staff has been very vocal about advertising and something that the community often connects with MoNA for. As for the accessibility question (Question 2 in Appendix 18), the general consensus was that MoNA was reachable whether by online or in-person. The responses for this answer were supported by discussions with MoNA’s education team confirming in their responses that MoNA staff also will visit or check-in with their partners onsite instead of having their partners come to them. However, several responses did mention that it would be helpful for MoNA to have a bigger online presence via a more interactive website or online streaming instead of just doing in-person work. The museum’s education staff, while they have their own page on the museum’s website, it is not their responsibility to magnify the institution’s online presence nor is it prioritized. It was suggested that if there were enough concerns involving this topic then the museum may consider live streaming exhibitions and events like they had done during the COVID pandemic.

One common response about the last open-ended question (open ended Question 3 in Appendix 18), which was “Please share any other thoughts, questions, and concerns pertaining to your partnership with MoNA”, is that community partners would like more opportunities to collaborate and work with the museum commenting that having summer field trips “would be nice.” This is a very good sign that they enjoy the work MoNA does and the resources put out. MoNA does have a lot of programs that community partners can participate in like the MoNA Link Program, art kit distribution and the previously mentioned Outside In Gallery. This prompts the question “Are community partners aware of these programs and how does MoNA staff go about informing partners of such opportunities?” The museum states that they do not always work with the same partners consecutively in order to make space for others to participate in programs that have limited opportunities in a year like the art kit distributions that follow the museum’s exhibition cycle, happening three times a year.

Summary of Recommendations

Stemming from the results of the evaluation surveys and organized into three different sections, the main recommendations are:

1. Communication Strategies

Open communication is always the first building block to further develop an established relationship. Section 3: Communication strategies include:

- Initial Email Outreach to Community Partners
- When To Send A Follow Up Email
- Meetings After Emailing

- Recap Emails Following A Meeting

2. Building Relationships

Found in Section 4: Next Steps to Building Relationships, this portion explores the ways that MoNA can deepen their relationships with various community partners through:

- Evaluations
- Quarterly emails
- Connecting communities

3. Inspirations and Tools From the Field

Within Section 5: Inspirations and Tools from the Field, museum education staff will find additional resources compiled from museum related organizations like the Ontario Museum Association. The resources range from articles to toolkits discussing community engagement techniques.

Section 3: Communication Strategies

Initial Email Outreach to Community Partners

MoNA's primary way of reaching out and getting into contact with their community partners is through email. The content of the email is important as it introduces the museum and its mission to the partner community. However, for this particular document, it focuses on partners that MoNA has already worked with in the past. An email should be straightforward and leave room open for partners to ask questions. It is often helpful for the messenger to suggest a meeting day/time or prompt engagement through questions or concerns as well.

The template in the appendix is only an example of what can be said, but the point is, the introduction introduces both the museum education staff that the community partner is in contact with as well as why the museum is reaching out to them. It also lets the community partner know that both organizations have an existing relationship. The second part of the email body suggests the next step and prompts a response from the community partner by listing availability. Think of it as something like a list of multiple choices for the community partner to pick from. This is helpful for those who scan through emails because it saves them time from going back and forth to consult their own schedule.

Unresponsive Partners: When To Send A Follow Up Email

Community partners are not always responsive. This is a common concern throughout museums and their education coordinators when working with partners, hence why emails should be kept clear and straightforward. Oftentimes, organizations do not have full time

outreach coordinators working with them and they may have to respond to many emails at once in their inbox.

Follow up emails are necessary to get a response from a community partner, so it is important to know when to reach out and attempt to connect again. A rule of thumb is to send a follow up email about a week after the initial email so that partners have some time to respond or see an email that might have been lost in their inbox. A template for a follow up email is available in the appendix section.

Meetings After Emailing

Language has always been important when interacting with others and it is no different in a museum setting. It is crucial to keep emails short and concise but it is the same case in meetings. Meetings can be difficult as the speaker has to think of what to say on the spot instead of carefully choosing their words as they would in an email.

It is always appreciated when people feel heard, recognized, and included during meetings. This boosts their involvement in discussions and shows that their opinions matter to the topic at hand. Ellie Cross, MoNA's director of education as of 2025, does this well as one community partner stated in the evaluation survey that it "really means a lot" to her that the director of education visits her organization's location to talk. Many partners have stated that working with MoNA does not feel transactional and they feel that the museum is always trying to do more for partners and their communities rather than using them as a way to expand MoNA's influence. Sincerity and being genuine goes a long way when it comes to community engagement whether it be shown through actions or through words.

