

COMMUNITY- BASED CURATION

A Toolkit for Expanding Narratives and Changing Practices

Museum...Library



TUCSON MUSEUM *of* ART
AND HISTORIC BLOCK

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A Toolkit for Expanding
Narratives and
Changing Practices

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Southwest Art: Contemporary Conversations during First Thursday, October 2023. Photo by Julius Schlosburg.



This toolkit is the result of the multi-year *Expanding Narratives* initiative, funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (MG-50-19-0044-19). The views, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this toolkit does not necessarily represent those of the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

To cite this publication:

Marianna Pegno and Christine Brindza, eds. *Community-Based Curation: A Toolkit for Expanding Narratives and Changing Practices*. Tucson, AZ: Tucson Museum of Art and Historic Block, 2024.

Acknowledgements

This toolkit would not be possible with the support, encouragement, conversations, and contributions of many.

To our community curators, thank you for your guidance:

Marla Allison, Julia Arriola, Monica Buckle, Lizz Denneau, Colleen Lucero, Gabriella Moreno, Reuben Naranjo, Nelda Liliana Ruiz Calles, M. Jenea Sanchez, David Tenario, TC Tolbert, and Ruben Urrea Moreno.

Many thanks to Karen Abeita, Evelyn Arenas, Lorenzo Barceló, Patricia (Patty) Barceló, Lorenzo Barceló, Selena Camacho, Karen Charley, Juan Carlos García, Emiliano Gonzales, Kyle Kootswatewa, Garret Maho, Emmaline Naha, Terran Naha, Fawn Navasie, and Sandra Sánchez, for their continued collaborations.

To our collaborators and partners we are forever grateful for your continued support: Adriana Kanoza and Acequia Massage Therapy & Bodywork; Amerind Foundation; Yesi Olivera and Apapáchame Tierra; Diane Dittmore, Charles Adams (Emeritus), and Alan Ferg at the Arizona State Museum; Kei Ann Mandanas and Ate Kei's Treats; Rochelle L. Garcia and Blue Corn Custom Designs; Carmenlita Chief; Feng-Feng Yeh and Chinese Chorizo Project; Drew Berryhill and Drutopia; Kristin Hoerth former editor-in-chief, Southwest Art; the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office; Elysia Poon at the Indian Arts Research Center / School for Advanced Research; Dulce Jiménez; Grace Liatti; Tiffany Nakatani and Love in a Cup; Cameo Cruz and Lower Arizona Jewelry; Diana Lucero; Dwayne Manuel; Hannah McElgunn, Ph.D; Jeremy Mikolajczak; Patrick Cruz at the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture; Anh-Thuy Nguyen; Nogaleria; Amber Ortega; Olivia Ortiz; Bardo Padilla; Arturo Ayon and Phatboii's BBQ; Howard Post; Canyon Records; Priscilla "Nefftys" Rodriguez; Alexandra Samarron Longorio; San Xavier District Culture & Natural Resources Committee; Perla Segovia; Mayra Torres and Señorita Art & Culture; Gareth Smit; Papay Solomon; Southwest Black Arts Network; Lauren Tresp at Southwest Contemporary; Tucson High School students Abby, Adrian, Alexia, Alexis, Alondra, Anixa, Armando, Emmie, Evita, Gael, Griffin, Imani, Itzel, Jeremiah, Jesus, Keira, Margot, Maya, Michel, Neo, Nola, Paula, Ruby, Sylvia, and Yazmine; Rietta Wagoner; Karima Walker; Ofelia Zepeda, Ph.D; and Martín Zícari.

To past and present TMA staff, docents, and volunteers thank you for your trust, participation, and patience as this work has evolved, shifted, and changed.

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Expanding Narratives

In 2019, the Tucson Museum of Art (TMA) received funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (MG-50-19-0044-19) to expand strategies for community engagement practices through an initiative entitled *Expanding Narratives*. With this funding TMA sought to systematize, test, and scale various approaches to community engagement.

GUIDING QUESTION

How do, or can, museums reflect and integrate local communities?

GOAL

To support the development of **community-based** curatorial practices, **culturally responsive** approaches to gallery-based instruction, and **innovative** programming.

STRATEGIES

- **Activate and include multiple voices.**
- **Connect** the permanent collection with local heritage communities represented by artworks.
- **Examine** how TMA **cares for and interprets** the collection and how the museum **reflects the diverse demographics and culture of the region.**
- **Review how museums present information and knowledge.**
- **Build capacities for dialogue** and **increase cultural competencies.**



LEFT: Year one of *Expanding Narratives* with community stakeholders in TMA galleries.

RIGHT: A visitor in *Indigenous Arts* during opening celebration in 2021. Photo by Julius Scholsburg.

Foreword

Interpretive planning in art museums—inclusive of exhibition and program development—focused on engaging audiences and communities, is rapidly developing as an important field of museum practice. Various approaches to exploring ways in which museums can better connect visitors to the objects on view have recently emerged. Inviting divergent voices into the process of interpretive planning and exhibition curation, including those communities that have often been underrepresented, is one approach—and one that TMA has been involved in. Over the past several years, the museum has collaborated with a variety of community groups to inform the direction and themes of exhibitions as well as share knowledge and expertise with museum staff, ultimately to the benefit of museum visitors.

Throughout this toolkit are several examples of exhibitions impacted by this approach, including *Southwest Art: Contemporary Conversations*, now on view, which aims to understand the southwestern region of the United States, a place where multiple histories, heritages, and cultures intersect.

Staff continues to develop and seek opportunities to scale previously piloted community-based strategies while supporting TMA's ongoing commitment to the public's evolving needs and ideas. The lessons learned through this work will be used to guide future exhibition development through community-based curatorial practices, culturally responsive approaches to gallery-based instruction, and innovative programming. Further implications may involve the content of visitor surveys and help guide decisions on future collection acquisitions.

First and foremost, we hope that the toolkit's content will assist other museum workers in their efforts to develop interpretive strategies that help them provide meaningful connections and conversations with their communities. Long term, our goal is to contribute to the promising shift in museum practice that recognizes, values, and embraces many voices and perspectives within our museums and collections.

Norah Diedrich
Jon and Linda Ender Director and CEO
Tucson Museum of Art and Historic Block

Community-Based Curation Strategies, Approaches, and Lessons Learned

This toolkit:

- Is broken into multiple collaboratively written sections that are punctuated with questions, opportunities for reflection, and takeaways. In each section are “viewpoints” from collaborators, which speak to the author’s role and expertise in the context of community-based curation.
- Asserts that the intersection of the museum’s collection and community is ripe with potential. In this in-between space, the relevance of artworks to their audiences becomes visible.
- Provides perspectives for framing your museum’s approach to expanding curatorial practice.

Community-Based Curation: A Toolkit for Expanding Narratives and Changing Practices is intended for midsized art museums but has implications for organizations of all sizes.

Questions to Consider:

- How can a museum with mission-driven priorities, a rotating exhibition schedule, and public programming allocate capital, both financial and human, toward community-based practices?
- How might project funding support a change in practice to broaden exhibition development and collections care by integrating community engagement?
- How can a museum begin to consider strategies to prioritize community-engaged practices and create a sustainable approach?

Before you Begin

Know Your Resources:

- Identify staff, time, and space for the work. This should consider timelines that consist of short-, mid-, and long-term outputs and outcomes.
- Know your audiences, demographics, and communities. Identify communities for collaborations and intentions / goals.
- Know your collection. What questions do you have about these works in your care?
- Identify key communities for collaboration. Look at local demographics and the museum's core collection. What are the overlaps?
- And remember: make a plan, but be flexible and revise it often.

Defining the Overlap

Collections and Communities

For TMA, it meant leaning into the overlaps of art, culture, heritage, and history that emerged from dialogue about the museum's collection and diverse peoples and histories of our region.

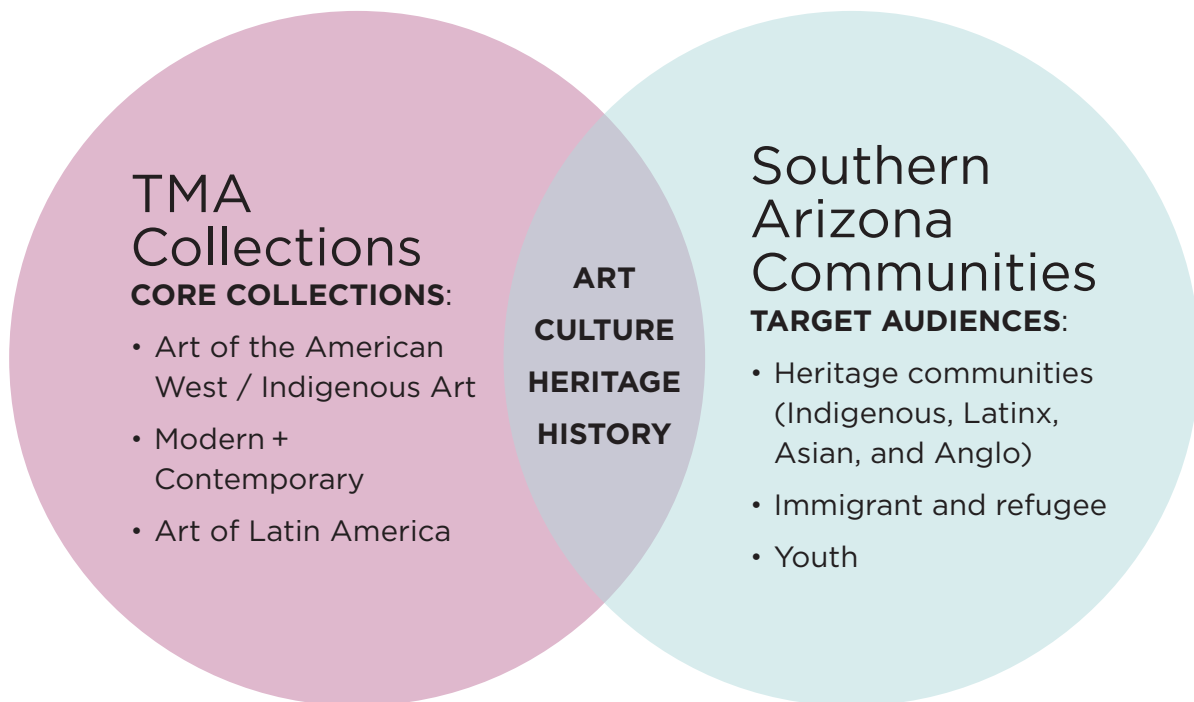


Illustration of the intersections of TMA's permanent collection and Southern Arizona communities. In 2019, at the start of *Expanding Narratives*, the overlap of art, culture, heritage, and history had not yet been defined.

Introduction

Since 2019, TMA has worked to systematically identify strengths and opportunities within its collection through critical reflection and community engagement—highlighting a commitment to gaining insights to inform its practices, expand the collection, and act as a springboard for the future.

These efforts actually began in 2013 with the implementation of culturally responsive practices in program development and multivocal interpretation integrated within permanent collection galleries. Over the course of several years, efforts were expanded into other activities and operations within the museum. For example, this work was further ingrained in the museum when in 2020 TMA adopted an Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (IDEA) Plan is to position the museum as a responsive, community-centered institution that represents, activates, and advocates for its communities. At TMA, IDEA is guided by four principles—relevancy, community, respect, and multivocality—which are integrated and reflected within all of the museum’s operations including collections, exhibitions, programs, and its people.

This work and commitment is at the core of TMA’s community-based curatorial efforts, and through sustained conversations and collaborations with community members, the museum seeks innovative approaches to exhibition development. TMA believes that the artworks in its care are dynamic: they evolve as histories are re-examined and varying perspectives are taken into consideration. Working intentionally with communities ensures that we meet our goals, share collections, and re-examine strategies for preserving, exhibiting, and interpreting the works of art in our care.

The final piece of this multi-year initiative (2019–2023) is a collaboratively authored toolkit, broken into seven sections, that defines community-based curation; outlines strategies for effectively engaging communities; and provides insights and reflections on TMA’s own experiences. Included throughout the document are holistic, comprehensive, and practical guidelines and recommendations for engaging community members in curatorial practice, as well as creating institutional infrastructure to support building capacity as a responsive institution. Each section presents detailed accounts—and resulting strategies—of the implementation and practice of community-based curation at TMA as well as lessons learned along the way. This document serves as a roadmap for museums interested in integrating community curation into their practice.

While this phase of the project is technically completed, our work is ongoing, with plans for future community curated exhibitions and updates to the museum’s strategic plan to ensure its sustainability and continued evolution.

Terminology:

- **Community-based:** communities, or museum visitors and users, have an active role in identifying issues and matters that relate to them, which then inform the museum's approach to its programs, exhibitions, and collections. These include strategies to connect the museum more intentionally to its local communities and audiences.
- **Collaboration:** equitable dialogue and commitment, from inception to execution; between individual partners or a network of museum users, that honors and responds to multiple perspectives and expertise to build more relevant programs, exhibitions, and experiences.
- **Cultural competence:** the ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures. This necessitates being aware of one's own world view, developing positive attitudes towards cultural differences, gaining knowledge of different cultural practices and worldviews, and developing skills for communication and interaction across cultures. Relationship building is central to cultural competency and emphasizes understanding one another's expectations and attitudes as well as building on the strength of one another's knowledge.
- **Culturally responsive:** reflective and inclusive of visitors' cultural expertise and references, this highlights the museum's ability to learn from and relate to the diverse cultures in our region. Practices that are culturally responsive empower visitors to tap into their own expertise and knowledge, rather than privileging singular experiences or expertise.
- **Decenter:** a shift from centralized and siloed practices to those that are collaborative and open, ultimately challenging traditional operations and structures. This type of museum and professional approach favors blurred boundaries between communities and institutions while valuing interdepartmental collaboration. Decentering requires one to question the tendency to center and prioritize the organization to consider the needs, interests, and recommendations of communities and stakeholders.
- **Dialogue:** a strategy for negotiation and communication that builds collective knowledge, changes over time, requires interpersonal connections, and nurtures relationships. In museums, dialogical frameworks can be applied to meetings, program and exhibition development, interpretation, and touring approaches—just to name a few. In these contexts, meaning-making evolves from the interaction between individuals and the materials discussed: where there is a coming together of different worldviews and expertise. This dialogical mindset positions interpretation, programs, and exhibitions as exploratory, conversational, collaborative, and varied.
- **Multivocal:** approaches that honor and amplify the inherent value of multiple points of view and varying experiences, ultimately expanding and complicating single perspectives.

ENGAGING COMMUNITIES

Authentically collaborating with communities in the context of art museums can be messy.

- It challenges traditional modes of academic scholarship.
- It requires activating multiple departments—thus, pushing against siloes and disciplinary boundaries.
- It unearths unanticipated, and hidden, opportunities and obstacles.
- It takes time.

Essential for the advancement of this work is a collaborative approach supported by reciprocity, shared power, and trust. Collaborative practices are important and significant to the museum field as they offer thoughtful ways to engage with difficult and pressing issues.

- Increasing calls for transparency and equity are transforming the way museums do business.
- Funders are interested in new and innovative frameworks that ensure the sustainability of museums for future generations.
- Collections are under new scrutiny and review—from the lack of representation in acquisitions to issues of provenance, stewardship, restitution, and repatriation.
- Community engagement as a discipline has become important not only at the intersection of curatorial, education, and collections departments but also in more administrative capacities and functions.¹

Community-based curation relies on a combination of external and internal collaborators. To position this practice as sustainable requires a long-term commitment to capacity building and relationships. Sustainable institutional change rooted in advancing equity can only come about through an institution's enduring resolution to advance this work, investment (of both financial and human capital), and relationship development.

This process questions power and can provoke resistance.

1 For more information on the way in which community engagement is changing the arts and culture field see: Douglas R. Clayton and Calida N. Jones (Arts Consulting Group), "Community Engagement: Embeddedness within the Arts and Culture Sector" October 8, 2021 <https://artsconsulting.com/arts-insights/community-engagement-embeddedness-within-the-arts-and-culture-sector/>; and Julia Halperin, "US Museums Face a Funding Crisis as New Generation of Donors Comes of Age," *The Art Newspaper*, January 19, 2024, <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2024/01/19/us-museums-funding-crisis-new-generation>.

Defining Community-Based Curation

Community-based curation is a systemic and collaborative framework for expanding approaches to exhibition development. With this approach, community stakeholders play an active role in identifying topics that relate and matter to them, which then can inform museum programs, exhibitions, and collections.

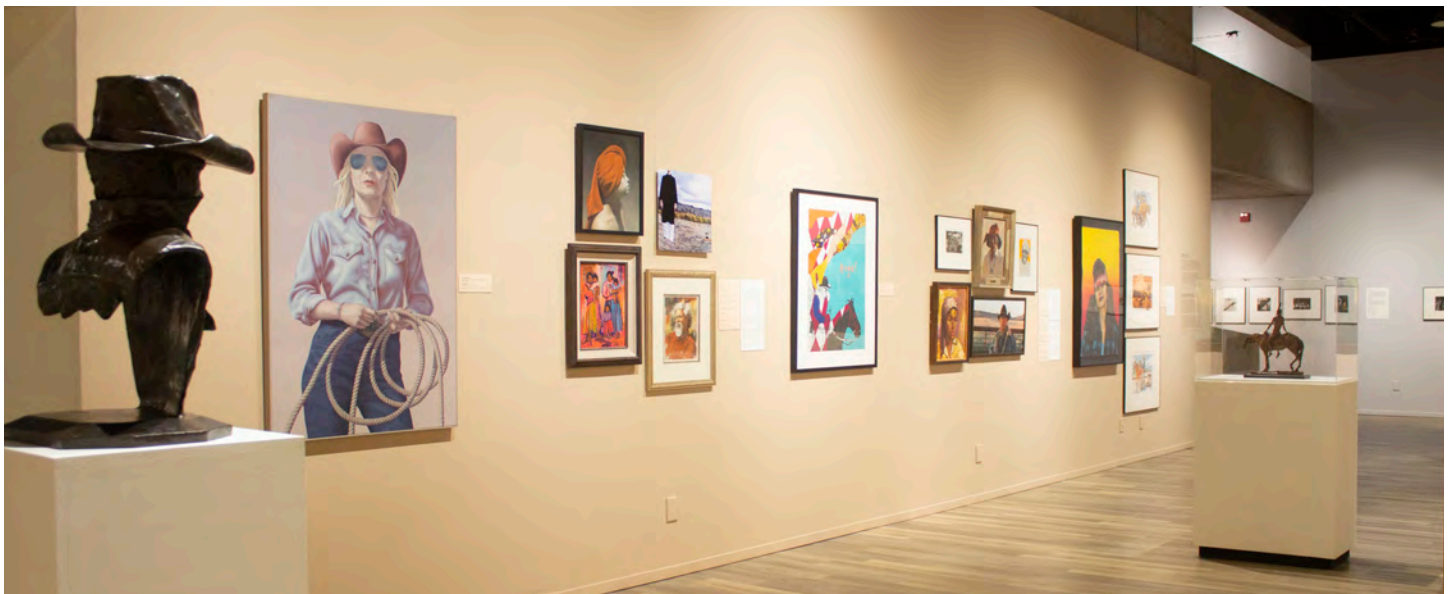
This process can be defined in similar ways to Viv Golding and Wayne Modest's *Museums and Communities: Curators, Collections and Collaborations*,² which in part explored the ways “innovative artist and community collaborations that further push the authoritative turn from a textual focus towards diverse means of promoting a wider public engagement in responsible ways.” They argued “that museums should work collaboratively with communities—in non-tokenistic ways that bestow equal respect....”

Questions to consider:

- How can museums share power with communities?
- What are the results of sharing power with communities?

TMA understands community-based curation to be a living thing that:

- is rooted in mutual **respect**.
- **constantly evolves** as more ideas, understandings, and references are taken into consideration.
- **broadens approaches** to interpretation, collections, display, and research, ultimately offering insights that might have been overlooked or contexts previously unknown.
- **brings up more questions than answers**—and necessitates that the museum understands that some answers are not ours to know or share.



Installation view of *People of the West* (2022).

² Viv Golding and Wayne Modest, *Museums and Communities: Curators, Collections, and Collaboration*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 3.



Community curator talking to a docent in *Indigenous Arts* during opening celebration in 2021.
Photo by Julius Schlosburg.

