EMPATHETIC MUSEUM
MATURITY MODEL

A Metric for Institutional Transformation in Museums

Empathy is one's ability to connect with others by relating to their personal experiences. It takes insight and a willingness to engage. The Empathetic Museum posits that cultural institutions can relate to their communities in the same way, and should align the work they do with the experiences, values, and needs of the communities they serve.

This assessment tool and associated resources can help organizations look within, and move towards a more empathetic future.

How to use the Maturity Model:

Materials: Overview & Characteristic Definitions (2 pgs), Rubric (2 pgs)

In the rubric, each characteristic is listed in the far left column. The columns to the right represent increasing levels of maturity in empathetic practice.

As you examine each characteristic, evaluate the level to which your institution embodies that characteristic and check the boxes that apply. Checked boxes identify your institution's current level of achievement, ranging from Regressive to Proactive. Unchecked boxes represent goals for your institution, and can inspire organizational change, the reallocation of resources, or whatever it takes to reach the highest level of empathy for all characteristics.

This model is designed to be flexible for institutions of varying size, location, and mission (with moderate & appropriate modification). If you have suggestions to make the tool more useful to your museum or to the field, please contact us at empatheticmuseum@gmail.com.

Key Terms:

Anchor Institution*: A key institution of civil society, such as library system, university, health system, educational system. Museums should be and should view themselves as anchor institutions. (Lord and Blankenberg 2015)
*museums are not anchor institutions by default; this position requires community buy-in

Soft Power: "The power of influence rather than of force or finance;" soft power resources are "ideas, knowledge, values, and culture." (Lord and Blankenberg 2015).

White Privilege: "An invisible package of assets that [white people] can count on cashing in each day...." Conditions that are viewed by whites as "morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work that will allow them to be more like us. "(McIntosh, 1990)

Employment Equity: Adherence to socially just guidelines for hiring in terms of race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, pay scale.

Decolonization: Deconstructing the Euro-centric, colonial origin of museums to reframe the way objects are presented, narratives constructed, and cultures privledged in interpretation, exhibition design, and educational programming.

Lord, G. D., & Blankenberg, N. (2015). *Cities, Museums and Soft Power.* American Association of Museums.
McIntosh, P. (1990) White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack. ted. coe.wayne.edu

Civic Vision

Civic vision is a matter of imagination and behavior. For museums to be 21st century civic leaders and relevant to the societies in which they reside (i..e. anchor institutions), their leaders must have the imagination (vision) to see their institutions in such a role: that they matter in their communities. Museums must behave as civic leaders, joining with other institutions of civil society to use their combined efforts to influence and shape (soft power) the quality of life in their community and the promotion of social justice in their municipalities.

For more information: *A discussion of museums as agents of soft power can be found in Chapter 1 of "Museums, Cities, and Soft Power," (2015) by Lord and Blankenberg (http://www.lord.ca/Pages/Cities-Museums-and-Soft-Power-Chapter1.pdf)*

Institutional Body Language

A term coined by Gretchen Jennings and discussed frequently in her blog, Museum Commons. Analogous to personal body language, institutional body language refers to the powerful messages museums convey through unspoken and unwritten manifestations of their being: the design of their buildings, the content of their advertising, the behavior of front line staff to visitors, the demographics of their staff and boards, the choices they make in their collections, exhibitions, and programs. In the context of diversity and inclusion, museums' body language often conveys the message that the museum is for the white, the wealthy, and the powerful. Such museums may have written diversity policies and goals, but the image presented to the public by the institution in its many manifestations speaks more loudly than written goals or mission statements. People of color and other marginalized communities get the message—this place is not really for or about us—and stay away.

For more information: *Museum Commons blog posts*
       http://www.museumcommons.com/2013/06/the-empathetic-museum-institutional.html
       http://www.museumcommons.com/2015/06/charleston-the-cultural-landscape.html
    Incluseum article
       https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B2mitjKPAu6yVk9HV0ZwRkRIT0E/view

Community Resonance

Just as an empathetic individual resonates with the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of another group or person, an empathetic museum is so connected with its community that it is keenly aware of its values, needs, and challenges. The best way to achieve this is through a board and staff that reflect the diversity of a community; advisory boards, collaborations, and partnerships also help a museum's ability to be in touch with and responsive to its community.

For more information: *Incluseum Blog (www.incluseum.com)*
    Joint statement from Museum Bloggers and Colleagues on Ferguson and Related Events
       http://www.museumcommons.com/2014/12/joint-statement-museum-bloggers-colleagues-ferguson-related-events.html

Timeliness and Sustainability

Because an Empathetic Museum is so connected to its community (see Community Resonance), it is able to assess and respond to particular events or crises that affect its community (and beyond) in a timely and sustainable way. For example, if a museum is aware of racial tension in its community because of the racial diversity of its staff and/or strong collaborative community relationships, it can be well informed about what programs, exhibits, social media and other initiatives it might take within its mission and vision to address this civic issue. And it is aware that one-off efforts are not effective. It maintains a continuous and sustained awareness of and collaborative spirit towards its community and its needs.

For more information: *Elaine Gurian on Timeliness*
       http://www.egurian.com/omnium-gatherum/museum-issues/timeliness
    Museum Commons blog
       http://www.museumcommons.com/2015/04/museumsrespondtoferguson-whats-authentic.html
    Incluseum article
       https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B2mitjKPAu6yVk9HV0ZwRkRIT0E/view

Performance Measures

A museum working to develop the characterics discussed above also incorporates them into its strategic planning. It creates tools to assess the level of achievement of each characteristic and its related goals. An Empathetic Museum commits resources to regular assessment, not only of its revenues and attendance, but also of its public and social impact.