Showing transparency and support towards partners is key to community engagement. An article published on the AAM blog in 2023 stresses the importance of trust and how it helped the History Colorado Center build a more transparent and deeper relationship with their indigenous community. This was done through incorporating partner's feedback along with making room for them to join a conversation through questions directed at participants, and this same strategy can also be used in an art museum like MoNA.

To make meetings more engaging, hosts can start by asking questions and follow up questions directed at a participant that is especially knowledgeable about a topic. It can be as simple as "What do you think?" Asking questions like this shows that the museum cares about the opinions of others; museums can be very obvious outsiders to a community they are working with and partners are the bridge that brings both sides together. To make the question seem less performative and more personal, adding a follow up question that loops back to what they were saying earlier not only displays active listening skills but also keeps the conversation going.

Recap Emails Following A Meeting

Recap emails are a great way to keep everyone on the same page through a short summary. The host should let participants know that an email will be sent out so that they know what to expect after the conclusion of a meeting.

The format of a recap email does not need to be complex; it can simply follow the outline of the meeting and highlight important ideas that were discussed. The format provided in the appendix can be used as a recap email template. Often a recap email will also include a due date for deliverable or task completion. This small detail can be added to the end of the main body of the email.

Section 4: Next Steps to Building Relationships

After A Project/Program Wrap Up

Wrapping up a project with a community partner does not mean that the museum will never interact or engage with them again! MoNA aims to be an integral part of their community and constantly asks for feedback. Analyzing constructive criticism then applying it to future projects is a valuable step to the process. As demonstrated in this report, evaluations provide insight often influencing the next steps by incorporating feedback from multiple perspectives. They help the institution understand their audience and partners while also encouraging staff members to reflect on their time working with the community.

An evaluation survey for community partners to reflect on their work with MoNA can be done in a multitude of ways. The most basic and common method is to send the community partners a survey, whether it is a list of questions or thought provoking prompts that elicit reflection. This method is used at many institutions and does not have to be art museum specific. The University of Washington's Museology program conducts mid quarter evaluations in this manner and students are always informed about an upcoming evaluation so they can anticipate seeing it in their email. Like a recap email, it would be helpful for community partners to be told about an upcoming evaluation survey so they know to expect and complete it.

Another method that may be better suited to MoNA is the walk-and-talk method. This evaluation arrangement is non-traditional but it takes into account the museum's strength, which is working face to face and building personal relationships with community partners. It allows the community partner to have an open conversation about their time working with MoNA while allowing museum staff members to ask follow up questions if needed. Knowing that MoNA's

community partners tend to prefer in-person meetings and visits, doing an evaluation after a project using this method can deepen the relationship between museum and community.

Staying In Touch With Community Partners

MoNA has a newsletter that is sent out every so often, informing subscribers of the museum's exhibits, programs and updates, while MoNA's education team will reach out to community partners typically around the start of the school year and several times throughout the year. However, according to the evaluation survey sent to MoNA's educational partners, several expressed enthusiasm to further collaborate with the museum to bring art programs to their communities showing that they want to hear more from the museum. Taking this into consideration, MoNA could benefit from reaching out to their partners a bit more often. Emailing quarterly would be the most efficient way to stay in touch and update community partners on available opportunities to work with the museum.

To keep a list of community partners ready for review at any time, a roster should be created to keep information about partners organized. In the beginning of this thesis project, the museum's education team created a spreadsheet of their existing educational partnerships to use when selecting participants for the evaluation survey. A more detailed complete version of this spreadsheet would be helpful when passing information between departments, looking for suitable partners for specific programs, or even simply for organization purposes.

The spreadsheet of information should have multiple tabs, each one containing information about community partners for certain programs, such as Outside In Gallery, Art Kits, MoNA Link, etc. Within each tab, there should be a total of five categories: organization name, contact person, email(s), whether or not the organization is education focused, and any

partnership notes. The partnership notes section can specify how it was working with the organization, or contain a short summary of their evaluation survey response. A sample of a more detailed roster of the community partners information provided by MoNA's education team has been created for the museum.

Connecting Communities

Surprisingly, MoNA did not actively link their community partners to each other if the museum did not have a resource that a partner may be seeking. Doing so would create a web of networks that could expand the museum's connections outside of the community thus bringing in more useful resources.

To begin connecting community partners, MoNA could ask if partners are willing to let the museum pass along their contact information to another organization. Alternatively, MoNA could be a third party for both groups and reach out as a trusted partner of one organization to link them to another. Permission to share contact information can be asked in the evaluation survey sent after working with partners. Any additional notes to this connection interaction can be noted in the community partners roster.