This process relies on activating a network of **community curators**, exhibition-specific consultants, who work collaboratively with TMA staff to develop exhibitions from inception to execution and beyond—supporting relevance and multivocality in exhibitions.

This work involves several activities including:

- one-on-one conversations *and* small group share-backs/convenings.
- determining preliminary themes and select artworks.
- examining works of art (virtually or physically as able) to choose what is essential and explain why.
- reviewing collections and recommended loans when necessary.
- authoring exhibit texts and revise previous labels to reflect community perspectives.
- increasing cultural competencies and skills for responsive facilitation.

These exhibitions:

- center communities.
- focus on relevance by exploring the connections between community and collections.
- amplify the importance of different scholarship, expertise, and experiences requiring interdepartmental collaboration.

Sharing power is essential to community-based curation.

Strategies and Approaches

There is no-one-size-fits-all approach to working with communities. Each relationship is unique.

Entering into thoughtful, community-based collaborations includes being transparent, building trust, listening with intention, thoughtfully responding to questions or requests, an openness to multiple expertise, and centering community perspectives. Additionally, this process should be responsive to your existing partners, audiences, and stakeholders while also rooted in your local demographics and aware of who is missing from the conversation.

For TMA, community-based curation necessitated that we were:

- leveraging partnerships
- ensuring communities and visitors are part of the conversation
- prioritizing multivocal strategies for content development
- bridging the museum more intentionally to its local communities and audiences
- prioritizing content that is reflective and inclusive of our local communities



A visitor in *Indigenous Arts* during the opening in 2021.
Photo by Julius Schlosburg.

Below are some helpful best practices and guidelines for entering collaborations and conversations with communities.

- Build trust slowly and intentionally:
 - identify relationships that are mutually beneficial rather than transactional
 - move beyond your institutional boundaries and comfort zones
 - have the first meeting offsite, preferably in a partner's or community's space
- Enter into thoughtful collaborations with purpose:
 - develop shared goals and objectives
 - understand and value the assets of your community partners
 - collaboration is a multi-way street
 - you do not always need to be an expert and accept when you are not
 - reflect upon hierarchy and issues of authority
 - understand that difference is a strength
 - honor multiple narratives, histories, and voices
 - provide multiple points of access to and options within programs
- Listen to the communities and advocate for them within the museum and beyond:
 - encourage sharing and exchanges of stories, ideas, and connections
 - provide opportunities for partners and visitors to lead discussions
 - practice active listening and respond thoughtfully
 - make space for community members to question assumptions
- Build support systems:
 - create training opportunities for staff and stakeholders to support cultural competencies and skill building
- Be flexible and responsive:
 - be open to new things
 - be willing to experiment and diversify with program development and content delivery in order to engage your audience in meaningful and relevant ways
 - be willing to revise and adapt programs, plans, and exhibitions

While these strategies are translatable skills, the ripple effects of these encounters and conversations are unique to each collaboration.

VIEWPOINT

Building Bridges and Fostering Connections

Marianna Pegno, Director of Engagement and Inclusion

Building authentic connections between communities and supporting relationships can be frustrating and exhausting—yet, incredibly impactful and rewarding.

The preliminary work that is the foundation for this framework for community-based curation emerged from program development rooted in community partnerships and access programs. More specifically, work on collaborative programs with immigrant and refugee audiences and visually impaired visitors necessitated a shift in my approach to accessing—and engaging with—exhibitions and collections. It also required honest conversations with colleagues in curatorial and collections departments about ways to navigate works that could be triggers and how we might physically experience a work of art more than simply as a viewer.

In these early moments, I had responsive, thoughtful, and willing colleagues—who were willing to experiment and entertain new methods of engaging with artworks. I was also incredibly fortunate to have partnerships with organizations who were supportive, excited, and trusting—they too were willing to experiment and test new strategies and approaches to make the museum's collections, exhibitions, and artworks accessible.

While I am comfortable in building bridges and making connections to extend the reach of the museum, this curatorial process required me to think critically about how networks were established and maintained. As the main facilitator (or at times, “instigator” might have felt more appropriate), I sought to drive, encourage, and support working collaboratively, both internally between departments and communities. My goal was to shift the museum, even in small increments, to be more reflective of our local audiences and at the same time consider the ways in which collections could be activated in ways that reflect the voices and experiences of constituents. On the most basic level, my approach consisted of making connections between people around a specific topic, documenting the conversations and meetings, and finding ways (and platforms) to share back what I heard to ensure I was effectively listening and capturing individual and collective sentiments.

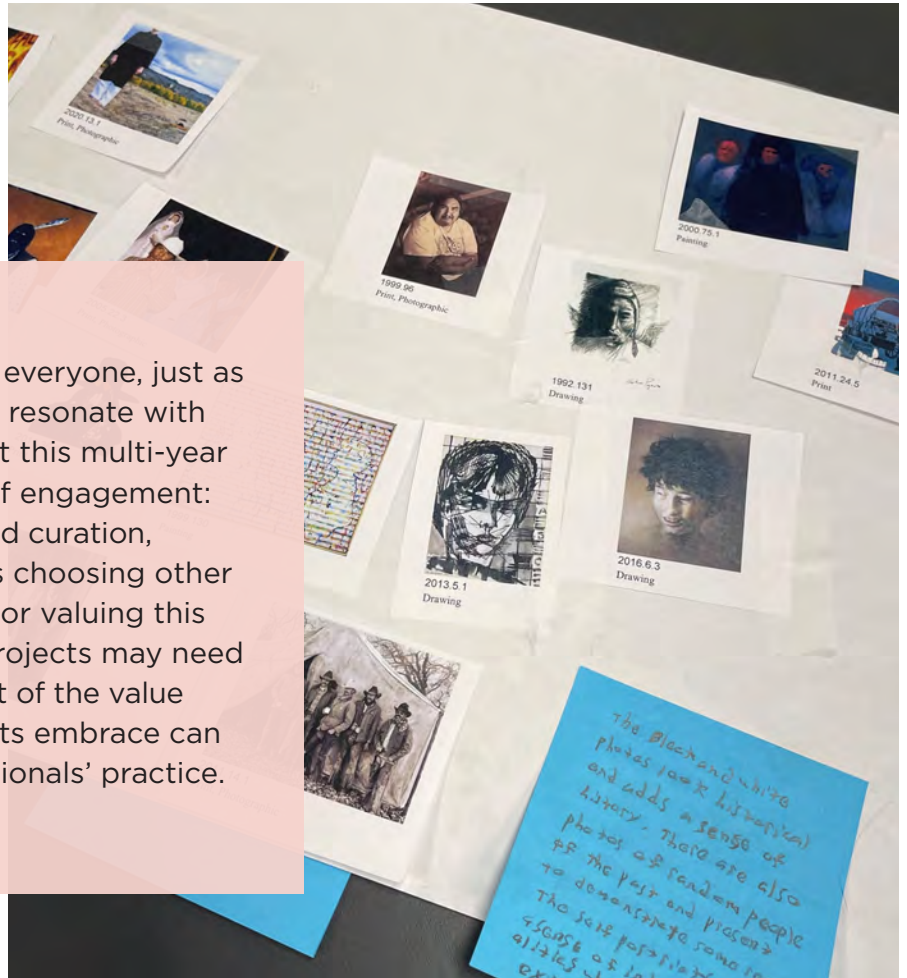
To advance community-based practices it was important to listen to the anxieties, critiques, and feedback from both internal and external stakeholders. Frequently, it was necessary to find ways to work around roadblocks or hiccups that included internal resistance, a global pandemic, limits in the permanent collection, and onboarding of new staff and leadership.

While this work was slow, intentional, and at times felt stagnant, in reality the change was more extensive, systematic, and impactful than I had initially expected.

Questions to consider:

- Who are your allies within the organization? How might they become co-conspirators in making space for communities and individuals to authentically engage with the museum and its various components?
- What stories or experiences from collaborators, communities, and audiences continue to emerge as critical spaces for change? How might you change your practice to address those needs?

Community-based curation is not for everyone, just as traditional curatorial practices do not resonate with all museum professionals. Throughout this multi-year project, we identified varying levels of engagement: totally committed to community-based curation, sometimes committed but sometimes choosing other curatorial models, and not accepting or valuing this curatorial approach at all. Different projects may need varied curatorial approaches, and part of the value of community-based curation is that its embrace can expand the range of museum professionals' practice.



ABOVE: Planning *People of the West* (2023) with teen curators.
BELOW: Installation view of *People of the West* (2023).

Stages of Community-Based Curation: An Iterative Process

Community-based curation requires institutions to consider ways to assess and scale existing community-based engagement strategies. This institutional alignment with community-based curatorial efforts and community engagement is an adaptive, iterative process. It consists of a long-term design process that involves **initial planning, piloting and testing, planning, analysis and design, implementation, and launch.**

Each venture into community-based curation at TMA began with a full year of preliminary conversations. These were often in the form of focus groups and one-on-one conversations facilitated by staff to begin to understand perceptions about a specific topic or collection area. Such conversations often run parallel to the typical early stages of exhibition development, and then intersect.

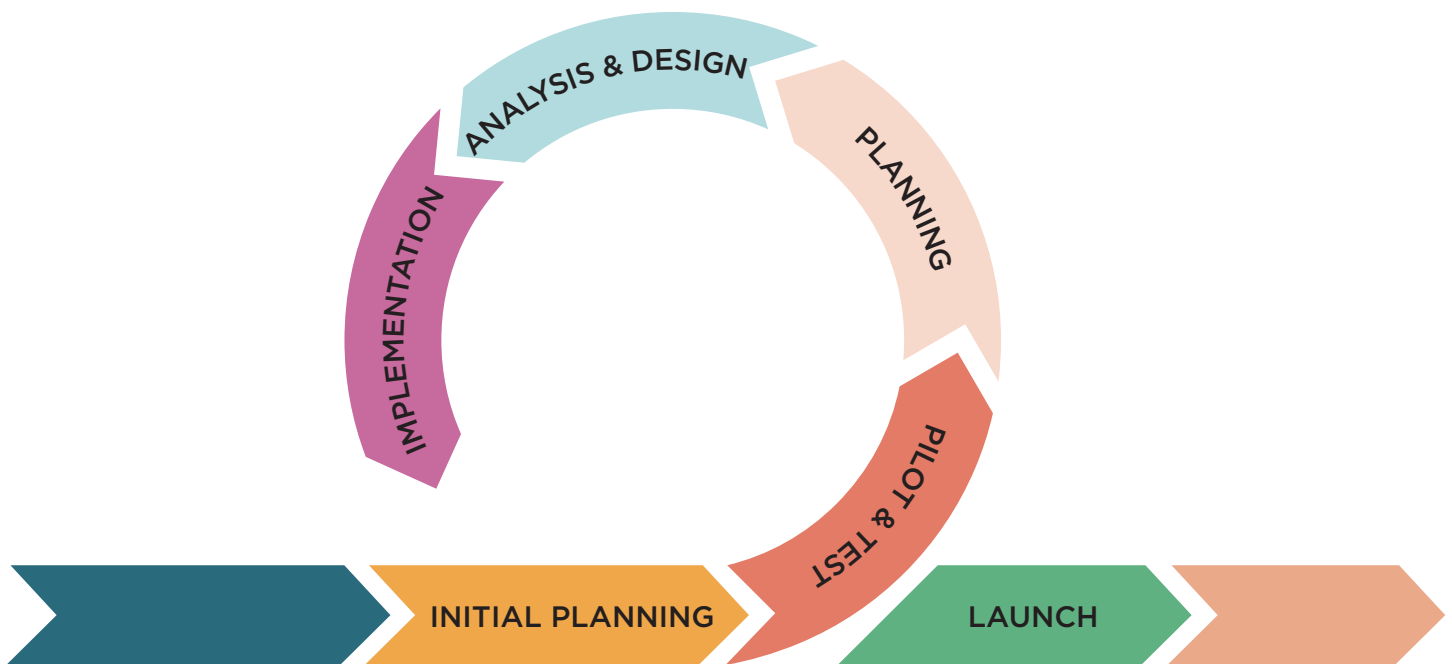


Illustration of the iterative process used in community-based curation. The above is one cycle of a repeating or ongoing strategy for continuously improving and developing exhibitions.

Each cycle involves the following components:

In the initial planning / piloting and testing stage:

- understand and define your local context
- reflect internally on your collections, curatorial practices, pedagogies, public programs, operations, and strategies by assessing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT). What voices are missing from the conversation?
- enter collaborations with local communities—be strategic, purposeful, and equitable. Go to community spaces, do not expect people to come to you
- seek alignment between communities and collection (or exhibitions)—walk the line between the internal and external
- identify places to internally diversify expertise and voice
- engage in conversations with collaborators and community stakeholders to explore what topics, media, and issues are relevant and important to explore within the exhibit space
- reconsider collections as an anchor and acknowledge the limitations between what is currently part of the collection and what is truly community-based content development

In the planning / analysis and design stage:

- assess collections with stakeholders
- develop preliminary checklists to share with community stakeholders
- identify a cohort of community curators to collaborate with on an exhibition
- send invitations and supporting materials to community curators
- develop contracts and agreements that are inclusive of expectations, timelines, and honoraria
- meet with community curators
- hold one-on-one conversations with each community curator
- analyze and organize data to identify emerging themes and a more refined object list
- review findings during share back with community curators
- compile feedback from community curators to develop a preliminary checklist and layout.
- if necessary, identify loans to augment exhibition with community curators

In the implementation and launching stage:

- finalize the checklist, update preliminary layout, and outline interpretative plan (inclusive of programming)
- make necessary updates and have additional conversations with community curators
- develop interpretation and fabricate exhibition materials
- train docents and staff
- seek additional and supporting partners for interpretation and programs
- finalize program plans
- install the exhibition
- open the exhibition with community curators
- implement public programming
- make updates to database and object records (if necessary)
- complete a summative evaluation

To scale and repeat:

- review prior strategies and reflect on lessons learned
- ask questions and evaluate what changes can be made to your process, both internal and external



Stakeholder conversations as part of *Expanding Narratives* in 2019 and 2020.

There are multiple models for curatorial practice, and there is no universal approach to exhibition development.

Consider your institutional and local context:

- Each museum serves different communities and has a variety of missions and goals. Who are your audiences? What is your organization's mission? What are your museum's core collecting areas? What are your organization's core values?
- Before embracing collaborative approaches curators must assess their values, processes, and museum structures. Who internally might you be able to collaborate with to reach new audiences and perspectives? How might collaboration impact your approach to exhibition development? Consider the resources you have for collaboration (i.e., financial and human capital, time).

Identifying New Approaches to Curation

Through collaboration with communities, the curatorial voice is shifted, and no single expertise is privileged. As museum theorist Mary Hutchinson (2013) reflected, "...working with and demonstrating an egalitarian conversation between differently located authorities, from the development of an exhibition into its fabric, plays a crucial role in creating an open, dialogue-inviting exhibition, encouraging audiences to respond from their own experience and knowledge."³

The community plays a role in developing the story of the exhibition, and community members can incorporate their knowledge and expertise into the overall design. Curators may benefit from this process as they may explore ideas and nuances not previously considered when using traditional research methods. Further, shifting practice towards collaborative curation provides opportunities for equity and inclusion where narratives can be broadened, dynamic, and relatable to the communities that the museum serves.

Curators interested in community-based curation should reflect upon their own curatorial paradigms as well as understand their institutional capacity, as they are essential to understanding what opportunities there are for collaboration as well as constraints to the practice.

3 Mary Hutchinson, "Shared Authority: Collaboration, Curatorial Voice, and Exhibition Design in Canberra, Australia," in *Museums and Communities: Curators, Collections and Collaboration*, edited by Viv Golding and Wayne Modest (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 143-162.

Reflecting on Your Curatorial Practice and Institutional Capacity

Curation and exhibition development are a series of choices, and individual curatorial philosophies and organizational capacities can inform the direction of exhibition development and level of community involvement.

To understand institutional, departmental, and individual preparedness to engage in collaborative work, the following pages offer a series of questions and rating scales to assess opinions, attitudes, and behaviors related to your own curatorial practice.

This self-assessment uses concepts that are inspired by Pat Villeneuve’s “Considering Competing Values in Art Museum Exhibition Curation” and Ann Rowson Love and Pat Villeneuve’s edited anthology *Dimensions of Curation: Considering Competing Values for Intentional Exhibition Practices*.⁴ Where practitioners are asked to consider values and approaches as they relate to interpretation, power, and intent in exhibition development. Also reflected within these questions and prompts are ideas from Maura Reilly’s *Curatorial Activism* to position curation as tool for addressing historic exclusion in art museums and more broadly, Western narratives of art history.⁵ Lastly, the check in incorporates research about collaboration and strategies for community-engagement that ask us to assess how and when we might begin to integrate multiple voices within our curatorial process.

We acknowledge that approaches to collaboration might change over time. For example, as relationships grow and evolve, it is possible for networking to yield collaboration or to shift from collaboration to coordination or cooperation (or vice versa) depending on the project; different projects might demand different engagement approaches.

4 Pat Villeneuve, “Considering Competing Values in Art Museum Exhibition Curation,” *Stedelijk Studies* (January 1, 2019); Ann Rowson Love and Pat Villeneuve, *Dimensions of Curation: Considering Competing Values for Intentional Exhibition Practices* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2023).

5 Maura Reilly, *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating* (Thames & Hudson, 2018).

What is your curatorial priority?

- **Object:** priority is on the work of art and art historical context
- **Revisionist:** priority is on broadening the art historical canon
- **Audience:** priority is on the visitor and their experience
- **Communities:** priority is on relevance to local communities

	Not at all Important	Slightly Important	Moderately Important	Very Important	Extremely Important
Object					
Revisionist					
Audience					
Communities					

How do you approach collaboration within your curatorial practice?⁶

Check the most relevant to your current practice:

	No interaction: project involves no collaboration
	Networking: little communication, decisions are made independently (by lead curator)
	Cooperation: more formal communication with defined roles between stakeholders; decisions are made independently (by lead curator)
	Coordination: intentional sharing of resources, defined roles and frequent communication, shared decision making
	Coalition: ideas and resources are shared; frequent, intentional and prioritized communication; all stakeholders participate in decision making
	Collaboration: ideas and resources are shared and collectively generated; frequent communication; mutual trust; consensus reached in decision making

6 This assessment of collaboration in relation to curatorial practice has been adapted from: Frey, Bruce B., Jill H. Lohmeier, Stephen W. Lee, and Nona Tollefson. "Measuring Collaboration Among Grant Partners." *The American Journal of Evaluation* 27, no. 3 (2006): 383-92.

Who are your active partners and collaborators?

Do you share decision making during exhibition development with:

Check all that apply:

	Colleagues
	Artists
	Stakeholders
	Community representatives
	Organizational partners
	Others

What is the objective of your exhibition?

Check all that apply:

	Disseminating knowledge, focusing on art historical interpretation
	Calls to action, artworks presented with interpretation that can be framed as revisionist or activist
	Critical investigation, reflection on disciplines and artworks that reframe, broaden, and recontextualize knowledge
	Presenting new contexts, broadening existing understanding with new learning
	Showcasing collections, calling attention to works in the museum's care
	Other

In relation to your exhibition and curatorial practice, what constitutes success?

Check all that apply:

	Art world-approved exhibitions
	Exhibitions curated through limited, shared expertise
	Audience engagement and participation
	Relevant visitor-centered or community-based exhibitions
	Activating collections
	Generating new insights
	Pleasing constituents (board, funders, donors)
	Other

In exhibition development, how involved are communities?

Check the most relevant:

	Community is involved from the beginning in the form of focus groups
	Community is involved periodically through ad-hoc conversations
	Community is consistently activated and engaged from concept development through program implementation
	Community is involved in program development and implementation to support exhibition
	Community is not involved in planning or implementation of either exhibition or programming

Exploring Curatorial Philosophies and Approaches

Each curator brings a unique perspective for creating exhibitions. In considering a community collaborative approach, understanding individual curatorial philosophies can help ground what priorities, types of strategies, or institutional goals curators have followed previously or may be open to using in the future. Understanding current mindsets may help determine willingness to incorporate new ideas or allowances for flexibility.

