



Perspective, Opinion, and Commentary

A Second Look: Reflecting on the Intersections of Community Engagement and Advisory Groups

Monica O. Montgomery, University of the Arts, USA

Received: 08/25/2023; **Accepted:** 10/27/2023; **Published:** 04/11/2024

Abstract: The following letter is in response to the panel “All Ears? How Museums Use Community Advisory Groups to Listen and Act towards Local Relevance and Engagement,” which was conducted on February 18, 2023 at the College Art Association and sponsored by the CAA Museum Committee. The transcript to the panel was circulated to museum professionals to respond to through the letter format based on their experiences and observations. This letter was penned to flesh out the finer details and dichotomies of the strategies and approaches shared around community engagement and advisory groups.

Keywords: *Community, Community Engagement, Advisory, Outreach, Institutions, Feedback*

Letter

Listening to the panel “All Ears? How Museums Use Community Advisory Groups to Listen and Act towards Local Relevance and Engagement” left me with some questions for the panelists, as myself and colleagues look to expound on practicing community engagement in museums with and among community advisory groups.

Abigail, you mentioned that “community engagement work is not fully resourced within our institutions” and is often “focused on their internal communities or adjacent neighborhoods because they [universities] have vested economic interests there.” With this in mind, how can community advisory representatives ethically steward a process that is likely to have funding scarcity, be unceremoniously terminated, or not be fully supported by an institution?

Additionally, thinking about community perceptions, optics, and inconvenient truths, you stated, “We can’t commit on behalf of our institutions because leadership changes and priorities change.” How solid should an advisory project strive to be before it opens up to welcome people in? Is it worth it to reveal the frailties or intentions of the institution to the advisors it seeks to (transactionally) engage with?

While it sounds utopian, perhaps there are some practical elements you can share around how to create a realistic version of “the ethos of redistribution and meaningful, non-extractive exchange within our institutional frameworks?”

Alyssa, you said: “What can we do in the meantime to institutionalize this work so that multiple staff members have this on their portfolio—that the board of trustees is engaged and that there are trustees who are active in this work as well as staff and community members...?”

How can community advisories be mainstreamed and delegated across an institution so that multiple people (e.g., staff, trustees, leadership) are carrying the torch and representing the urgency of consensus?

Alyssa, you stated: “Making sure that this work is synonymous with your organization's identity in the community, not just internally.”

What strategies beyond town hall sessions and surveys can institutions use to become aware of their identity in the community? Seeing as most community feedback trends toward being negative, should institutions employ their advisory group to be ambassadors and authentically champion the work, or is that disingenuous?

Acknowledgment

Acknowledging the labor and scholarship of all of the original conference presenters at the College Art Association Conference, especially within the All Ears panel, As well as profound gratitude to Daniel Tucker, Director and Associate Professor, MA Museum Studies, University of the Arts, who surfaces the need for this line of inquiry and research in academia and practitioner circles.

AI Acknowledgment

The author declares that generative AI or AI-assisted technologies were not used in any way to prepare, write, or complete essential authoring tasks in this manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Monica O. Montgomery is a transformational museum leader operating at the intersections of social justice in museums and diversity, equity, and inclusion to spark ecologies of promise. She is steeped in community engagement, dynamic outreach, and strategies for socially responsive museums. Montgomery has extensive experience within museum administration, having honed her talents over decades in executive leadership (three museums), curatorial (forty+ exhibits), communications (two degrees) education, and dozens of public programs. As a keynote speaker, graduate professor, and consultant, she is a natural ambassador for Museum Remedy, regularly interacting with a creative milieu of artists, diplomats, neighbors, corporations, associations, scholars, educators, and donors to launch museum initiatives and sustain goodwill for cultural organizations.

Email: monica.o.montgomery@gmail.com