Another missed opportunity to engage with a larger community would be working more consistently with the University of Washington's Museology program to develop an internship for students. A common issue discussed throughout this thesis's meetings and brainstorming sessions as well as mentioned in the surveys is that MoNA lacked the staff needed to aid with continuous community engagement. A quarterly education intern can ease the workload for museum staff who already handle multiple projects at one time. The MoNA education staff members as of 2025 consists of two individuals, one who works part-time but having an intern

provides staff with extra help while allowing the intern to gain skills and experiences for their future career. If MoNA works with the University of Washington's Museology program, the intern will also receive academic credits along with 90 hours of paid internship work. Internship work may consist of simple tasks such as organizing the partnership roster and aiding with outreach like sending a follow up email.

Conclusion

Community engagement and hearing from outside perspectives is more important now than ever before as old harmful traditions, such as museum exclusivity, are being challenged. Incorporating feedback and evaluating how a museum's actions can affect the people attending it already reflects determination to connect to the communities it serves. Building an interwoven community means more support even in times of instability. The resources listed in this document and MoNA itself prove that institutions are striving to make a difference through their actions as well as highlight the plethora of ways museums can involve their partners. It all starts with an email and sincerity, before transforming into a trustworthy and sustainable relationship.

Section 5: Inspiration and Tools from the Field

- Museum of Northwest Art Website: www.monamuseum.org/
 - MoNA's website lists all their public programs and also describes the purpose of each program. MoNA staff can visit the website for a refresher and to put themselves in the shoes of a community partner to understand how a program can be interpreted from an outsider's perspective. This could also help draft a more personal outreach email to community partners if their perspective is understood.
- Nina Simon's *The Participatory Museum*: participatorymuseum.org/read/
 - Nina Simon is the Executive Director of the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History in California and is known for her enthusiasm in community engagement. Her book *The Participatory Museum* is a museum engagement staple; she provides frameworks for participatory projects (found in Chapter 5), and walks readers through the entire process of working with the community.
- List of Toolkits for Various Types of Museums: museum.industry411.com/work-smarter-18-free-toolkits-for-museums/
 - This webpage provides a list of toolkits for a wide range of topics relevant to museums like collections care, community engagement, and funding. This resource could be helpful to more than just MoNA's education team.
- Going Places Community Engagement Toolkit By ArtFund_: www.artfund.org/professional/news-and-insights/going-places-community-engagement-toolkit
 - This community engagement toolkit hails from the UK and takes inspiration from all over the country on how to better involve partners in museum spaces. It may

not be so relevant to MoNA but the toolkit does come in Welsh along with English, which is impressive in its own way of including a small community.

- Communicating with Intention: Activities and Techniques for Strengthening Community Partnerships:
keracollective.com/blog/creating-change-museum-deai-community-partnerships-techniques
- This article goes in more detail on how to do the walk and talk evaluation method with partners. It also talks briefly about communicating and intentional language use with teenagers, an age group that MoNA often works with.
- American Alliance of Museums (AAM) Community Engagement:
www.aam-us.org/topic/community-engagement/
- The American Alliance of Museums or AAM is always a good place to check first when looking for resources but they have roughly about 428 different articles and resources on community engagement alone, many of which are public access.
- How Can Museums Use Email Marketing:
www.museumnext.com/article/how-can-museums-use-email-marketing/
- Though this article focuses on marketing in museums, it can improve responsiveness in community partners based on when an email is sent. The article goes into depth explaining which days and time are best to send an email, and encourages readers to use mail automation.
- How To Keep Your Team Engaged In A Remote Meeting:
www.successfulmeetings.com/Strategy/Meetings-Events/How-to-Keep-Your-Team-Engaged-in-a-Remote-Meeting#:~:text=Ask%20questions%20and%20involve%20the%20%2

[2quiet%20people.%22,not%20be%20as%20comfortable%20talking%20on%20screen.&t ext=Research%20shows%20that%20people%20are%20more%20likely,or%20charts%20 during%20the%20meeting%20if%20possible.](#)