Questions to consider:

- Thinking critically about your current practices, how do you approach developing exhibitions?
- What is important in your curatorial process? What drives your approach to exhibition development?
- What do you think is the most important motivation for an exhibition (art history, objects, social context, collections care, etc.)?
- What are some ideas you turn to repeatedly in your curatorial work?
- What are examples from past exhibitions and projects that support these values?
- What strategies do you use to expand your curatorial approach?

Examples of Curatorial Philosophies from TMA

Christine's Curatorial Philosophy

(Curator of Art of the American West)

As a curator who has been trained in traditional object-based strategies, prioritizing art historical narratives and knowledge, I have learned to expand my practice to consider more inclusive methods in exhibitions development. While my curatorial philosophy has often emphasized visitor experience, multiple points of access, and willingness to try new things—where I embody the role of an educator helping to foster ideas and connections. I've inserted open-ended questions and prompts in exhibition materials rather than just presenting straight facts, also juxtaposing objects to generate nuanced discussions regarding their relationships. I've incorporated multivocality with the creation of community voice labels, where community members author texts in exhibitions. This approach differs from the accepted art historical narrative, and opens exhibition possibilities and ways of presenting content I would not have considered otherwise.

While I do consider audience first in my practice, I am often working at the border of object-based and visitor-centered strategies. Object-based traditions are still standard, as demonstrated in the common practice of a curator being the expert and sole authority, or the privilege of scholarly information and rigor over welcoming atmospheres and engagements. These approaches can be at odds, but there can be a balance struck between both. By trying different ideas and incorporating collaborative strategies, my curatorial practice has evolved to include communities and make exhibitions relevant to museum audiences of the 21st century.

Questions to consider:

- How do collaborative practice and multiple voices inform (or drive) exhibition development?
- What is an inclusive approach to curation?
- When curating, what strategies can be employed to prioritize and emphasize visitor experiences?



Installation view of *More Than: Expanding Artist Identities from the American West* on view at TMA October 15, 2022–March 19, 2023.

Kristopher's Curatorial Philosophy

(Curator of Latin American Art)

My expertise is in the stewardship and interpretation of historical objects. For me, it's important to ask: What is a locally relevant way of presenting objects here, in Tucson, where the region has connections to their histories? Narratives about the past don't need to be monolithic or told in the same way from museum to museum—there are ways the historical field in which I work resonates in our region and I aim to reflect that specificity in interpretation and exhibitions. Sometimes identifying those resonances means talking to community members who have heritage relationships to histories; other times it means undertaking research in archival or scholarly sources. I embrace multiple ways of identifying narratives important in our region.

My curatorial work is concerned with helping visitors understand how the museum works and how its processes shape the stories we tell. With one recent exhibition project, I displayed a work of art alongside paperwork from when the piece was brought into the collection to explain that the cataloguing process erased the Afro-Latino identity of the work's maker. With another project, I researched the ownership history of an ancient object as part of an exhibition, clarifying the processes that bring ancient art to museums. I want our visitors to see that museum processes shape stories about culture and I want them to feel invested in and excited about questioning the effects of those processes, and perhaps even participating in that work with museums and other cultural institutions in the future.

Questions to consider:

- How can the knowledge of an object's life and history relate to a local context?
- How might exhibitions inform audiences about the way in which museums care for objects?
- How can curatorial practice make visible previously erased histories and experiences?
- What types of curatorial strategies make museum operations transparent?



Installation view of *Popol Vuh and the Maya Art of Storytelling* on view at TMA May 4, 2023–October 20, 2024. Photo by Julius Schlosburg.

Julie's Curatorial Philosophy

(Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art)

As a scholar with a background as a studio professor, gallerist, and curator at collecting and non-collecting institutions, I develop exhibitions by first reflecting on issues and themes that are emblematic to our time and then mine the museum's collection and tap into my wide network of artists and galleries to find historic and contemporary art that stands out for its relevance. I follow regional interests and national trends about artistic, social, and cultural issues and topics to offer ways to appreciate art that open new pathways of understanding. The most important motivation for an exhibit is to open viewers' eyes, minds, and hearts to inspire thought about the world around us, finding commonalities and thought-provoking differences through art.

For example, in an exhibition called *Dress Matters*, viewers can relate to the need to be clothed and the desire to be noticed for what they wear. Selecting a wide range (culture, gender, generation, medium, etc.) of artistic expressions about how clothing is central to identities can reveal statements about who we are both in times past and today, locally and globally, how alike yet different we are. In this kind of thematic focus, all audiences bring their own backgrounds to what they see as well as consider approaches and artistic statements that are different than their own.

Questions to consider:

- How can exhibitions center and amplify regional creativity in dialogue within a global society?
- How can audiences and communities support exhibition goals within this approach?



Installation view of *Dress Matters: Clothing as Metaphor* on view at TMA October 21, 2017–February 18, 2018.

Marianna's Curatorial Philosophy

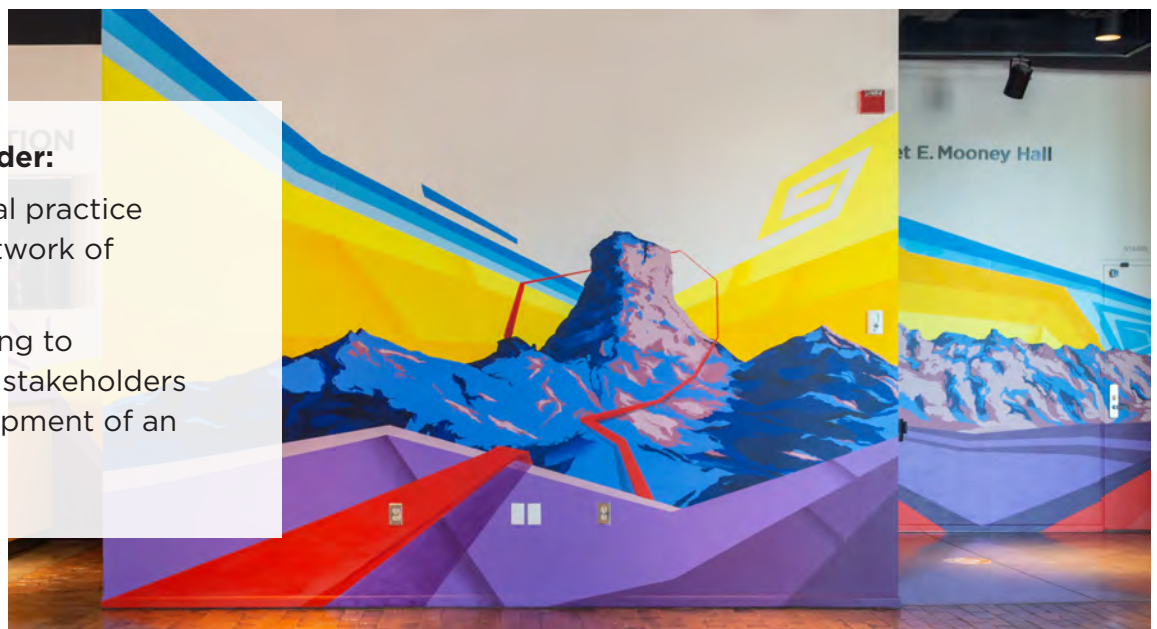
(Director of Engagement and Inclusion)

I approach exhibitions through a collaborative framework that blends education, curation, interpretation, and community-engaged practices. This hybrid approach necessitates that I develop support systems that advocate for and make space to reflect the diverse audiences living, working, and creating within the Southwest, and particularly Southern Arizona, to ensure that the museum engages in meaningful and transformational dialogue in response to artworks.

I work to develop projects with local impact and relevance that reflect communities, collaboratively conceptualizing installations, projects, and exhibitions with a variety of stakeholders including artists, educators, cultural workers, and youth. When working with traditional curators, my role builds connections between exhibitions, collections, and communities. In several exhibitions I have worked as a facilitator of conversations—both one-on-one exchanges and focus groups—seeking input on collections and potential exhibitions exploring the relevance of artworks and themes with local audiences. Sometimes these conversations result in new directions for the exhibition, identifying partners, and/or the development of new interpretative materials. My drive is rooted in the belief that museums have a responsibility to their region and people and must critically investigate how they present information and who constructs these narratives. This results in a networked curatorial approach that activates community curators who identify essential themes, select objects, author section texts and object labels, and play additional roles in developing exhibits.

Questions to consider:

- How can curatorial practice be rooted in a network of collaboration?
- How might listening to communities and stakeholders inform the development of an exhibition?



Installation view of *Dwayne Manuel: LANDSLICE* on view at TMA August 5, 2019–May 30, 2021. Photo by Nathan Lothrop. In this installation, Manuel honored three mountains sacred to O'odham himdak (culture/way of life): Baboquivari (depicted above), Catalina, and Quinlan; each are mentioned in oral stories and are pillars of O'odham history.



Visitors looking at photographs by Anh-Thuy Nguyen included in *4x4*: *Willie J. Bonner*, *Nazafarin Lotfi*, *Alejandro Macias*, and *Anh-Thuy Nguyen* on view at TMA May 20, 2021–September 26, 2021. Photo by Julius Schlosburg.

VIEWPOINT

The Responsive Curator

Christine Brindza, Senior Curator, Curator of Art of the American West

Engaging in collaborative, community-based process has helped me evolve and understand how curatorial practices can be decentered, transformed, and expanded. This can be beneficial to both the communities that the museum serves as well as the museum itself. By broadening how exhibitions are typically developed and modifying the internal, lone creative/expert model to be collaborative and dialogic, creativity and knowledge can be shared, content explored more in-depth, and process becomes just as important as the final product.

As a curator involved in these collaborations, the act of decentering my position and the museum became essential. It meant being an active listener when community curators expressed their opinions and ideas to home in on others' views, take notes on what themes were emerging, and to ask follow-up questions. This sharing of space allowed time to build comfort and trust with one another. As a result, traditional art historical considerations (asserting importance of artists or works within an established canon) did not dominate discussions.

In this process, I became a translator of knowledge and narratives. It was critical to consider the importance of voices and perspectives. As a museum representative and traditional gatekeeper of the collection, it was essential for me to understand what views were being expressed and find ways to bring them to fruition. To do this, after each convening I studied meeting notes, identified key phrases and emerging themes, discussed these findings with internal team members, and then tied these ideas to the museum collection and mission, often repeating these steps to continue to narrow objectives. In this sense, I took the dialogue or "language" of the community and translated their ideas into a physical exhibition product. Their words [and world views] were present, whether literally in texts or metaphorically in the presentation of art.

In areas where the museum may have not been able to address a significant concept, such as a shortfall in artist representation, we found ways to navigate the obstacles by obtaining loans, including text panels on the topics, and utilizing QR codes that offered additional information. From these collaborations, we came to acknowledge areas where we can improve the collection to address community needs in the future.

Through community curation, I was able to share the creative process of exhibition planning, opening more possibilities and addressing needs that I did not know existed. I was able to use my experience and knowledge with the community to create truly unique and nuanced interpretations of the collection that I could not have accomplished on my own. This process generated opportunities to listen, respond, and incorporate multiple perspectives into an exhibition that audiences can benefit from and enjoy.

Questions to consider:

- What questions do you have for communities and collaborators that can inform the objective of an exhibition and the way information is presented?
- How might dialogue and collaboration expand your curatorial practice?
- What possibilities and commonalities exist at the intersection of local communities and collections?
- Why am I interested in collaboration? Is it checking off a box or serving a deeper purpose?
- What have I done previously that puts me in a position to do this?
- How have I responded to community needs with past exhibitions or curatorial projects?
- What is my comfort level with sharing expertise?

POWER
SHARING +
DIALOGUE

Sharing Power

Shifting Roles in Shared Power Structures

Community-based curation may shift how museum staff approach their roles. Curatorial staff or other individuals who may be accustomed to making unilateral decisions about exhibitions and their presentation will have to adjust to multiple internal and external stakeholders being involved. Education and engagement staff may discover how the relationships that they have cultivated with external collaborators change as more people are brought into conversations.

- How might collaboration and sharing power change the way exhibitions are developed?

Internally, museum staff may need to rethink how they collaborate with one another. Depending on the structure of the institution, the method of sharing information and responsibility evolves, where roles are either subtly redefined or become less clearly demarcated as they engage in this process. Allowing fluidity based on skills and expertise may be necessary to work effectively in these collaborative roles. However, such significant shifts may cause internal tension as staff navigate emerging changes to their relationships. Clear communication and setting of expectations can help to alleviate tensions.

- How might collaboration and sharing power change the way departments work together and museums function?

Sharing power and authority with external collaborators raises its own questions. Having invited collaborators to be part of a project, staff should carefully consider issues such as how they will document and record the ideas of their collaborators, how their project will reflect the meaningful impact of the collaboration, and how the project design reflects an equitable model of work.

- How can you challenge and/or dismantle the expectations that do not center community?

VIEWPOINT

Importance of Transparency in Centering Community

Cenorina Ramirez, Assistant Curator of Engagement

As one of the few people of color in this institution and project, I enter this work with a conscious desire to prioritize community and BIPOC. An example of this intention is ensuring all collaborators are paid for their time and labor.

While it can be difficult to find people in traditional leadership roles who intentionally center accessibility in everyday operations. TMA is focused on the diverse people in southern Arizona including people whose stories the museum holds as well as individuals who can connect with the museum's work and goals.

Including community in more aspects of this or a similar project is necessary both to guarantee that there is an internal centering of community in all aspects of the work, and to ensure the environment of the project is 'safe' for community, making sustainable collaboration is possible.

Because most traditional institutions and their staff are not familiar with community work, there needs to be clear guidelines for effective collaboration. My concerns during this project have been how to effectively center community and consciously decenter the institution's voice. This is essential, and can prove to be a heavy lift.

Staff involved in community related work should ask:

- Who does your work center?
- Are you willing to have uncomfortable conversations and feel discomfort to center community?
- How will you make space for community within your role and work?
- What level (or percentage) of accountability are you willing to be held to?
- What are some agreements and values you can commit to when entering the project?

Transparency is essential when doing community related work, and critical when making connections with people committed to this work. Otherwise, when the community is not familiar with the institution and its work, it is more likely that they will be hesitant to connect. When structure, roles, and goals are clear, there is less likelihood for expectations to be blurred and for collaborations to become extractive.

I wonder how we might sustain these relationships. What are the expectations of TMA staff and the community curators after the exhibition has opened? How do we support trainings to make space, share power, listen and decenter, and value different ways of communicating? Working with community is slow as space and time are needed to create authentic connections. Energy, time, and resources/capital are needed to help projects like this grow and succeed.

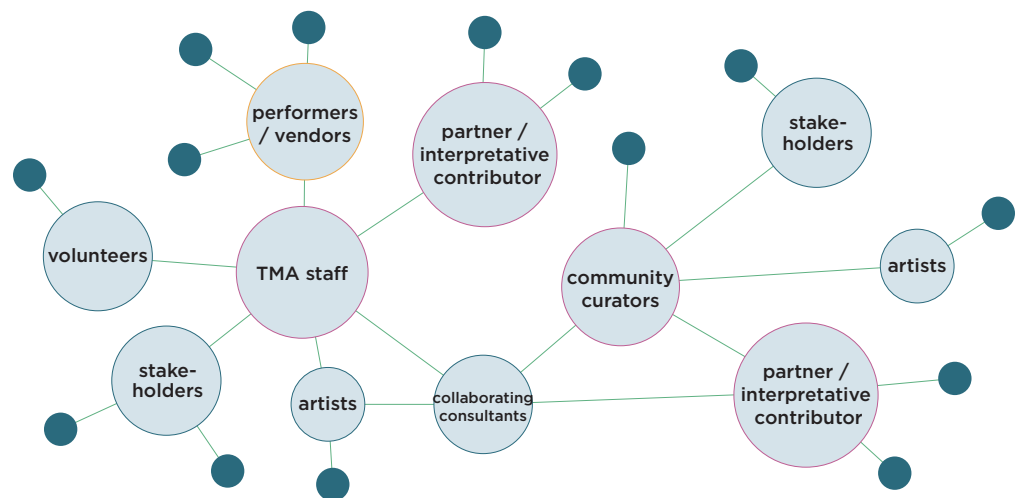
Defining A Leadership Approach for Shared Power

Leadership is critical to supporting and making space for community-based curation. Working collaboratively with communities and colleagues necessitates a leadership model that is dynamic, horizontal, and networked. Traditionally, art museums function in hierarchical, top-down structures that prioritize and privilege sole (or perhaps a small collective) expertise to determine programmatic outputs and related successes. Shifting to a responsive, collaborative, and multivocal organization necessitates a more horizontal leadership structure. In these efforts, there is an intentional change from programs for audiences to programs with communities, as well as move away from the top-down or closed systems towards collaborative or networked ones.

Shared power

A collaborative process, rooted in shared power, roles and positions will often evolve/shift—where one person might be both an artist and a community curator or start as a partner and become a community curator.

RIGHT: An example of TMA's networked relationships as a result of community-based curation.



Collaborations rooted in shared power:

- entail multiple conversations
- are intentional from the ground up
- involve shared responsibilities and mutual stakes
- require that egos are checked at the door

When entering collaborations to collectively build exhibitions, it is important to reflect on power dynamics. A collaborative leadership approach must consider the way in which a museum influences its communities and how communities influence museums. It is a multiway exchange.

- What does collective leadership look like?
- What does an equitable and inclusive museum of the 21st century look like?

With community-based curation, it is essential that you approach relationships, both internal and external, with clear and transparent intentions. Each key player (see: pages 50-53) plays an essential role in formulating the exhibition, developing programming and interpretation, translating conversations and artworks into a layout, and engaging the public. Additionally, there are a multitude of ways to approach conversations with stakeholders (see: pages 44-45). It is important to consider how these different strategies inform one another and expand on existing knowledge.

Community-based curation requires a flexible framework and a reimagining of structures, resources, and timelines.

Kristen Caloca and Vanessa Schnaidt⁷ reflect on pillars of collaborative impact to consider the infrastructure, funding, and time span necessary to build successful community-centered approaches in “To Build Shared Vision in Communities, Trust Them to Lead.” Summarizing these pillars is useful in relation to community-based curation:

“Infrastructure: Build an Ecosystem that Amplifies Community Power”

Various roles are necessary for collaborative impact, these might include: individuals connecting organizations, leaders propelling change into action, partners who make change possible, and advocates who provide financial and other support. A community-based curatorial process requires that facilitators and collaborators act as conduits and bridges, partners support building knowledge and networks to communities, and advocates propel change on multiple levels within the organization.

“Funding: Reimagine How Dollars Are Distributed”

Community-based work requires a financial investment. However, it does not require an overextension of resources. Allocating funds to community curators and structural changes in galleries can make a big impact.

“Time Span: Take the Long View to Strengthen Impact”

Building relationships and authentically engaging communities in collaborative endeavors takes time. Community-based curation cannot be the first step in relationship building. Rather, it requires foundational networks that can expand practice and imagine new modes of curatorial research.

Leadership in community-based curation demands a flexible mindset, with the acknowledgment that different collaborators will showcase their strengths and expertise as varying intervals of the process. This echoes Blythe Butler and Sami Berger’s sentiments: “If you can empower people through a feeling of safety and connectedness, they will offer you things you would never have imagined... People feel empowered for different reasons, and those reasons can change over the course of the collaboration.”⁸ By being responsive, fluid, and authentically connected to local communities, museums can build new ways of understanding objects in their care and tell more complete stories of the region.

Questions to consider:

- How might these relationships between museums and their communities begin to inform leadership?
- How can museum leadership value, include, and amplify a broad range of stories?
- How are you creating contracts or shared agreements before including community in your work?
- How are goals and expectations continually reevaluated?

7 Kristen Caloca and Vanessa Schnaidt, “To Build Shared Vision in Communities, Trust Them to Lead,” *Nonprofit Quarterly*, May 23, 2023, <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/to-build-shared-vision-in-communities-trust-them-to-lead/>.

8 Blythe Butler and Sami Berger, “Network Governance as an Empowerment Tool,” *Nonprofit Quarterly*, October 6, 2020, <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/network-governance-as-an-empowerment-tool/>.

Strategies and Approaches

How dialogue supports equity and community-based curation

To have thoughtful conversations about TMA's collections and approaches to exhibition development we had to shift to a culture of dialogue to support a community-based curation process. Conversations were facilitated by museum staff and external consultants (see: pages 50-51) and with *Expanding Narratives*, sessions were led by TMA's Director of Engagement and Inclusion and an external facilitator (Patricia Lannes of CALTA21).

A dialogical practice can expand reach and impact, allowing for new understandings to emerge. Dialogue was fostered at TMA through conversations structured with multiple formats and goals in mind.

Conversations: Semi-structured meetings conducted by a facilitator. The goals of these conversations were to:

- explore with communities the relevance of TMA including its programs, exhibitions, and collection
- understand positionality and worldviews in the context of community-based curation and shared power
- check in on concerns and struggles related to implementation of community-based curation
- share progress and challenges that emerged when working to increase community relevance and representation as a result of community-based curation

These conversations existed in multiple formats:

- **One-on-One Conversations** (facilitator and staff, board, docent, or community member): These conversations were essential in both the internal and external work to building trust and advancing a collaborative community-based curatorial process. Internally, these one-on-one meetings were opportunities to share frustrations and apprehensions, reflect on perceived risks being taken, troubleshoot next steps, and discuss how to apply or scale the framework. Externally, these conversations were a key step in fostering relationships and understanding community perceptions of the museum.
- **Small Group Discussions:** These discussions were organized by department, stakeholder groups and/or were cross-disciplinary with a multitude of community stakeholders. There were strategies for a larger check in on the project, where progress updates were provided and collective feedback on processes were collected.

- **Focus Groups:** These differed from the small group discussions since they were short term, consisting of a single meeting, and focused on a series of questions with clear learning objectives. These sessions helped expand conversations and broaden community participation.

Three key questions to ask before facilitating a meeting include:

1. A clear purpose for session/convening: **What do I need to learn?**
2. Identifying ideal attendees for the session: **Who can help me understand this question?**
3. Eliciting conversation and perspectives: **What questions do I ask to help me learn?**

Professional Development Sessions: These meetings were often conducted by an external facilitator but sometimes activated TMA staff to facilitate learning sessions. Although they can be seen as a long-term investment, change in mindsets can bring radical organizational change. Creating a platform for all stakeholders to understand why community-based curation is a commitment to equity and what approaches help in accomplishing it can ensure that this framework becomes a sustainable practice at the museum.

Sessions were organized as follows:

- TMA staff
- TMA docents
- Combination of staff, select group of docents, trustees, and community members

The goals for these sessions were:

- to build a team that would support and work together towards a community-based curation process
- to guide groups in understanding key concepts that emerged during exhibition development for community-curated exhibitions to support this new curatorial approach
 - Some key concepts that benefited from the support of professional development included sovereignty, collaboration, dialogue-based practices, decoloniality, multivocality, radical hospitality and inclusion, and relevance
- to create consistency of language and understand that language is a powerful tool
- to model strategies and approaches, such as dialogue, (a core principle of community-based curatorial work) and offer translatable resources for gallery-based experiences

VIEWPOINT

Dialogical Practices Encourage and Support Change

Patricia Lannes, CALTA 21

TMA has been dedicating time, staff, volunteers, community relationships, board, funding, thought and action towards transforming their museum into an equity-driven, relevant and community-centered 21st century institution. Through facilitated conversations, content creation, and professional development models developed as part of the CALTA21 initiative, I have been consulting with TMA since 2016 and have supported this effort for changing museum mindsets among staff, docents, and board to implement new organizational practices.⁹ Mind shifts and accepting change takes a long time and requires intentionality and opportunities to work towards a common goal.

This effort is supported by an ecosystem of interdependencies (interdepartmentally and with the surrounding communities), diverse expertise, constant collaborative construction of knowledge, and power sharing. Dialogical practices expose power structures and support a relational framework through collaboration, collective inquiry, and research that questions hierarchies and looks for more equity-driven relationships. This also increases the respect of multiple perspectives, strengthens relationships, and enhances the understanding of the reasons behind the intended changes.¹⁰

During *Expanding Narratives*, I facilitated conversations and conducted professional development sessions where participants (staff, board and volunteers) were asked to decenter the museum, think about their practices, and find ways of including multiple knowledge systems. Art is always at the center of dialogue. To understand dialogue as a way of building collective knowledge where meaning passes and flows, participants were provided with tools and strategies that encompass good dialogical practices, such as:

- the nature and formulation of open-ended questions
- the development of active listening skills
- the attention to complexity and authenticity
- the use and power of language as a way of facilitating change
- the respect for and acceptance of multiple points of view

This dialogue practice reinforces the concept of individual sovereignty where voices with different worldviews are heard and come together collaboratively.¹¹

These practices support institutional change. They are an effective approach for developing strong and positive relationships among staff, within museum departments, between different stakeholders and within communities. They honor multiple voices, find common ground, allow the interweaving of ideas, support and nurture long-term relationships, and are key to the development of power-sharing and community relations that support institutional change.

Questions to consider:

- How might you incorporate dialogical practices within the development of exhibitions and programs?
- How might dialogical practices be a tool for capacity building with staff, volunteers, and trustees?

9 Patricia Lannes, “CALTA21: A Model for Bridging Museums and Immigrant English Learners,” *The Inluseum—Museums and Social Inclusion*, May 23, 2013.

10 Patricia Lannes, *Relational Frameworks Support Equity in Museums*. Unpublished article, 2023.

11 Patricia Lannes, *Dialogue. Expanding Narratives* Workshops at Tucson Museum of Art. Tucson, AZ, 2021.

Building a Network of Collaborators

Forming a group of collaborators is an exciting part of the process, but also involves several considerations. You'll want to think carefully about the subject the museum is addressing and consider who might offer enriching perspectives and expertise.

- What voices are part of your collaborative work?
- Which perspectives on the subject need to be heard?
- What voices (both internal and external) are missing?
- Are there voices or ideas that have not been sufficiently represented in conversations on the subject?

Institutions can accomplish meaningful work through the process of recruiting.

Community-based curation requires an interdisciplinary cohort of museum colleagues to make exhibitions a reality. Often staff from curatorial, community engagement, collections, and education are essential in concept, program, and exhibition development but you will also need voices from beyond these departments to build a collective awareness and discuss preliminary ideas.

When thinking about community stakeholders, these projects can be an opportunity to amplify existing relationships. For example, you might find prospective collaborators for a curatorial project among longtime participants in one of your museum's programs, or you might find collaborators in the organization of an existing institutional partnership. Collaborations can also be an avenue for establishing and deepening relationships with informal partners or individuals newer to your network. It makes sense to approach this process with long-range thinking, as fruitful collaborations often lead to partnerships extending beyond the life of the exhibition you co-create.

Considerations and Strategies for Building Collaborators

An important step in the life of your collaboration is a preliminary and informal meeting, which can be done virtually or in-person, so you can discuss the project. Sometimes a brief preliminary document that is useful in this early conversation includes questions and background information.

Once a collaborator expresses interest, share more information starting with key details about the number and frequency of meetings, the expectations for their input, and details regarding how they will be compensated for their participation.

When forming a group of collaborators for a project, it's important to think about composing a group that represents a diversity of perspectives on the project's subject. Some subjects might call for a multi-generational approach and group composition; others might call for diverse areas of expertise and disciplinary approach. Many projects will call for a diversity of lived experience. As you begin to assemble a list of collaborators, you may find that your initial ideas of who should contribute are subject to revision. It can be valuable to challenge your own ideas about who should have a say in speaking about the subject of your project.

VIEWPOINT

Responsive Practices and Cultivating Ownership

Elizabeth Denneau, artist and educator

As a Black woman making art and teaching art in this desert land where my community represents less than 3% of the population, I am often confronted with the ongoing image of the Black cowboy in institutions of art that acts as my soul avatar in the narrative of the Southwest. Knowing that this is the only way you are seen in the incredibly expanding landscape of the Southwest is frustrating and alienating. While this story has a place, it cannot be the only one. We are not monoliths and so I approached my work with the museum as a Community Curator with this mission; to chip away at these visual narratives. I was delighted by what was tucked away in the museum's archives and pleased with their thoughtful reactions when gaps were revealed through this process. Interweaving my perspective onto gallery walls gave me a sense of ownership that wasn't necessarily there before.

In my work as an art educator, I approach my classroom with similar tenants of cultural responsiveness and cultivate an enduring sense of ownership. I encourage institutions to start an earnest conversation of trust and inquiry with the young people in their communities. While building those relationships, consider handing over some power, like my students and the curation of the museum's People of the Southwest. Creating a sense of ownership for youth is crucial to the positive progress of a community; it is essential to the museum's survival. You must create avenues of empowerment and ownership in younger generations. Institutions' dependency on their older generations is not sustainable and does little to build new patrons and art appreciators. Give teens a voice within your walls, and they will not disappoint.

Questions to consider:

- How will you support educators in your community?
- How will you provide pathways for collaboration between the museum and youth?
- What single stories are present in your museum, and what must you do to remedy that?
- What sort of work are you acquiring, and who must be added to your collection?

Defining Key Players

Key players in community-based curatorial work include: facilitators, museum staff, volunteers, docents, trustees, collaborating consultants, community members and partners, community curators, and museum audiences.

Facilitator—a collaborator who opens and guides conversations.

Facilitators have a clear goal and a methodology to get people thinking first and then guiding their actions towards the intended outcomes. Their facilitation is open-ended rather than prescriptive. Facilitators invite participants to:

- encourage sharing ideas
- honor and respect multiple types of expertise
- think beyond their comfort level
- share their expertise and experiences to build more relevant museums (collections, exhibitions, and programs)
- build off each other's ideas to expand knowledge

Facilitators may be internal or external staff members, but an internal facilitator must situate themselves in the in-between space—crossing a boundary between institutional departments and community.

Engaging with an external facilitator whose work is at the crossroads of dialogical pedagogies, community-based work, art-based knowledge, and intersectionality brings not only expertise, but also an “outsider” perspective which transforms the process and in some circumstances, may be less threatening.

The work of a facilitator can ground conversations in artworks to expand professional practice.

External Facilitator Example

In preparing docents to tour the *Indigenous Arts* exhibition at TMA, an external facilitator, Patricia Lannes of CALTA21, explored key concepts in relation to works of art on view.

Docents were invited to engage in facilitated conversations anchored in works of art from the permanent collection. Within the context of our community-based and co-curation framework, concepts like sovereignty, dialogue, and collaboration emerged as essential terms to ground conversations that would address ideas of shared power, equity, and undoing and re-doing professional practices.

Internal Facilitator Example

Another example can be seen in the open-ended framework used during TMA's early conversations to determine preliminary themes and focus for community-based curatorial efforts. In these conversations, an internal facilitator (TMA's Director of Engagement and Inclusion) engaged in semi-structured conversations to explore perceptions of permanent collection galleries and what themes would be important to consider in future installations:

- From your perspective, what should be the focus of an exhibition on [exhibition topic / collection area]?
- What do you think is missing from the museum's current display of [exhibition topic / collection area]?
- What stories and objects should be included in an upcoming exhibition of [exhibition topic / collection area]?

Following these preliminary conversations, more in-depth work was done with community curators that was grounded in an extensive preliminary list of potential artworks (where only 20% or less would be able to be exhibited). Some sample questions for facilitating those conversations included:

- What recommendations / comments do you have regarding the preliminary themes?
- Is there anything we are missing, or something you feel should or should not be highlighted within the forthcoming exhibition?
- Related to these themes, were there any standout artworks that you feel strongly belong in one section or another?
- Are there pieces that maybe should not be displayed together?
- General concerns or recommendations?

Questions to Consider:

- How can additional stakeholders be engaged in collaborative practices outside of core groups?
- How can information about collaborative processes be disseminated and incorporated into other parts of the museum?

Museum staff—Persons who represent the museum and have responsibility for different aspects of its operations. Each organization has its own structures and employees, that may often change, but these individuals influence the direction of a project and community-based curation.

Activating an interdisciplinary team is essential to a collaborative community-based curatorial approach. Museum staff require a mindset that accepts the importance of decentering the museum and recognizing that to build community-based curation approaches, multiple expertise and worldviews need to be respected and given space.

The TMA *Expanding Narratives* core team was comprised of representatives from collections, community engagement, curatorial, and education departments.

The core team consisted of:

- Community Engagement: Director of Engagement and Inclusion and Assistant Curator of Engagement
- Collections: Collections Manager and Registrar
- Curatorial: Senior Curator, Curator of Art of the American West and Associate Curator, Curator of Latin American Art
- Education: Director of Education

Additional staff from operations, membership, development, and marketing were activated during internal focus groups and ideation sessions.

Community Curator—Members of the community who collaborate with museum staff with the goal of fostering access and engagement with objects in meaningful ways based on their experience and unique areas of expertise.

A community curator is paid for their time and expertise. An honorarium is offered with consideration for the number of meetings and self-directed work necessary to support the development of an exhibition.

At TMA, working with a network of community curators enables the museum to explore a new framework for exhibition development and curation. Through a series of focused conversations community curators and TMA staff collaboratively determine themes, select artworks, and rethink approaches to interpretation and display for exhibitions. This process is reflective of, and committed to, collaboration, relationship building, and shared stewardship of works of art in the museum's care.

Collaborating Consultants—External collaborators with expertise in a specific field who work with museum staff toward a common goal. Both the consultant and staff bring their knowledge and experience to the table to develop solutions.

Community Partner—Individuals or organizations that have beneficial interests in a program. They have supportive and often reciprocal relationships with museums and can help promote interests with other agencies.

Board of Trustees—Governing body of museum responsible for strategic direction, financial management, and the fulfillment of museum mission.

At TMA, members of the Board of Trustees participated in different sessions and were kept informed of the collaborative process. Several members of the Docent Council, members of the Community Initiatives Committee (responsible for the IDEA initiatives and assessing the impact of community partnerships), and the Governance Committee participated in focus groups related to generating collective knowledge about the museum's collections and exhibitions.

Docents—Public-facing museum representatives who share information about exhibitions, artworks, programming, and events with the public.

TMA relies on docent volunteers for both daily public tours and many scheduled tours. During *Expanding Narratives*, many docent training sessions offered practice-oriented strategies for engaging visitors in gallery conversation starters.

TMA activated docents in two main ways related to capacity building efforts: large-scale continuing education meetings and small group trainings.

Museum Audiences—Individuals who engage with the museum, whether by visiting, participating in programs, or otherwise supporting the institution.

Community Member—Members of the public who live, work, play, learn, and interact within a certain area of interest. Museum community members can have multiple connections with the institution including being visitors, partners, and collaborators. Community members might also be museum audiences but could also be potential audiences, representative of active members of the local community.

VIEWPOINT

Evaluative Thinking as a Dialogical Process

Cecilia Garibay, Garibay Group

Evaluation is often associated with activities at the end of a project, intended to assess whether it met intended outcomes. While this is one important function, findings can inform project activities and decision-making when evaluation is carefully woven across the life of the project. As the project's evaluation partner, Garibay Group approached our work as part of an ongoing effort in which the evaluator is “at the table” throughout the process to encourage reflection, learning capacity, and team engagement in using evaluation data to inform decision-making and therefore help maximize team learning.

Using a development evaluation frame¹² throughout the process, Garibay Group sought to: a) ask evaluative questions to help uncover implicit assumptions, surface challenges, and clarify specific aspects of project development; b) provide data-based feedback to inform implementation and ongoing program iteration; and c) facilitate reflection to support the team's overall model development. Thus, the emphasis is on providing real-time feedback through discussion and reflection so that teams can respond to evaluation insights and choose to course-correct and adapt throughout the process.¹³

The nature and focus of the dialogues naturally evolved over time, depending on emergent issues and the evolution of the team's understanding. These discussion cycles¹⁴ also served to identify challenges—e.g., which team members were struggling. To meet this challenge, the facilitator served as a reflective partner who could push the team's thinking, point out areas of convergence, strengths, or dissonance, and support the team in considering next steps. While we recognize that many museums do not have the ability to include an external evaluation partner in their work, the types of activities outlined here can—with some commitment—be integrated into your process.

At the heart of this work is developing an “evaluative thinking” mindset and skills with which to identify assumptions, pose critical, thoughtful questions, use evidence to make decisions, and seek deeper understanding through reflection, perspective-taking, and discussion.

When a team is using evaluative thinking practices, it might ask questions such as:

- How do we know?
- What evidence do we have and how credible is it?
- What assumptions do we hold?
- What other information do we need?
- Are there alternative explanations, and if so, what are they?
- Have we asked our community partners, and if so, what do they tell us? What information or evidence do we need to make the most informed decision?

12 Michael Quinn Patton, *Developmental Evaluation: Applying Complexity Concepts to Enhance Innovation and Use*, 2010.

13 Marcie Parkhurst M, Hallie Preskill, Jewlya Lynn, and Marah Moore, 2016, *The case for developmental evaluation*, <https://www.fsg.org/blog/case-developmental-evaluation>.

14 Graham Gibbs, *Learning by Doing: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods*, 1988, <https://ci.nii.ac.jp/naid/10013454789>.

Narrative Data

Conversations and narratives are fluid, dynamic, and ever-changing—and mapping what emerges from these exchanges can be overwhelming. Listening to communities through the above strategies will yield a lot of information. Each conversation, focus group meeting, community curator discussion, and other related correspondence, methods of note taking, making recordings, or other forms of compiling narrative information should be used to capture various perspectives. These will be useful when the time comes to draw conclusions and disseminate what has been learned into the exhibition. This narrative data can be used to understand multiple sources and perspectives from communities.

Anna De Fina and Alexandra Georgakopoulou¹⁵ define narrative research as a method of social practice, imagining “narrative structures as dynamic and evolving,” as “part of social practices inevitably lead to pluralized and fragmented notions” and lastly within narrative practice “people participate in multiple, overlapping and intersecting communities.” By acknowledging these relationships and creating spaces for them to collide and interact, the museum becomes a site of multiple and varied perspectives.

Narrative data is important in this context because it offers insights to:

- a variety of lived experiences
- provides valuable information to inform exhibition themes, interpretative plans, and programs
- creates new understandings about artworks in the collection
- often opens new pathways for future research and exploration

15 Anna De Fina and Alexandra Georgakopoulou, “Analysing Narratives as Practices,” *Qualitative Research* 8, no. 3 (July 1, 2008): 379–87, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794106093634>.

Qualitative data comes in many forms and from several sources. When TMA developed community-based exhibitions, copious notes and meeting minutes documented conversations, focus groups, and share-back sessions. These were always member-checked, meaning that official minutes were distributed after conversations and community curators/stakeholders were given the opportunity to fill in gaps or make corrections.

Once minutes and summaries were approved, TMA staff began label and organizing themes and identify relationships within the data. When working with community curators, conversational data was coded for various purposes. Coding helped to identify patterns among artworks mentioned, themes that recurred, and strategies proposed for reviewing preliminary object lists and materials. From these categories, we were able to review the frequency of works of art mentioned across conversations as well as identify “big ideas” that could act as umbrella themes.

Now, what will you do with what you’ve learned?

Questions to Consider:

- How do you implement insights from conversations with communities within exhibitions, interpretation, and programming?
- How, if at all, do they inform the organization overall?

G	
accession #	brief explanation (if any) direct quote from notes
2005.22.23	Storytelling; grounding relationship with the land; deer dancer - sound and sensory
2005.22.24	Storytelling; grounding relationship with the land; deer dancer - sound and sensory
2005.22.9	Storytelling; grounding relationship with the land; deer dancer - sound and sensory
2021.9.1	deer dancer imagery
1998.7	importance of story telling
2009.22.5	funny
2007.16.1	in betweenness and the mixing of cultures

[Artworks](#) | [Artworks Frequency](#) | [Themes](#) | [Approaches to reviewing](#)

G		Example
Category	sub-category	
Weird / unexpected		
Humor		<p>[Speaking about Pascola masks] "I like them cause they are funny"</p> <p>"there are lots of contemporary works that are very fun – that play into the mix of tradition but also satirizing tradition – poking fun and holding on to things that are important to us (practices learned or kept as family)"</p> <p>"reworking traditional imagery with contemporary materials and making it a bit humorous"</p> <p>"I am interested in the comparison from my personal – my heritage – it's a very personal part of my identity – we took for Christianity/Catholicism - Poking fun at things while also maintain what is sacred"</p>
Landmarks	old signage; desert bodegas; mexican resturants; important places in the landscape / desert	<p>"I highlighted a lot of the missions as well – I think its an important part of this place"</p> <p>"I wonder if anyone else would be interested in including an image of the mission just because it is such a well known part of the landscape and culture"</p>

[Artworks](#) | [Artworks Frequency](#) | [Themes](#) | [Approaches to reviewing](#) | [Big Ideas](#) | [+](#)

ABOVE: Examples of narrative data and related codebook from *Southwest Art: Contemporary Conversations* exhibition development, 2023.