- This article gives readers 10 tips on how to make Zoom meetings engaging through asking direct questions to participants, as well as unique visualizers.
- Guide to Email Campaigns for Museums:
[https://museum.bc.ca/brain/guide-to-email-campaigns-for-museums/#:~:text=Prolonged %20periods%20of%20disengagement%20will,people%20to%20unsubscribe%20as%20 well.](https://museum.bc.ca/brain/guide-to-email-campaigns-for-museums/#:~:text=Prolonged%20periods%20of%20disengagement%20will,people%20to%20unsubscribe%20as%20 well.)
- This article is similar to “How Can Museums Use Email Marketing” but it also breaks down how to write an effective and engaging email to prompt a response from the receiver.
- Engaging Your Community: A Toolkit For Museums by The Ontario Museum Association:
[www.tamarackcommunity.ca/library/engaging-your-community-a-toolkit-for-museums#: ~:text=Engaging%20your%20Community%3A%20A%20Toolkit%20for%20Museums% 20is%20a%20process,the%20sustainability%20of%20the%20museum](http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/library/engaging-your-community-a-toolkit-for-museums#:~:text=Engaging%20your%20Community%3A%20A%20Toolkit%20for%20Museums% 20is%20a%20process,the%20sustainability%20of%20the%20museum)
- The Ontario Museum Association or OMA produced a toolkit that focuses on sustaining community engagement across any type of museum. They ask mindful questions to prompt self assessment and institution evaluation to better engage with the surrounding community.
- Art Educator Toolkit: www.arteducators.org/learn-tools/art-educator-toolkit

- MoNA's education staff not only does community outreach and connects the museum with partners, but will sometimes also facilitate workshops and develop educational programs! This webpage is a compilation of toolkits that offer teaching tips, art education frameworks, as well as examples of letters that advocate for visual arts education.

Section 6: Appendix

Evaluation Survey for Community Partners

Evaluation Statements:

Using a scale of 0-5, 0 being completely disagree and 5 being completely agree, rate how true the following statements are.

1. Communication with the staff members of MoNA was consistent.
2. Communication with the staff members of MoNA was clear.
3. MoNA was transparent with their goals.
4. I was able to ask for clarification.
5. I was provided with requested resources, such as needed documents and forms.
6. My time working with MoNA aligned with my mission.
7. My time working with MoNA aligned with my values.
8. I would work with MoNA again.
9. I would recommend MoNA to other similar organizations.

Open Ended Questions

1. What resources does MoNA have specifically for your organization to utilize?
 - a. What has been helpful to your organization?
2. Is MoNA accessible to you whether online or in-person?
 - a. If not, what are some suggestions that can be implemented in order to make the museum more accessible?

3. Please include any other thoughts, questions, and concerns pertaining to your partnership with MoNA.

Evaluation Survey For MoNA's Education Staff Members

Evaluation Statements:

Using a scale of 0-5, 0 being completely disagree and 5 being completely agree, rate how true the following statements are.

1. Communication with the community partners of MoNA was consistent.
2. Communication with the community members of MoNA was clear.
3. MoNA was able to communicate their intentions and goals with community partners..
4. MoNA was able to ask for clarification when needed..
5. MoNA was provided with requested resources, such as needed documents and forms.
6. Time working with community partners aligned with MoNA's mission.
7. Time working with community partners aligned with MoNA's values.

Open Ended Questions

1. What strategy has been helpful to MoNA when communicating with partners?
2. What is something you wish community partners would know when it comes to interacting and engaging with art museums?
3. Please include any other thoughts, questions, and concerns pertaining to engagement between the local education communities and MoNA's education staff members.

Initial outreach email template:

Hello ____ [if you do not know who to address, a simple 'Hello' will do],

My name is ____ and I am the [state your position at MoNA here]. I am reaching out to you regarding our [insert program/resource/collaboration name]. This program/resource/collaboration aims to [explain what MoNA is trying to accomplish with this program/resource/collaboration, attach links if needed], and our community partners roster shows that we have worked together in the past on a similar initiative.

I would love to coordinate a day and time to meet with you and discuss further details via an in-person meeting, or through video call (Zoom, Google Meets, etc.). I am available [list day and time you are available]. Please let me know which day/time works for you and if you have any questions at all. Thank you.

Best wishes,

[Your name]

Follow Up Email Template:

Hello ____ [if you do not know who to address, a simple 'Hello' will do],

I am reaching out to you regarding ____ at the Museum of Northwest Art (MoNA). To reiterate: [You can summarize the content of the initial outreach email here].

Please let me know if you have any further questions or concerns. I look forward to your response.

Best wishes,

[Your name]

Recap Email Template:

Hello,

Thank you for meeting with me today and discussing [meeting's topic]. We talked about [highlight important points of the meeting, such as outcomes or decisions regarding an issue]. Please note that the next steps are [what can be expected in the upcoming meetings, deliverables, and/or tasks that need to be completed].

Please let me know if you have any further questions, concerns or clarification needs.

Thank you.

Best wishes,

[Your name]

Example Evaluation Questions After Working With Community Partners:

- Please tell us about your time working with MoNA.
- What did MoNA do well?
- What can MoNA improve on?
- Additional comments about your experience with MoNA.
- What did MoNA do well?
- What can MoNA improve on?
- Throughout the collaboration, did you feel heard and included? Please describe your experience and any feedback for future improvement.