VIEWPOINT

Translating Community-Generated Data into an Exhibition

Kristopher Driggers, Associate Curator, Schmidt Curator of Latin American Art

Often, community conversations leading to a permanent collection reinstallation can generate an enormous quantity of data. Museum staff and community collaborators have ideally built and sustained relationships over the course of many hours, met in multiple sessions, and had interactions that shaped how all participants understand the topic of the prospective exhibition. Hopefully, these observations have been faithfully documented – perhaps recorded on Zoom and then transcribed, or assiduously captured by a note-taker with precise attention to detail. But once all the data has been amassed and organized, it can be difficult to know how to take the next step in making all it into an exhibition.

In my experience it is useful to think of this work as both editing and translation, both significant responsibilities. Staff should faithfully represent the community conversations, staying true to the words, ideas, and sentiments that emerged over the course of dialogue. Even so, questions may arise, in part because the process involves a shift in medium from dialogue to exhibition. Conversations have their own pace, rhythm, and fluidity, while exhibitions communicate in a spatial rhetoric that is distinct from speech. Staff must make choices about how to carry out these translations and should also be clear-eyed that such decisions might require further renegotiation through additional dialogue and communication with collaborators.

Along with translation issues, an exhibition will require choices about how to condense data into a manageably-sized presentation. Setting these priorities can be challenging: Out of all of the information that you have gathered, what points are the most important? It might be reasonable to foreground ideas that come up frequently in conversation, highlighting collaborators' points of consensus. Sometimes, a review of the notes shows a brilliant insight from a collaborator offered as an aside or a stray remark. How does one decide which comments will be included in a show, and what methods will best prepare you to share back an exhibition's vision with collaborators?

This process is going to require communication and quite likely willingness to negotiate. At the onset, contributing staff should speak internally about how translation will be undertaken, discussing roles, setting expectations, and imagining potential questions or obstacles in the approach to the data. As the process unfolds, staff should maintain dialogue with collaborators, ensuring that the work is being undertaken faithfully and adjusting the exhibition in response to feedback. Most importantly, staff should not take for granted that collecting community-generated data will make all further choices about the exhibition obvious. Instead, they should anticipate further conversations and creative solutions to the work of translation and condensation ahead in pursuit of an exhibition that speaks to a multiplicity of narratives.

Questions to consider:

- Imagine that you have collected extensive data on an exhibition topic from conversations with community collaborators. How would you work with that data to create an exhibition?
- How can an iterative curatorial process transform exhibitions?
- How do you check in and share back with community curators for feedback and discussion as exhibition details become finalized?
- After you begin translating your data into an exhibition, what kind of conversation would you have with your collaborators to further refine your exhibition? What kinds of materials or presentation formats would support that work?

BUILDING CULTURAL COMPETENCIES

As a result of engaging communities in conversations about collections, records might need to be updated, governing documents might need revision, and other changes in practice could occur.

Museums are evolving entities; approaches to collections care, curatorial processes, and program development should grow and change as multilayered, community-informed research that is reflective of broadening historical contexts is taken into consideration. As methods of art historical scholarship change, so should our approaches to exhibition development, gallery facilitation, and collections management.

Critical to the cultural competencies of museums, including their staff and volunteers, is the focus on the specific social, political, cultural, economic, and historical contexts and functions of both institutions and artworks. For example, to implement equity principles, it is important that gallery facilitation poses questions and shares information that deepens understanding and participation among visitors, community partners, and museum professionals. With regard to collections care, there is a need to integrate community-based approaches and scholarship that incorporate academic research and culturally-specific methodologies to expand collections records and interpretation to reflect multiple perspectives and expertise.

In community-based curation it is essential to finding ways to incorporate the worldview and perspectives of communities within museum practices.

VIEWPOINT

Transformation of Practices: Visible and Effective Changes

Kit Kimball, Trustee and Docent

As a Trustee and a docent at TMA, I believe wholeheartedly that *Expanding Narratives* has been a solid success for our institution. There have been amazing and positive changes over the past four years at TMA, including the physical appearance of the museum, changes to programming, community involvement, entertainment for children and adults, and a greater focus on the “melting pot” of local cultures in our region. TMA is becoming an inviting, mind-opening and comforting experience for our diverse community.

This resulted from a transformation of traditional practices. There is no better time than today to promote this community-based model and cultural inclusivity for our nation’s art museums. Some visible and effective changes to TMA as a result of this shift include:

The *Indigenous Arts* gallery representing a wide variety of art (paintings, weavings, basketry, rugs, pottery) highlighting regional as well as national peoples from a community perspective.

The Art of the American West gallery, with its *People of the West* intervention, presenting thought-provoking questions about diversity and representation in the selection of art, artists, and time represented. Visitors are challenged to distinguish between the myths and truths of western art.

Popol Vuh and the Maya Art of Storytelling, an exhibition that explored a Mayan story of creation, reached visitors on visual, programmatic, and multivocal levels, while also highlighting the stories from Guatemalan community members on the value and importance of Popol Vuh in their lives.

As I docent, I have seen how TMA has been on the cutting edge of developing, training, and executing a successful program that integrates community-based practices. Some highlights of the TMA Curator/Docent led program include:

- A stronger collaboration between curators and docents is in place to prepare for docent-led tours including discussions for all new art exhibits that have been community driven.
- TMA training of docents is both comprehensive, ongoing, and open to adjustments as docent, curators or community feedback requires.

We see it as our responsibility to assure that the rich diversity in Tucson’s history and the continued diversity in its modern communities are honored and fully represented.

Dialogue and Responsive Facilitation

When curating exhibitions with communities, it is important to develop cultural competencies that foster dialogue through responsive facilitation and to prioritize gallery experiences that support conversations.

These questions for self-assessment¹⁶ (pages 63–65) are useful tools for a check in:

- How are you valuing and including lived experiences in museum work/your work?
- How do you foster relationships?
- When collaborating with communities, are you putting conditions in place that allow you to really listen and ask people their truths?
- How do you make space for different visions and perspectives?
- How are you accommodating differences among the people involved?
- Are you allowing space for flexibility and change?
- How can museums better reflect and engage communities and audiences?
- How are we considering (and addressing) the contemporary moment when planning for gallery experiences?
- How can we address the gap between histories taught and histories lived?
- How do we shift away from defensiveness when we make mistakes?



Docent workshop with a community curator in *Indigenous Arts*.

¹⁶ Prompts for reflection has been inspired by the plethora of cultural-competency resources provided by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association's "Cultural Competence Check-Ins:" <https://www.asha.org/practice/multicultural/self/>

Awareness

How often are you aware of:

	Never	Sometimes	Often / Pretty well	Always / Very well
the power you hold				
your privileges and those in the group				
your capacity and others' in the group				
cultural differences and how they impact group dynamics and individual experiences				
the areas that make you feel comfort and/or discomfort				
the assumptions you hold				
both your and individuals' multiple social identities				
the ways in which culture influences experiences, knowledge, and society at large				

Knowledge

How often do you understand:

	Never	Sometimes	Often / Pretty well	Always / Very well
how different social positions are formed and their implications in society				
difference as a strength in communities and groups				
the impact of racism, sexism, and other prejudices can have in group dynamics				
my strengths and limitations				
the way cultural differences inform expertise, experiences, scholarship, and communication styles				
different reasons for collaborating and the different risks individuals hold when collaborating				

Skills

How often are you...

	Never	Sometimes	Often / Pretty well	Always / Very well
willing to do your 'homework' and learn about cultural differences				
willing to recognize your own cultural biases				
equipped with tools and resources to help navigate cross-cultural situations with respect				
amplifying the voices/contributions of a broad range of individuals, especially those who have been historically erased or misrepresented				
understanding when to step back and let others take the lead				
making space to think and formulate responses by allowing time for pauses and silence				
valuing difference and diversity				
facilitating conversations and learning in a way that challenges stereotypes				
able to adapt and respond to different and difficult situations				
acting respectfully in cross-cultural situations				
taking responsibility for how your comments and behavior may impact others				

VIEWPOINT

Becoming a Facilitator

Morgan Wells, Director of Education

A major part of my role through this process was to implement a **visitor-centered approach** to the museum's docent core and enforce the idea of being a **facilitator over teacher**. This grant made it possible to re-enforce what staff was trying to implement and made change possible in a group that often has a hard time with change. While this change was difficult and often met with some resistance, the education team, which included myself, the Director of Education, and two docents, was able to make major improvements to the training program. The change to the program began with the docent class of 2019/2020 and then with the class of 2022. Each training course lasts eight months during which time docents learn about the museum, collections, and how to tour and engage with visitors.

The original docent training program was focused on an art historical approach and taught docents a foundation of art that TMA did not have in its collection. These trainings were based on the interest of the docents and not on the museum's mission or the works in its collection. The change focused on using open-ended question strategies while touring. Docents learned to facilitate conversations using Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) and questioning strategies supported by layering artist details and art historical information when appropriate. This shifted touring from a lecture style experience to one that prioritized dialogue.

With the new training class, the art history component of the course centers on the TMA

collection with insights from the museum's curators as well as learning about their experiences in community-based curation. In the past, university professors gave general lectures that acted as a survey course for art history broadly and were not relevant to the artwork displayed in the museum. This change aimed to make the training class more relevant to what the docents would be touring once they graduated.

Since the new training, there has been an increase in docents willing to tour, as well as a more positive attitude when serving the museum's mission to our visitors.

With the existing docent cohort, we created mandatory training to talk about open-ended questioning, more inclusive touring strategies, and best practices. Additionally, during the year (October–May), docents have monthly opportunities to learn about ways they can be more inclusive in their roles. These trainings are offered by museum staff and outside experts to provide more opportunities for docents and to reinforce the work of museum staff.

It can still be a challenge to overcome previous teaching methods that privilege art historical knowledge and "lecture style touring." It is easy for them to fall back on more traditional touring methods. I hope that over time these new methods, which focus on audience and community relevance, will become easier and a standard in docent training.

Rethinking Docent Continuing Education

In year two of the project, and in conjunction with the reinstallation of *Indigenous Arts*, TMA implemented an extensive training program for its cohort of volunteers. This impacted the ways in which TMA trains docents on feature exhibitions and presented an opportunity to train new docents more holistically.

An initial attempt to train all 100 docents via Zoom during the pandemic was a failure. The concepts presented in the training (collaboration, sovereignty, and dialogue) were too content heavy for a single session, and there were difficulties navigating the technology.

After this experience, a group of 12 docents in leadership roles who understood the museum strategic and IDEA Plan was invited to participate in a series of **eight professional development sessions**. Multiple sessions were critical for the development of new dialogical skills, culturally relevant practices, and concepts that relate to community-based curation. These sessions were not without their own challenges.

In the very beginning of the *Indigenous Arts* study group, we were asked about why concepts of sovereignty and treaties with Tribal Nations were important to learning if it wouldn't be the main topic of conversation during tours. Knowledge of these concepts and experiences should fundamentally shift our approach to touring and facilitating conversations with the museum. While these might not be the main

topic of touring and gallery conversations, they inform facilitation strategies.

Additionally, it was important to underscore the reality that sometimes no matter how well-researched and well-read we are, we are still distanced from content and experiences related to cultural materials and stories. We must be aware of our sources, and perhaps critical of them. Are these sources in fact offering us essential information or are they a single perspective or do they highlight cultural knowledge not intended for all visitors? We also must acknowledge that some stories are not ours to share and as good facilitators we shouldn't push too far, overshare, or attempt to be experts on cultures/materials where we are outsiders. Extending this further, to be good collaborators we need to respect and honor boundaries.

TMA staff offered the following suggestions to docents touring this exhibition:

- be flexible and start where your group is drawn first
- organic materials (baskets, textiles and works on paper) will rotate annually because of light sensitivity, so keep in mind that this space is evolving constantly
- this exhibition includes a variety of interpretative materials and texts authored by artists and community curators—be sure to reference/quote from these first-person accounts when possible

Strategies and Approaches

Museum galleries are spaces for exchanging ideas, dialogue, and for building deeper understandings. Works of art might share the artist's personal experiences, address sensitive subject matter, offer a new way of looking at something, present a commentary on society and more. It is essential to respect and honor multiple perspectives, even when they differ from your own.

Responsive Facilitation is a user-centered approach where facilitators observe groups' interactions, support engagement and observations and reflect on what has been said and experienced. This occurs when facilitators practice generous listening (without judgment), engage in dialogue, and let go of personal perspectives.

This type of facilitation consists of:

- being open to revise, adapt and change when necessary
- listening to what is said or not said and what is implied and responding thoughtfully
- reflecting and building connections between observations
- questioning through inquiry-based methods
- respecting diverse and differing opinions
- integrating art historical information after conversation and only when relevant

Here's how:

- building collective understanding by connecting comments and ideas:
 - co-creating stories
 - making connections between observations
- including invitations to share by asking open-ended questions
- developing accessible entry points using opening prompts that can spark multiple and varied responses
- including multiple perspectives
- asking for supporting evidence:
 - what do you see that makes you say that?
 - what more can you tell me about that?

A NOTE ON DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS AND DISCOMFORT

- acknowledge discomfort—this is a space of possibility and change. Remember, often discomfort yields learning
- commit to follow where relationships and conversations go
- measure success through moments of trust rooted in a safe and open environment without judgement, keeping in mind that judgement is perceived both through verbal and non-verbal cues

VIEWPOINT

Expanding Skills and Building Knowledge Together

Julie Frankston, former docent council president (2019-2022)

The *Indigenous Arts* study group docents learned a lot about themselves and how to engage visitors humbly, respectfully, and safely from the workshops. Although the *Indigenous Arts* exhibit is an ideal example of community-based curation, it also offered many new terms and philosophies that were unfamiliar and difficult for docents to embrace. The concepts are universal, but the fear of overstepping is huge.

Let's think of this experience as a shared (curators, docents, visitors) museum journey.

Beware abstract notions and big words with docents—avoid the academic jargon or lose the docent. Traditional docents (those who graduated before 2015) are used to historical and contextual information and not trained to encourage independent thinking. Asking docents to treat an artist's intention as secondary is a BIG ask.

Givens:

- Modeling is critical but practice is imperative.
- Paraphrasing and comment-linking are challenging (need practice).
- Open-ended question samples are a MUST.

We need to find a way to speak and feel comfortable in our own skin.

Community-based curation is a fantastic innovation and docents want to embrace it even though, in the end, there may be more questions than answers. In terms of touring the *Indigenous Arts* gallery, the idea that not all knowledge can be shared is magical—a new concept for docents.

I love the term steward and think it belongs everywhere in museum-speak. It implies studious and loving care for objects that belong to others. It's a great mindset.

The more we tell ourselves and our guests that we are all learners and build knowledge together, the better.

VIEWPOINT

Expanding Skills and Transforming Approaches to Training

Virginia Yrun, current docent council president (2022-2024)

At the start of *Expanding Narratives* in 2019, the Director of Education, Director of Engagement, the co-vice presidents of training, and our director embarked on a collaborative effort to transition away from a curriculum which focused on art history and object-based touring methods. Instead, we created and adapted a curriculum model that incorporates inclusion, diversity, equity, and access (IDEA) as the program's foundation.

As a result of these efforts, TMA launched a newly revised docent training curriculum based on IDEA principles. The purpose of the docent training committee is to support the implementation of TMA's strategic objectives by:

- implementing a curriculum that includes and celebrates the IDEA philosophy throughout
- supporting trainees to present inclusive tours which highlight exhibitions featuring traditionally underrepresented artists and their and community voices
- fostering a welcoming environment
- facilitating barrier-free access
- enthusiastically touring underserved and diverse communities

The curriculum supports trainees in offering tours which provide opportunities for guests to give feedback about their experiences and to provide information regarding museum membership. Docents are assigned practice tours specifically in TMA galleries in which curators work collaboratively with community partners.

Additionally, principles included in new docent training have been used as the focus of our monthly Docent Council Education Meetings and incorporated into our Tour Support efforts with tenured docents: activities and speakers center on communities we serve; focus on relevance by exploring community links in relation to our collection, amplify the importance of various scholarship and expertise and demonstrate for docents the importance of interdepartmental collaboration.

We look forward to continued refinement of the progress and principles developed through TMA and IMLS support.

Impacts on Collections Care

While interpretation practices might first come to mind when considering the impact of work with community collaborators, practices in collections care are just as relevant in community dialogue. Traditional art museum approaches to collections care prioritize the long-term stability of artworks' materials, with decisions often guided foremost by an interest in extending the longevity of works. Opening up dialogue with community members might suggest what other priorities might be considered as well. In your conversations with collaborators around object care, you might ask what priorities should guide your institution's practice of object caretaking, and whether there are specific practices for stewarding the works that best align with culturally relevant approaches. Conversations might lead, for example, to rethinking the ways that objects are handled by staff, revising policies around access to objects, or rethinking the conditions of objects storage—along with many other aspects of collections care that might be addressed in community dialogue.

As always, these conversations should recognize that museum practices represent only one kind of authority on the subject. The expertise and lived experience of collaborators offers another important body of knowledge for thinking about how to approach your work. At times, the practices recommended by collaborators may seem to be in tension or even in contradiction with the way collections care departments typically carry out their business. In these instances, staff might start by working to reexamine the premises behind existing museum practices, or might engage in further research on the feasibility of implementing collaborator recommendations.

Questions to Consider:

- What governing documents may need revisions to ensure access is provided to source communities interested in reviewing and engaging with collections?
- If museums are stewards of art, culture, heritage, and history, how can collections be activated and employed in ways that achieve greater cultural understanding?

VIEWPOINT

Unlearning

Rachel Adler, Collections Manager and Registrar

As I reflect on the community-based curation process, the “unlearning” that I experienced was significant. Those in charge of collections management like myself—Collections Managers, Registrars, Conservators—all receive training to be able to care for and handle works of art. The standards of care and methods are typically created by professionals in the industry, and come from decades of discussions, research, and real-world practice. I realized through interactions with community curators that these standards and training came from the western world and do not necessarily reflect the beliefs or practices of all groups, specifically the Indigenous communities with which we were collaborating. For example, handling pottery or baskets with bare hands was often preferable to gloved hands. Conservation research tells us that oils from our hands can damage items and works of art. In the interest of preservation, we are trained to wear gloves when handling works. As a result, the emphasis has always been on protection and object permanence. However, for some communities, some items are living or ancestors and their souls should connect to other living beings. If I’m wearing gloves, then there is a barrier and loss of connection. I might be staying true to my training, but I am violating an intrinsic cultural value.

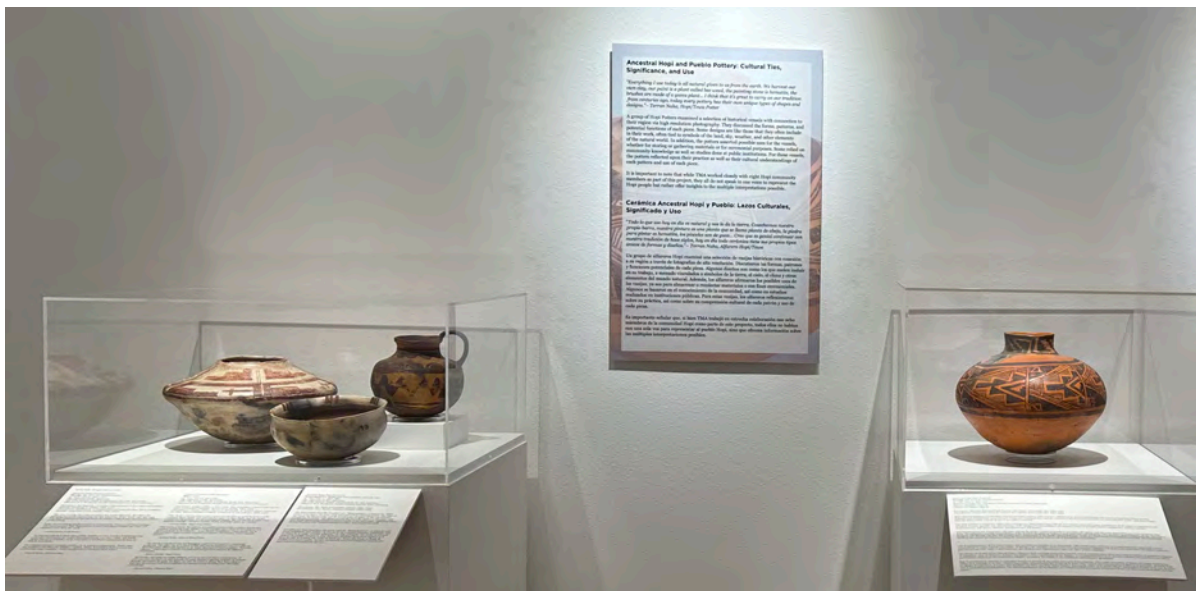
Becoming aware of these practices was enlightening, but initially, was challenging to navigate. It required me to reflect on all my past training and knowledge of current best practices and re-access. I needed to decenter the museum as an authority, and center people, community, and culture. This shift in perspective revealed alternate methods of handling works, a change in reference language and nomenclature, and redefined the expert/person of authority.

It is so important that these items are handled with the utmost care and respect, keeping in mind their culture of origin, but by utilizing these methods, would I be disregarding a fundamental part of my current practice? How could I reconcile my experience and formal training with this new information I had gained? These questions are still unresolved in my mind, but it was clear to me that I could not ignore this new knowledge, and a change in practice was necessary. After conversations with Indigenous community members, I changed the way I handle these items. Making sure my hands are thoroughly washed and washed often, I refrain from using gloves and move or touch works with my bare hands. This ensures that there is a connection from one living being to another, while also keeping preservation and object permanence in mind.

Altering my method of art handling was an informal change and was relatively simple to implement. However, I had to consider how can we solidify this change in practice going forward, not just on a small scale, but also on a larger scale. An institution-wide change might be an essential next step to reinforce this change in practice. Most recently, our institution has been in the process of revising our Collections Management Policy and this could be an opportunity to make changes at the policy level, so that we can reconcile and merge traditional practice with culturally relevant practices.

Questions to consider:

- Who decides what are best practices? Who is the expert/authority?
- How do you determine the best method of handling an object? Is it based on material, fragility, cultural significance, source/origin?



ABOVE: Installation view of *Stories from Clay: Community Conversations of TMA's Historical Indigenous Pottery Collection*.

BELOW: Study of ancestral Indigenous pottery through the *Stories from Clay* research project, 2022.

VIEWPOINT

Collections Care and Best Practices for Storage

Colleen Lucero (Hopi), museum consultant

Care differs depending on context.

Pottery (Tsaqapta) is to be used to their fullest potential or purpose for it being made. Some for food/water storage, to serve food and to cook and others for ceremonial offerings. The more elaborate pots used for monetary pay backs when a maiden was learning to grind corn that led up to a wedding. These pots were made for appreciation in helping her become successful in her endeavors as a Hopi woman. This was the care that we know as Hopi people, for them to be used. Even when they break, they have a purpose in firing more pots. Recycling clay or passing down designs.

When they are stored, they are stored within the home, they help occupy a shared space of interaction. They hear the joys, sorrows, and laughter of the families they were created for. It is true that it is as if the pots are an ancestor visiting, sharing these stories and encouraging them to work hard and to excel at their craft.

This is the care we know, and it is the complete opposite for museum institutions and that is okay. Museum staff carry their own expertise just as each native community does and those roles should be respected as their own best practice. Encourage the Indigenous communities to sit and visit to ask those questions, to learn about pottery and themselves. These communities are the experts and leave them to do this so their values and culture can carry on. Museums must be open to looking at the value of the content and origin, rather than the monetary value or condition of the pottery. This will help institutions understand the paradigms the native communities need in reclaiming their own histories.

Museums and institutions must continue to invest in the communities they serve just as much as their collections. Indigenous people never cared about pottery breaking because they could make more, they could perfect it better and more importantly pass it on. That is the relevancy in working with Indigenous communities in helping this knowledge to be preserved within these cultures.

TMA CASE STUDY

Timeline and Activities

Overview

Between 2019 and 2023, TMA created eight exhibitions through a community-curated process. Each exhibition activated a network of collaborators. Nearly all exhibitions involved additional focus groups and one-on-one conversations with internal and external stakeholders.

Activities included:

- collections evaluation and assessment
- exhibition development
- interpretation
- stakeholder meetings
- programming
- marketing and communication
- project evaluation
- IDEA intensives (professional development sessions)
- reports and publications

Expanding Narratives and community-based curation at TMA evolved over the course of four years (and continues to evolve) for a multitude of reasons ranging from a global pandemic to responding to emerging community suggestions/requests for deeper work.

Throughout the multi-year, multi-phase process, we engaged in a systematic approach to community-based curation. This began with informal conversations that led to small-scale interventions in the galleries so that new ideas and approaches could be tested. After, these pilot exhibitions were scaled to full galleries—continuously revising along the way.

This section presents TMA's experiences as a case study to illustrate the framework for community-based curation discussed in this toolkit.

The exhibitions discussed on the following pages include:

The Place Where Clouds Are Formed (February 2020 – February 2021)—installed in the museum’s gallery of Indigenous Arts was the museum’s first attempt in a community-based approach.

Indigenous Arts—a full reinstallation of the museum’s permanent collection space, opened in March 2021, and was the result of the collaborative efforts of six community curators. The development of this exhibition involved preliminary conversations with seven partner organizations and 10 Indigenous artists and scholars.

People of the West (Part one in 2022 and Part two in 2023)—an intervention that scaled the community-based curatorial model from a single collection area (Indigenous Arts) to one that explored multiple content areas. It was the result of conversations with two local artists and presented an opportunity to critically reflect on the Art of the American West.

After these three exhibitions, TMA learned there were many avenues that could expand our initial project scope including research about the collection and acquisitions. As a result, offshoot projects developed that while rooted or deeply connected to *Expanding Narratives* required additional funding to realize.

Enduring Legacies: The James T. Bialac Indigenous Art Collection (opened in February 2023)—this exhibition continued work with three of the six community curators from *Indigenous Arts*, and was an opportunity to explore a recent gift to TMA through a collaborative approach. This exhibition was made possible by Arizona Humanities.

Popol Vuh and the Maya Art of Storytelling (opened in May 2023)—this exhibition explored a new approach to artistic interventions to explore the intersections of ancient and contemporary artworks and included a large-scale mural by Justin Favela. As part of this process, museum staff engaged in dialogue about the Popol Vuh story with three generations of a family of Guatemalan heritage now living in Tucson. This exhibition was made possible with support from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Stories from Clay: Community Conversations of TMA’s Historical Indigenous Pottery Collection (opened in June 2023)—this exhibition was the result of a collections-based research project that scaled the community-based curatorial approach to how the museum conducted research, practiced co-stewardship, and worked to develop culturally relevant documentation. This project was made possible in part by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities: Democracy demands wisdom.

Southwest Art: Contemporary Conversations (opened in October 2023)—from spring 2022 to late summer 2023, TMA engaged in conversations to define, describe, and understand the Southwestern United States, asking: Are there key stories that should be told through the artwork on view? What stories define the past, present, and future of the Southwest? This exhibition, developed with seven community curators, explores Southwest art through four concepts: identities, perspectives, land, and materials, ideas that overlap or connect with one another, often speaking to several themes at once.

Evaluation Throughout *Expanding Narratives*

While it is not possible to describe all elements of the evaluation in detail, the following illustrates how evaluation was threaded throughout the *Expanding Narratives* project.

In year one of the project, Garibay Group worked with core TMA staff through a series of activities to develop the project's theory of change (TOC)—a comprehensive map illustrating how long-term goals would be accomplished. This helped the team identify issues such as key assumptions, situations in which staff might be missing necessary steps, instances where the timeline needed to be slowed, and develop solutions to reach the overarching goal: expanding representation and histories told in exhibitions (internal result) and enhancing community relevance (external result).

The core assumptions laid out in the project's TOC proved critical in setting a foundation for the project's work (Garibay Group, 2022). These principles included that: a) leadership must champion and support change efforts; b) cross-departmental teams are valued and involved in project efforts—including not only staff but volunteers and board; c) co-creation and collaboration are valued and central; d) community members are actively involved and engaged.

In years two and three, evaluation of the team's work on the *Indigenous Arts* Gallery focused on providing data-driven feedback to identify what was (and was not) working to inform the next phase of implementation and provide project insights. Through surveys and interviews with community curators, TMA docents, curators, TMA leadership, and TMA staff, we assessed and documented the productive and positive collaboration with community curators, the effectiveness of professional development activities for docents and other staff, and the degree to which the project seemed to influence organization-level practices.

The evaluation also identified two key remaining questions: a) was the community curation model replicable in other galleries that have different content and larger collections? and b) could TMA scale the project up, moving the work beyond its current core team and meaningfully involve more staff beyond curators?

Based on these outstanding questions, the evaluation focused in the final year of the project, largely on assessing the replicability of community curation and the fidelity of its implementation. As the team implemented the approach for *Art of the Southwest*, for example, we looked at how and how much it could be applied, emergent challenges, and what the team learned along the way.

Background

The Tucson Museum of Art and Historic Block (TMA) is a mid-sized art museum in the southwestern region of the United States. It has an operating budget of \$3 million, of which 56% is allocated to personnel expenses, and 20 full-time and 20 part-time staff. Annually, TMA has approximately 72,000 visitors to the campus and partners with over 200 local organizations and schools.

The museum was first established in 1924 as the Tucson Fine Arts Association, which was legally incorporated in 1936, and in 1954, became the Tucson Art Center. The Tucson Art Center became the Tucson Museum of Art in 1975 when it moved to its present location in historic downtown Tucson. TMA has evolved from a community artist-based art center in the 1950s and 1960s to a regional institution in the mid-1970s.

Today, the museum strives to represent and collect a broad array of objects that amplifies the dialogue between local and global cultures, histories, and artistic practices.

TMA's mission statement:

The Tucson Museum of Art and Historic Block connects art to life through meaningful and engaging experiences that inspire discovery, spark creativity, and promote cultural understanding.

TMA has a permanent collection of approximately 12,000 artworks with core collections of Art of the American West, including Indigenous Arts; Art of Latin America, ranging from ancient to contemporary; and Modern and Contemporary Art.

TMA's four-acre campus, in historic downtown Tucson, Arizona, encompasses an entire city block and includes the main museum building as well as five properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The campus includes:

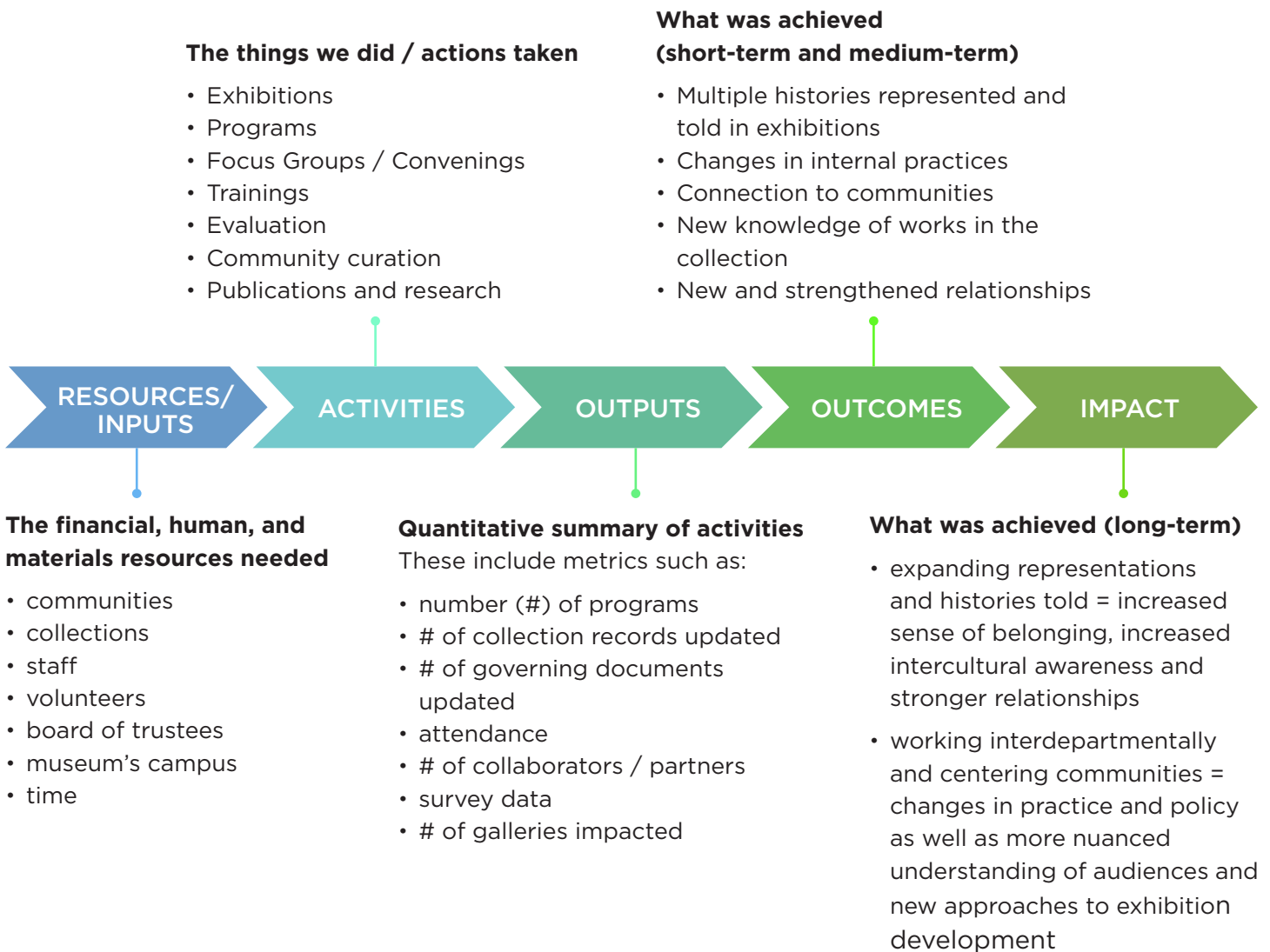
- 25,000 sq ft of exhibition space
- over 23,000 sq ft of courtyard spaces
- a 25,000 sq ft mixed-use facility with collections storage, offices, and an education center with classrooms, lecture space, and library
- a museum store and restaurant



View of TMA's north entrance and Kasser Family Wing. Photo by Nathan Lothrop.

Institutional Considerations

TMA has identified strengths and opportunities within its collection through critical reflection and community-engaged practices—highlighting a commitment to gaining insights to inform practice, expand the collection, and act as a springboard for the future. This work is at the core of TMA’s community-based curatorial efforts whereby through sustained conversations and collaborations with community members the museum seeks innovative approaches to exhibition development—amplifying the complex and unique cultural diversity of southern Arizona.

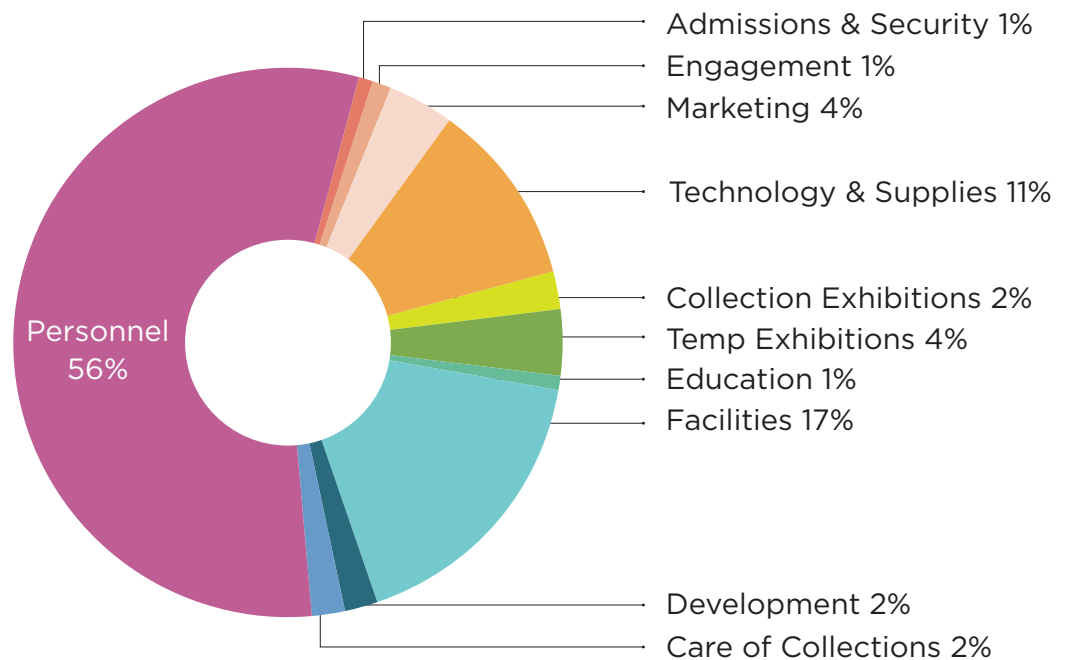


Within the context of *Expanding Narratives*, we wanted to illustrate spending and budget allocations, with the exclusion of personnel to better understand the impact grant funding could have on permanent collection exhibitions and related research.

We asked:

- How might TMA begin to consider strategies to redirect expenses to prioritize community-engaged practices and create a sustainable approach to community-based curatorial efforts?
- How might project funding from organizations such as IMLS support a change in practice to scale, broaden, and integrate community-engaged practices within exhibition (temporary exhibition) and collection (collections care and galleries) area activities?
- How does TMA allocate funds to our permanent collection (and its related displays) vs. temporary exhibitions?

TMA Cash Expenses—Two-Year Average Breakdown

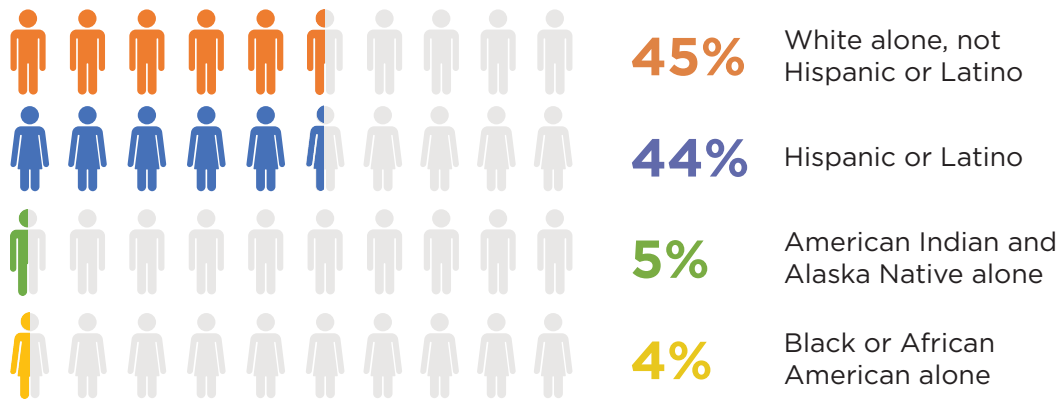


TMA’s cash expenses depicted above include standard operating costs and excludes grant funding, acquisitions, and depreciation (non-cash). Personnel, technology and supplies, and facilities are institution-wide expenses, other categories are direct expenses for the stated purpose.

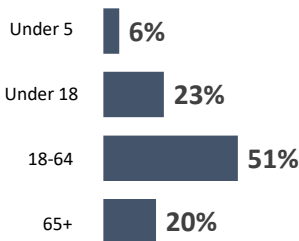
TMA does not budget for annual acquisitions, funds allocated to this are tied to restricted funds or designated gifts. Funding from federal agencies can provide TMA with an additional 1–2% towards programming expenses in this case. Predominately these costs make an impact in structural areas to upgrade exhibition layouts, build and construct new exhibition furniture, and provide honoraria to community collaborators.

Local and Regional Considerations

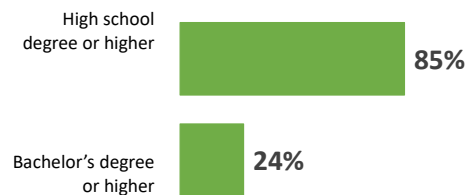
TMA is committed to relevance and equity by serving Southern Arizona and fostering connections to its local communities. The museum has steadfastly harnessed the power of community engagement and collaboration to connect to new audiences while diversifying the museum's institutional voice. Along with the region's diverse demographics, including Latinx, immigrant, refugee, and Indigenous communities, TMA is situated on the original territories of the Tohono O'odham and an hour's drive north of the U.S-Mexico border. This unique situation pushes the museum to build access creatively and collaboratively for its communities and present innovative and relevant public programs and exhibitions.



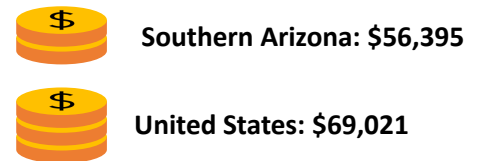
Age



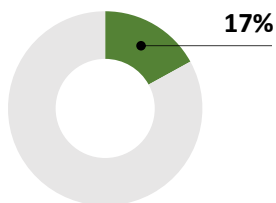
Education



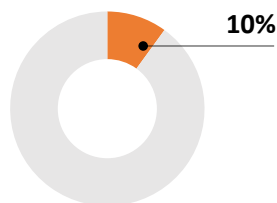
Median Household Income



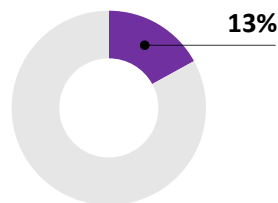
Persons in Poverty



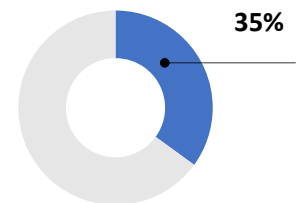
Persons with a disability (under 65)



Foreign Born Persons



Language other than English Spoken at Home



Southern Arizona Demographics: Cochise, Graham, Pima, Pinal, and Santa Cruz Counties.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts (Jul. 1, 2023).

Year One

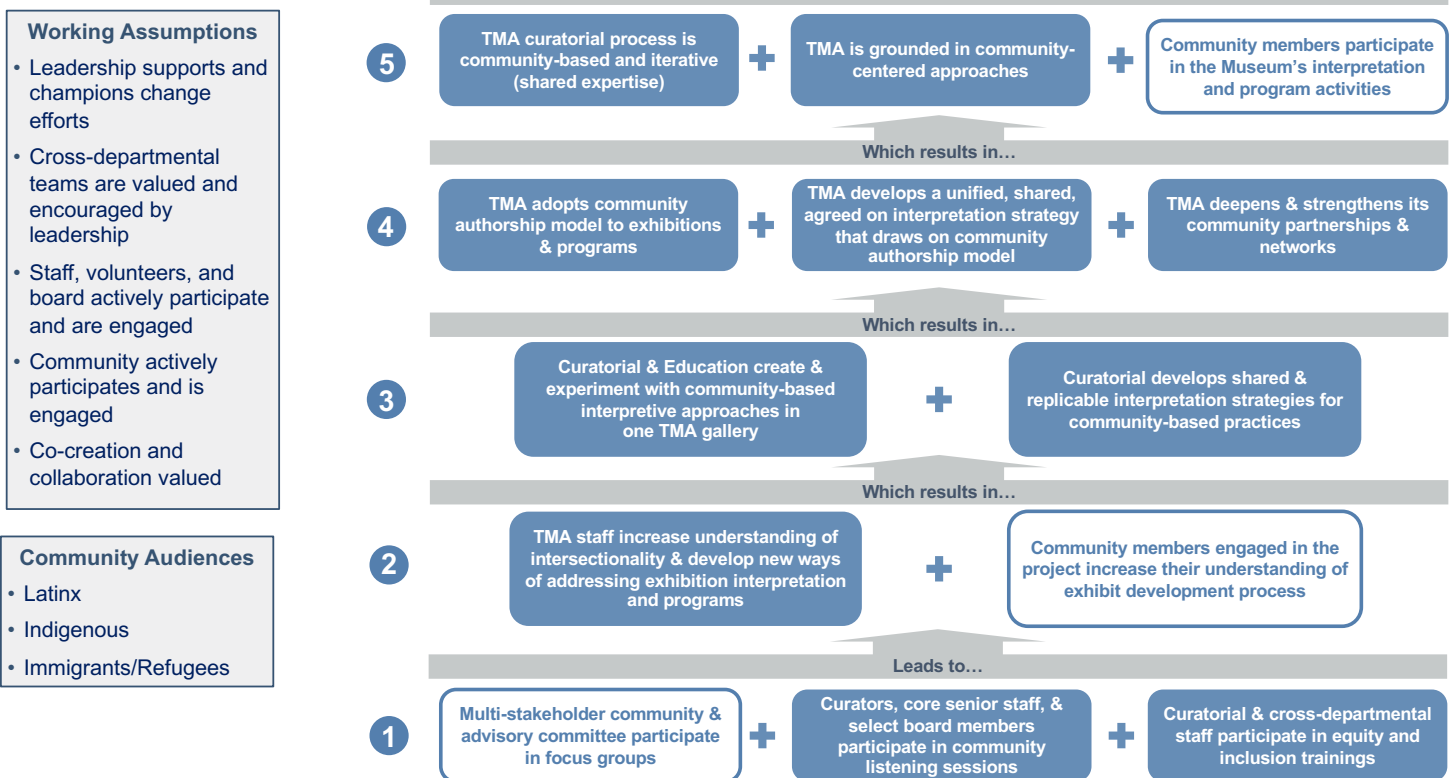
Benchmark and Reflection

(November 2019–October 2020)

Despite an interrupted year one due to COVID-19, this year focused on assessing existing community-based strategies and reflection on curatorial practices and collections management through an equity lens. We tested community-based curation with *The Place Where Clouds Are Formed*, installed as an intervention in the existing Indigenous Arts gallery.

During this year, collaborating consultants helped TMA to develop a Theory of Change (TOC) to guide *Expanding Narratives*—outlining desired impact and necessary steps to accomplish these impacts. Professional development sessions were also conducted.

Expanding Narratives Framework Theory of Change



Garibay Group (2020). Tucson Museum of Art: *Expanding Narratives* Theory of Change. Chicago, Illinois.

Exhibition

The Place Where Clouds Are Formed

The Place Where Clouds Are Formed combines poetry by Ofelia Zepeda (Tohono O’odham), critical text by Martín Zícarí, and photography by Gareth Smit to investigate the intersection of religion, migration, and community in the Sonoran Desert. The U.S./Mexico border in Arizona separates the Tohono O’odham as well as their sacred sites and ancestral land—this international border has long been the site of struggles over sovereignty. The images displayed in this exhibition depict Tohono O’odham villages in Quitovac, Cu:wĩ I-ge:sk (San Francisquito), and Sonoyta—towns located in Sonora, Mexico—as well as Quitobaquito and the surrounding lands in Southern Arizona. Poetry, interspersed in dialogue with the photographs, provides additional context and meaning to these places. The project started in 2018 as a result of a Magnum Foundation Grant, and this installation includes creative explorations by activist Amber Ortega (Tohono O’odham) and potter Reuben Naranjo (Tohono O’odham) to further explore this land.

Insights on Process

- Take the time necessary to connect with all the essential external partners and stakeholders. This may slow down the installation. *The Place Where Clouds Are Formed* was initially intended to open in 2019 in conjunction with the fall feature exhibition TMA was working on. However, due to the

content in the exhibition (both photographs and topics discussed) staff felt it was essential to touch base and converse with a wide network of O’odham cultural groups prior to installation. As such, the exhibition installation and opening was delayed five months.



Installation view of *The Place Where Clouds are Formed*, February 2020. This exhibit was a temporary Special Project installed in the Indigenous Arts collection area and was on view from February 2020–February 2021.

Year Two

Test and Refine

(November 2020–October 2021)

This year acted as a case study to test methods and pilot community-based curation. March 2021 saw the installation of the first fully community curated exhibition: *Indigenous Arts*. All activities, including programming and professional development trainings, were conducted via Zoom due to the pandemic.

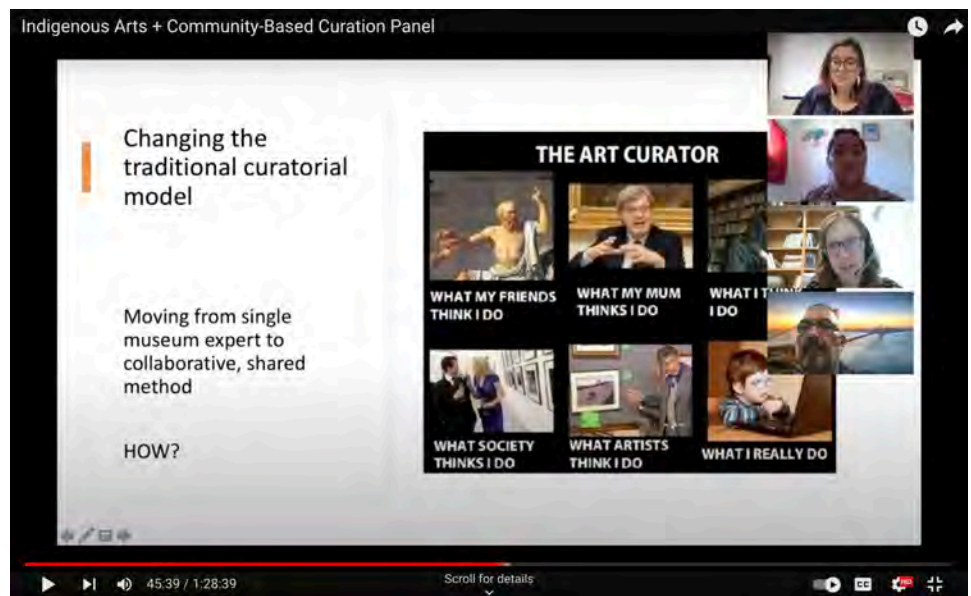
In year two a substantial focus was on training docents in culturally relevant pedagogies and key concepts related to *Indigenous Arts*. This would later impact and support an overhaul to TMA’s docent training program.

Additionally, in year two TMA identified more opportunities to deepen engagement with communities as an extension of lessons learned from *Indigenous Arts*. This included a need to

support new acquisitions and special projects with artists to address gaps in the collection and a need to do further research on existing and incoming collections with incomplete provenance, especially as it relates to historic works in the Indigenous Arts collection.

The end of year two included a small intervention to test scaling community-based curation to an intersectional content area—one that was not culturally specific. From focused conversations with artists living and working in Arizona, we installed *People of the West* in the Art of the American West gallery.

At the conclusion of year two TMA had a successful proof of concept with its framework for community-based curation.



LEFT: Installation view of *Indigenous Arts*, 2021.

RIGHT: Screenshot from panel discussion *Indigenous Arts + Community Based Curation* held via Zoom in 2021.

Exhibition

Indigenous Arts

This exhibition was a collaborative effort guided by a committee of Indigenous representatives in partnership with the museum, choosing works of art that speak to the complexities of tribal communities, sovereignty, and creativity. Through collaborative stewardship, multivocal interpretation, and creative pairings we collectively aimed to tell some of the stories behind the works of art in TMA's care. Interwoven throughout this exhibition are important themes within time and place. Works of art present thriving 21st century Indigenous peoples, cultural sovereignty, histories, and the resiliency and continuity of cultural practices through a diverse array of media.

Insights on Process

- We developed this initial installation over the course of 18 months of conversations and countless hours of invaluable dialogue and shared expertise with many people. We had preliminary conversations with seven partner organizations and more than 10 Indigenous artists and scholars prior to beginning the “official” exhibition development with the cohort of community curators. Community curation consisted of more than 55 hours of focused conversations with six community curators.
- Originally, we thought that the collection was an anchor for discussions, but as the process continued, we realized that the representation of living, regional communities was essential, expanding outside of the existing collection. As a result, the museum pursued loans, new interpretative approaches, and continued dialogue to consider these communities.
- Through discussions that we had with community curators we realized the need for a new approach to training docents in culturally relevant materials, moving docent from teacher or expert to facilitator. We developed exhibition-specific training with eight sessions and five speakers: an external consultant (Patricia Lannes with CALTA21), two TMA staff (Director of Engagement and Inclusion and Senior Curator, Curator of Art of the American West), and two community curators.
- Conversations with communities through the curatorial process highlighted the need for more in-depth collections research in order to update records and correct possible misattributions/misinformation.



Installation view of *Indigenous Arts*, March 2021.



ABOVE: Installation view of *Indigenous Arts* as installed in 2023.
 BELOW: Installation view of *Indigenous Arts* as installed in 2023.

Exhibition

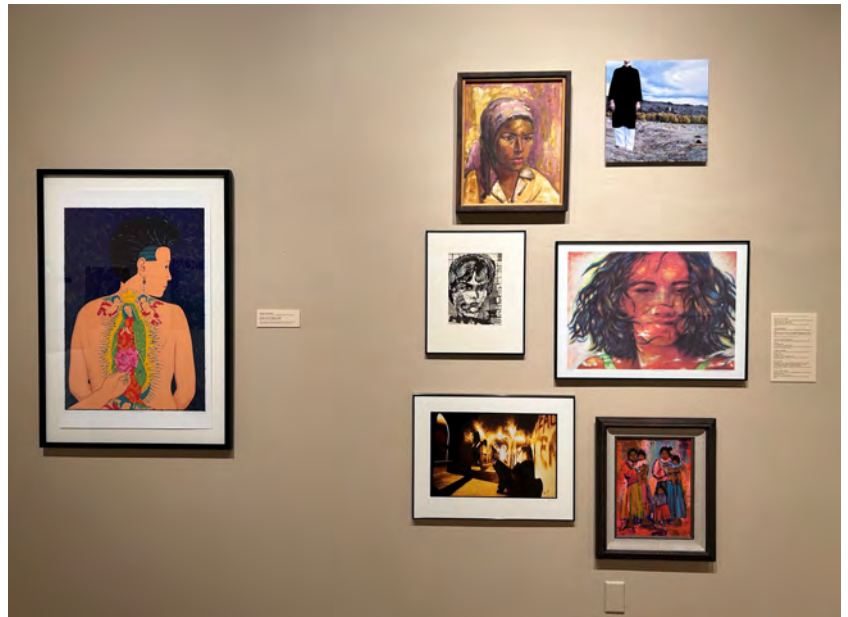
People of the West: A Rethinking of “Westerners” (iteration 2022)

Displayed in 2022 and located within the Art of the American West gallery, this collaborative intervention was originally inspired by conversations with Papay Solomon and Anh-Thuy Nguyen, Arizona-based artists who questioned their representation as “Western” while living and working in the region. This resulted in an exploration of the TMA collection and community dialogue that answers the question: How might we offer a new interpretation of this term that is more inclusive and reflective of a 21st century vision?

The works, depicting all types of westerners and includes those who are often not engaged as part of the myths and stories of the West such as people of color, women, immigrants, and people with disabilities were displayed on a large wall in dialogue with the Art of the American West collection. It contained works of art. The grouping provides rich, significant histories that enhance the way we think about the region. In addition, with select works, artists and cultural experts authored community voice responses to specific works.

Insights on Process

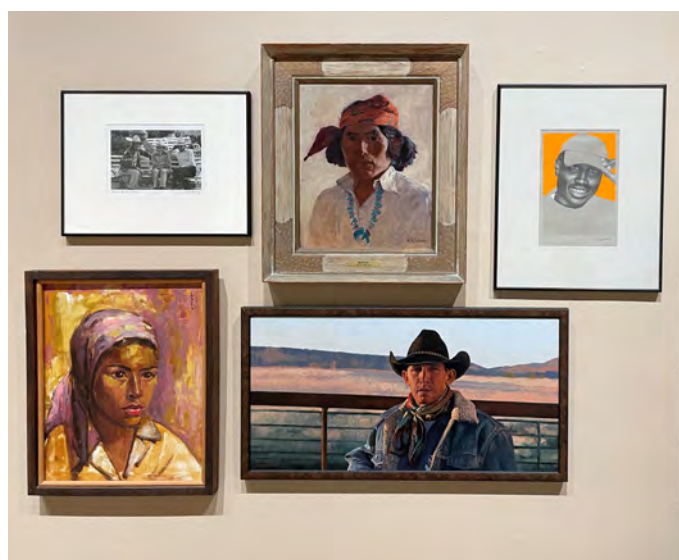
- This intervention emerged from critical dialogue with artists about the Art of the American West collection. It caused us to reflect on the genre and who is traditionally included, inspiring more conversations both internally and externally about how to expand the classification of this collection.
- We used this intervention as a springboard for multiple conversations and future projects including how to test working with a diverse group and a collection that is not culturally specific. Testing ideas in a small, contained footprint was a crucial step in building successful community-based exhibitions.



Installation view of *People of the West*, September 2023; a special project installed in dialogue with TMA's permanent collection display of Art of the American West.

“The discussion pertaining to identity has always been a difficult one for me to have, even prior to my family and I migrating to the United States, and more specifically Arizona...I was not aware that I was “Black” or an “immigrant” until after I arrived. As a Black man, refugee, or immigrant—whatever term you’d like to use—I am often left out of the expected roll call of a citizen of the American West.”

—Papay Solomon, artist and TMA collaborator



“I came to the U.S. in my adulthood to visit my sister living in Tucson, Arizona. The West that I always imagined and heard of did not resemble what I saw in Tucson. Of course, I did not expect to see cowboys running across the streets shooting but that was how Hollywood portrayed the West to me.”

—Anh-Thuy Nguyen, artist and TMA collaborator

LEFT: Installation view of *People of the West: A Rethinking of “Westerns,”* in the upper right corner, the portrait of a figure in a baseball cap against an orange background is a 2020 portrait of Ahmaud Arbery by Papay Solomon.

RIGHT: Installation view of *People of the West: A Rethinking of “Westerns,”* in the upper right corner, the portrait of a headless figure in a traditional Vietnamese tunic is the photographic work of Anh-Thuy Nguyen, *Boat Journey series: In transition, Saratoga #1*, 2012.

Year Three

Test, refine and scale, and replicate

(November 2021–October 2022)

This year focused on expanding community-based curatorial efforts in several other collection spaces. This work included sustaining and building relationships necessary for community-based curation as well as listening to stakeholders to determine preliminary themes for future exhibitions. During this year we learned to define the overlap between communities of Southern Arizona and TMA's collection as the intersection of heritage, culture, and history made visible through art.

To make these practices sustainable and systemic, we reflected on how relationships with communities are continuous; the tensions between the old way of doing business and new approaches to exhibition development; and the challenges of onboarding new staff.

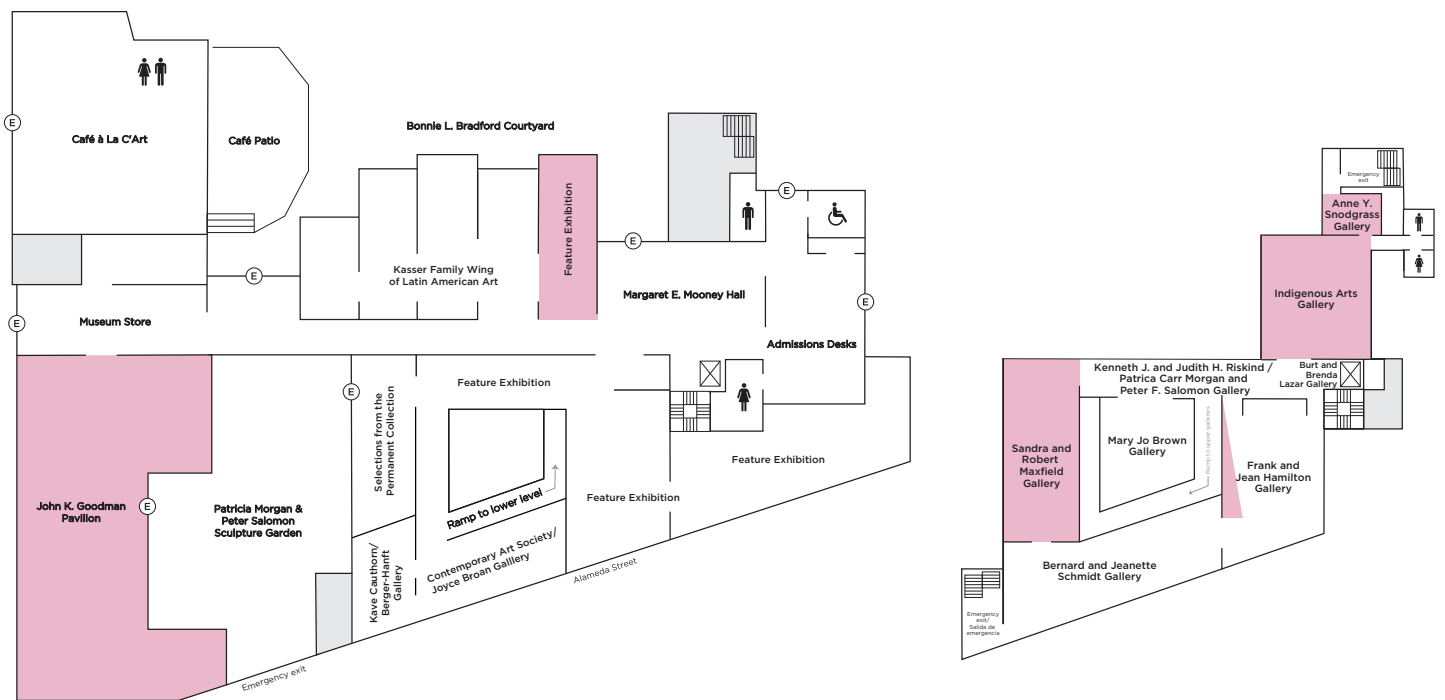
TMA's internal team began a series of reflective check-ins as the project team expanded to include colleagues from other areas.

Collaborating consultants continued to support *Expanding Narratives* through conversations and professional development sessions with staff as well as internal and external stakeholders.

This year also marked one year since the debut of *Indigenous Arts*. In preparation for the annual rotation of light sensitive works in the *Indigenous Arts* gallery, we engaged with previous collaborators to maintain the diverse ideas and voices incorporated in its first iteration.

Insights on Process

- At this point in the project, we identified some skills that are essential in moving away from the traditional curatorial model to one that centered communities:
 - plan timelines accordingly as this process requires time to engage in authentic and trusting conversations and compensate collaborators accordingly
 - listen to constituents and be responsive to emerging needs, ideas, and questions
 - be vulnerable: sit with discomfort and allow yourself to be changed within these moments
 - know when to step up and when to step back
 - reflect on your biases and behaviors, be willing to adapt
 - embrace a supportive and responsive practice rather than the role of an assertive expert
- Regularly updating collaborators and continuously tending to relationships is essential. This ensures that updates to exhibitions and regular rotations of works on view is possible with the inclusion of multiple voices and stakeholders.



TMA galleries and campus — As of November 2023, spaces noted in pink have been impacted by community curation; this represents 367 lft and 3,320 sq ft of exhibition space and is equivalent to 13% of the museum's galleries.

Year Four

Scale and replicate

(October 2022–November 2023)

In year four, we continued to scale and replicate the community-based curatorial framework in several exhibitions. During this time, staff continued reflective check-ins to discuss progress and reflect on roles, planned programming in support of the new *Southwest Art: Contemporary Conversations* exhibition, and started work on the toolkit.

A note on expansion and scaling:

While working on *Expanding Narratives* we identified resource gaps and opportunities for further exploration, ranging from deep dives into collection research, funding to support acquisitions and artistic interventions, and avenues to explore feature and temporary exhibitions that would mix artworks from our collection with strategic loans to address gaps in the collection.

As a direct response to the lessons we were learning during these community-based initiatives, we sought (and received) funding from the Terra Foundation for American Art, the National Endowment for Humanities, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Arizona Humanities. In addition, other funding opportunities and grant projects used findings and early research from *Expanding Narratives* to highlight the importance of TMA's commitment to community-based efforts.

Exhibition

Enduring Legacies: The James T. Bialac Indigenous Art Collection

Developed through collaborative, scholarly, and community-based dialogue with Indigenous scholars, this exhibition focuses on the intimate relationships and interconnectedness of people, events, and nature as told from multiple viewpoints found in works of art. Indigenous scholars Julia Arriola, Mayo-Mescalero; Monica Buckle, Cherokee; and David Tenario, Tohono O’odham, collaborated on this exhibition that focused on the intimate relationships and interconnectedness of people, events, and nature as told from multiple viewpoints found in works of art.



In February 2023, *Enduring Legacies* opened after several months of continued collaborations with three community curators as an extension of Indigenous Arts. The exhibition was developed through collaborative, scholarly, and community-based dialogue.

Insights on Process

- This exhibition was an opportunity to deepen work with three of the six community curators from *Indigenous Arts*. Meetings to review collection material occurred one-on-one in TMA’s collection area where collaborators examined the recently gifted collection in its entirety for thematic content.



Enduring Legacies: The James T. Bialac Indigenous Art Collection was made possible by Arizona Humanities.

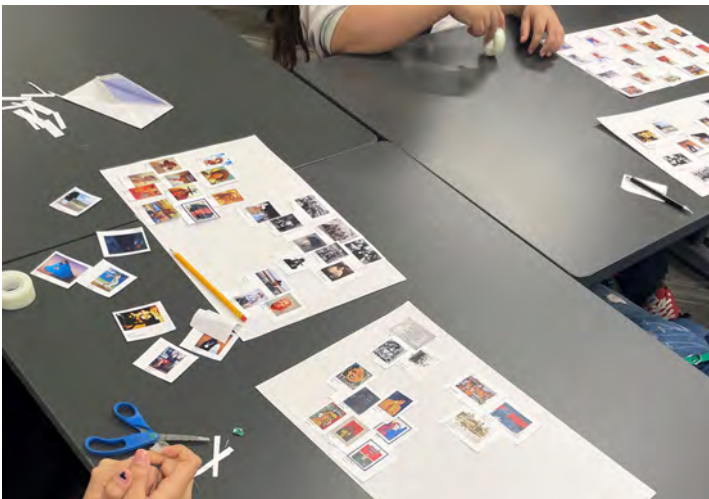
Installation view of *Enduring Legacies: The James T. Bialac Indigenous Art Collection*, February 2023. Temporary exhibition of TMA’s Indigenous Arts Collection, on view February 2023–March 2024.

In spring 2023, we began to explore focus groups with new audiences as a way to expand conversations and participation. This included working with teens to explore a new interpretation of *People of the West* to be installed in summer 2023.

Exhibition

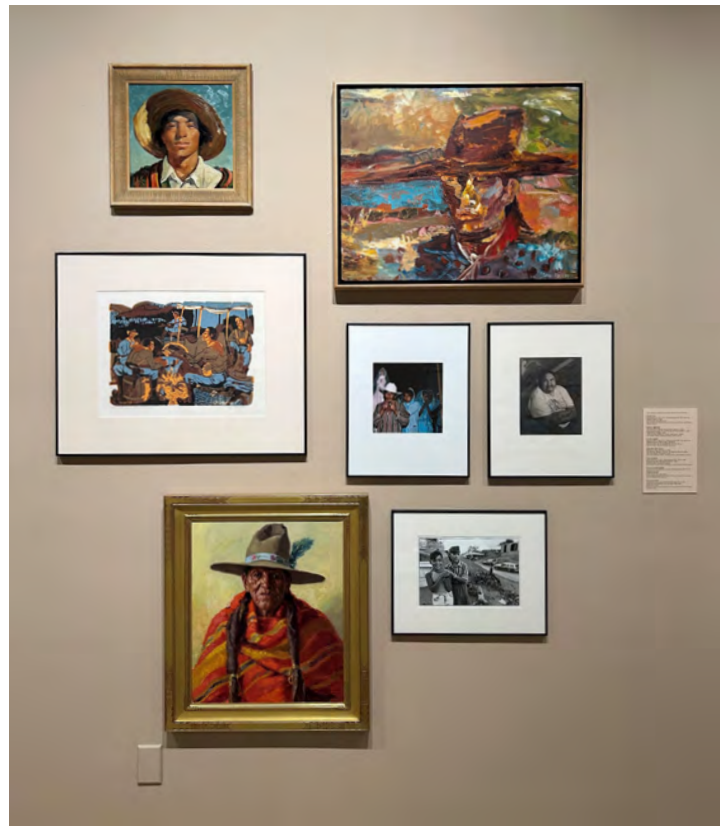
People of the West: A Rethinking of “Westerners” (iteration 2023)

The second iteration of this intervention stemmed from interactions with high school students and their understandings of “westerners.” TMA worked with students at Tucson High School in exploring the collection to find who they believe are “People of the West.” They examined images from the collection, determined themes, and selected artworks. Installed in 2023, this display includes art that represents someone they see every day, from those they would view in a coffee shop to portraits that reminded them of a relative. Some students were interested in depictions of “real” representations of people living in the West verses imagined, while others considered media, color, or compositional elements. A few made connections to history, women’s roles, urbanization of the West, and people in positions of power.



Insights on Process

- As artist conversations influenced the direction of the first iteration of this intervention, the second was guided by high school students. Students were given images to choose from, and their creative control in defining a “westerner” became more concrete than the first iteration which was more philosophical in scope. Students were excited to be a part of the curatorial process and have their opinions heard.



LEFT: Teen curators working on exhibition layouts.

RIGHT: *People of the West* installation view from September 2023.

In May 2023, in conjunction with First Thursday, *Popol Vuh and the Maya Art of Storytelling* opened. This exhibition included a large-scale mural by Justin Favela who responded to a work in TMA's permanent collection, Carlos Mérida's *Estampas del Popol Vuh*. As part of this process, museum staff engaged in dialogue with three generations of a family of Guatemalan heritage now living in Tucson about *Popol Vuh*.

Exhibition

Popol Vuh and the Maya Art of Storytelling

Creation, survival, relationships, and community are at the heart of the Maya story called the Popol Vuh. Written in the K'iche Maya language, the Popol Vuh narrates events from before the first sunrise. As part of the process of creating this exhibition, museum staff engaged in dialogue with three generations of a family of Guatemalan heritage now living in Tucson.

Artworks and voices in the exhibition show different artists' and community members' relationships to the Popol Vuh over time, such as Guatemalan modernist Carlos Mérida, whose *Popol Vuh* lithographs (1945) used the ancient Maya text as inspiration, a large mural by contemporary Latinx artist Justin Favela offers an immersive reinterpretation, and Ancient Maya vessels exemplify the creative and narrative resources available to historical artists. The gallery also includes the reflections of Guatemalan community members, who offer intergenerational perspectives on the Popol Vuh's words and meanings today. In their words, the Popol Vuh is all around us: it is the colors, the mountains, and the people.



Installation view of *Popol Vuh and the Maya Art of Storytelling*. Temporary exhibition of TMA's permanent Collection of Latin American Art, on view May 2023–October 2024.

Insights on Process

- Staff met with Guatemalan community members four times. From these conversations, it became clear that the stories of the participants were important to record. Plans morphed to include a video component within the exhibition that featured participants and their personal connections.
- Participants in the sessions were not always the same due to conflicts in schedules. However, each session proved fruitful and featured a variety of voices that generated nuances reflected in the final product.

Popol Vuh and the Maya Art of Storytelling was supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts.

Stories from Clay: Community Conversations of TMA's Historical Indigenous Pottery Collection opened in June 2023. The exhibition reflected the discussions and knowledge gained from Indigenous community groups, scholars, and organizational partners regarding historical vessels, developing practices of co-stewardship, community curation, and culturally relevant collections documentation. Two key collaborators on this project were community curators on *Indigenous Arts*, along with Hopi and Tohono O'odham potters and staff members from three regional institutions that focus on Indigenous materials.



Installation view of *Stories from Clay: Community Conversations of TMA's Historical Indigenous Pottery Collection*.

Stories from Clay: Community Conversations of TMA's Historical Indigenous Pottery Collection has been made possible in part by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities: Democracy demands wisdom.

Exhibition

Stories from Clay: Community Conversations of TMA's Historical Indigenous Pottery Collection

Stories from Clay was an in-depth research project and exhibition that focused on historic Indigenous art pottery dating prior to 1900 with possible ancestral origins to Indigenous peoples in present-day New Mexico and Arizona. Members of Indigenous communities, scholars, and organizational partners collaborated with TMA to develop practices of co-stewardship, community curation, and culturally relevant documentation.

These conversations provided deeper context and understanding of these items, their cultural ties, and proper steps for care. The selection of vessels featured highlighted insights from the project, including updated tribal affiliations, a deeper understanding on how to best date the vessels as well as where they could have been made, clarification on how they may have been used, and interpretation about the designs—or storylines—adorning them. Reflections about specific works of historic pottery from Indigenous potters working today were integrated throughout the exhibition and included in collections files, making connections to places, patterns, and materials. In addition, details were provided about the collaborative research process, examples of lessons learned, and open discussion about provenance (ownership histories).

Stories from Clay demonstrates one segment of collaborative research and learning that can help enrich the collection and exhibitions, deepen relationships with communities and other organizations, and build trust between the museum and public.

“These are our people—we should be able to learn from them.”

—Kyle Kootswatewa, Hopi traditional artist



Insights on Process

- *Stories from Clay* was initially conceived as a collections-based research project, but as it evolved we were able to translate learnings into a new permanent collection exhibition. This project continually shifted in response to community participation and comfort revealing the need for flexibility and at times slowing down.
- This project required working with both organizational partners and Indigenous artists and scholars, including eight Indigenous potters, seven museum professionals, and a collections fellow to build a deeper understanding of historic Indigenous pottery.
- The interpretation offered a mix of personal reflection, background on the research process, insights on lessons learned, and a discussion about provenance. For TMA this variety of information shared echoed practices of co-stewardship, community curation, and culturally relevant documentation.

Installation view of *Stories from Clay: Community Conversations of TMA's Historical Indigenous Pottery Collection*, June 2023.

October 2023—*Southwest Art: Contemporary Conversations* opened after conversations with focus groups, one-on-one discussions, and a three month intensive with a cohort of seven community curators. The exhibition focused on the multicultural and intersectional nature of the region, as well as the acknowledgement of what is missing from the narrative.

“We aren’t just one thing—we are such a complicated story—sites in the southwest are so different from one another...”

—Jenea M Sanchez,
Community Curator

Exhibition

Southwest Art: Contemporary Conversations

TMA engaged in a collaborative exploration of Southwest art guided by representatives from the community. They selected artworks from the collection that address the complexities of the region and identified areas where stories are missing. This exhibition explores Southwest art through four concepts: identities, perspectives, land, and materials, ideas that overlap or connect with one another, often speaking to several themes at once. Together, they underscore the multicultural, binational character of the region and its arts. While most works on view are contemporary, historic pieces express enduring interests, ancestral knowledge, and material connections across time and place. Many artists consider distinctive Southwest communities and traditions, concerns about land and resources, aspects of urban and rural living, subverting stereotypes and dominant narratives, borders and migration, uses of assorted materials and artistic processes, and multisensory and emotional experiences.



Installation view of *Southwest Art: Contemporary Conversations*, October 2023.

“...telling a more modern story of what the Southwest looks like—combined with the traditional of the Southwest—this is all a spin on things we’ve been doing for time immemorial.”

— Ruben Urrea Moreno, Community Curator

Insights on Process

- The entire process—from preliminary conversations engaging over 30 stakeholders, extensive notetaking, and analysis of discussions to installation—took 18 months.
- Seven community curators reviewed a preliminary list of artworks from the Southwest that 183 works from the collection. After discussions with each community curator, artworks that were mentioned in at least four of the seven individual conversations (a total of 14 out of 183) were identified as anchor pieces for the exhibition. Fifteen themes were discussed, and then consolidated into four big ideas. The works they selected addressed the complexities of the region.
- Suggestions for docents touring this exhibition were rooted in the idea of conversations and connections between works and interpretation rather than single object-focused approaches.
- Conversations identified gaps in the collection and the need to include more works that speak authentically to the stories and experiences of women, people of color, LGBTQ+, and more who have been historically erased in depictions of the region.



Priscilla, Nefftys" Rodriguez performing during the First Thursday in October 2023 in celebration of the opening of *Southwest Art: Contemporary Conversations*. Photo by Julius Schlosburg.

“Another thing—diversity of perspective—oftentimes when I see exhibitions I see similar artists. I would love to see a little more diversity that explores different experiences, histories, artistic expressions especially underrepresented communities such as LGBTQ+, immigrant, refugees, and other communities less commonly seen/hidden in plain sight...”

—Nelda Ruiz, Community Curator

Strategies for Addressing Gaps and Building Exhibitions Through Community-Based Curation

Acquisitions: finding means to acquire works of art that address areas in the collection that are missing or underrepresented. This can be accomplished through targeted purchases and donations. Temporary loans may be utilized until acquisitions are fulfilled.

Artist Commissions: commissioning work to address specific areas can be addressed in collaboration with living artists. This activation builds relationships with artists, provides economic stimulus, and responds to community specific needs.

Collections Assessments: full examination of collection holdings to understand their current state as well as provide recommendations for the future. In traditional practice these are conducted by professionals who have expertise in specific areas. They often can examine artistic representation, monetary value, condition, proper handling, display, storage, etc. Community representatives can conduct assessments based on expertise, such as cultural and spiritual knowledge, to make recommendations for handling, display, storage, documentation of purpose and materials, possible repatriation, representation, etc.

Multimedia: used as communication tools, these materials often link historic and contemporary forms, preserve cultural traditions, and offer unique insights into creative practices. Examples include video, audio, and graphics made available in exhibition spaces.

Multilingual Content: multiple forms of language, often in written or spoken form, used to communicate ideas. An example of this is the poetry by Ofelia Zepeda on display in TMA's Indigenous Arts Gallery that is presented in English, Spanish, and Tohono O'odham.

Multivocal Interpretation: community-written labels or interpretative materials that position the museum as a place for active conversation and dialogue, where multiple voices are sharing knowledge and participating in meaning making. These are ways to feature community expertise.

Programming: opportunities for public engagement that expand upon themes and interpretation within an exhibition. These programs may be used as a strategy to address limitations and gaps in the collection or exhibition by making space to highlight missing stories and/or identities. An example of this is TMA's partnership with the Chinese Chorizo Project as an extension of *Southwest Art: Contemporary Conversations* to develop interpretative materials but also curate food vendors for a public program.



Vendor during programming in support of of *Southwest Art: Contemporary Conversations*. Image by WilloArt.

Special projects/Intervention: activation of exhibition spaces to address contemporary issues and integrate new voices and perspectives. This can include the integration of loans and special programs within permanent collections displays.

TAKEAWAYS

Lessons Learned and
Questions to Consider

Community-based curation is not always smooth sailing.

Listening to honest community feedback may be uncomfortable and internal tensions or conflict are often difficult to work through.

We have found that through this work exhibitions can:

- challenge the expected, and contextualize the historic dominance and erasure, while acknowledging the collection limitations
- explore multiple narratives and the ways in which experiences are varied, expansive, and border crossing
- create ownership, or a deep connection, between audiences and the artwork

However, this is only possible when the curatorial process is decentered, which requires:

- listening (not telling)
- willingness to take risks
- challenging silos
- a shift in priorities
- understanding, honoring, and amplifying diverse expertise
- not asserting an agenda
- flexible timelines

Additionally, in the short-term and with a limited budget, public programming can address known gaps in the collection as well as extending the exhibition beyond the walls of the gallery.

Community-based curation has underscored the importance of systematically considering our local context, imagining new structures for curation, working interdepartmentally, reflecting upon our cultural competencies, exploring the strengths and weaknesses of our exhibitions and collection, and prioritizing development of authentic and trusting relationships with communities.

Questions to consider:

- What type of change needs to happen so that community-based curation and co-curation become systemic and sustainable? Why is this shift important?
- How can you ensure a long-term commitment to community partnerships so that this type of work is sustainable?
- How can you be as inclusive as possible of different communities when you are recruiting their members?
- How are you building community? What can you do to make those relationships durable?
- How do you show that relationship building with community members for this new curation model needs to start early and on an equity based type of relationship? What makes a good community partner?
- How can the museum staff and volunteers speak with the public about this new approach?
- What type of strategies are needed in every department and cross-departmentally so that this process is not only successful but sustainable and brings systemic change?

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