For more information: *Scott, C.A., ed. (2013). Museums and Public Value. Chapter 3, "Creating Public Value Through Intentional Practice," by Randi Korn.*

Characteristic	Regressive *(Lowest Maturity)*	Emergent *(Low Maturity)*	Planned *(Medium Maturity)*	Proactive *(Advanced Maturity)*
Civic Vision i.e. How the museum expresses empathy externally through its civic role. *An "anchor institution" of civil society (like universities, libraries, etc.); Exercises "soft power"(influence for social good) in community.*	☐ Identifies as independent, stand-alone player ☐ Indifferent to/unaware of issues within community ☐ Focused on core subject matter only	☐ Interested in being more relevant to civic life in the community ☐ Willing to reassess mission and vision ☐ Lacking required resources or clear direction	☐ Acknowledges role as anchor institution in community ☐ Ensures mission and vision reflect civic role ☐ Explores authentic ways to be part of its community and allocates project resources to do so	☐ Embraces and internalizes role as an anchor institution in community ☐ Key civic player with responsibilities and influence used for growth and social justice ☐ Exercises soft power in the community with dedicated staffing and project resources
Institutional Body Language i.e. How the museum embodies empathy through staffing, policies, workplace culture and structure, etc. *Aware of unconscious & unintended messages of white privilege communicated by building., administration, staff, hiring practices, collections, advertising, etc. Values intersectional cultural competency at all levels of staff and governance.*	☐ Museum culture embodies privilege (racial, cultural, social, etc.) ☐ Governors, leaders, employees, exhibits, collections, etc. are predominantly single demographic (usually white) reflecting that of founders ☐ Unaddressed issues of pay (unpaid labor, low wages, wage disparity) and employment equity in hiring practices	☐ Token "community coordinator" is hired, or a "diversity function" is added to someone's job to attract "diverse" audiences ☐ "Diversity" initiatives consist of short term "outreach" programs or only overlap with "ethnic" holidays ☐ Some labor practices amended to create more equitable working conditions ☐ No substantial change in internal culture in terms of board, staffing, collections, exhibitions, programming	☐ Enacts formal policies through staff collaborations with community partners, advisory committees, experts on inclusion, equity, etc. ☐ Assesses and reorganizes board, staff, collections, exhibits and programs—its entire ethos—to reflect its community ☐ Hiring practices examined for bias; efforts made to address staff concerns ☐ Parity in representation are prioritized as the responsibility of all staff ☐ Changes from a place of white privilege to a place where all feel welcome	☐ Internalized awareness of privilege communicated by building, leadership, staffing, collections, advertising, etc. ☐ Workplace culture reflects inclusive environment with participation from staff of diverse thought, experience, and cultural competencies at all staff levels ☐ Fully resembles the complex and intersectional community's evolving demographics and values ☐ Recognizes and supports need for staff self-care to limit burnout ☐ Enacts long range plan to ensure sustainability of this transformation

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Community Resonance i.e. How the museum values, relates to, and serves its diverse communities. *Persistent awareness of surrounding community; forges strong, trusted connections with all (often underrepresented) segments of community in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status.*	☐ Concerned with "attracting wider audiences" to expand audience base ☐ Uninterested in investigation of institutional connections to exclusion, racism, sexism, oppression, white privilege, etc. ☐ Perception that community issues have little connection to museum	☐ Authorizes research into the history of its building, location, collections in relation to racism, sexism, oppression, and privilege ☐ Examines its relationship with previously ignored or excluded communities ☐ Community connections focus on execution of the museum's mission and vision; relationship is predominantly one way, serving the museum's needs; involves cultural appropriation	☐ Solicits help from experienced facilitators and community partners to address engagement issues from an intentional, structural perspective ☐ Revisits institutional policies (staffing, collections, exhibitions, programming, etc.) to prioritize internal transformation ☐ Secures partnerships with other anchor institutions and local organizations more fully integrated with community issues	☐ Acknowledges complicity in legacy of exclusion, racism, oppression, cultural appropriation and privilege ☐ Implements plan to reverse these connections; seeks reconciliation with affected communities ☐ Nurtures reciprocal, community-driven relationships with local organizations that link the museum and its mission to local/national/global issues relevant to the surrounding community
Timeliness & Sustainability i.e. How, why, and when the museum responds to community issues and events in a sustainable way. *Able to respond to unexpected issues affecting its community due to continuous and sustained relationships & role as anchor institution.*	☐ Rarely acknowledges or responds to local, national, or global events. ☐ Programs are reactive, one-offs and not sustained; do not emanate from prior planning.	☐ Responds and can reallocate committed resources as a plan deviation ☐ Aware that one-off, unsustained responses do not build lasting community engagement	☐ Plans strategically for the future and engages periodically with stakeholders (internal/external) so that appropriate community/national/global issues can be addressed ☐ Allocates resources to provide responses that are flexible and sustainable	☐ Plans strategically; reciprocal relationships with community members enable museum to anticipate and respond in a timely way ☐ Rarely blindsided, highly nimble and flexible; resources already allocated ☐ Community resources and programs are fully funded and protected in budget
Performance Measures i.e. How the museum measures success in empathetic practice. *Values and commits resources to regular assessment of public impact; shares this with the public.*	☐ Traditional measures focus on outputs, attendance and revenues ☐ Metrics rarely reported to internal/external stakeholders or the local community	☐ Traditional measures supplemented by attempts to gauge community collaboration and impact ☐ Museum reports to internal stakeholders annually	☐ Community impact and effectiveness as anchor institution are included in outcomes to be measured ☐ Museum reports to internal and external stakeholders annually	☐ Museum continuously assesses and redefines its public value impact ☐ Commits resources to continued impact assessment along with attendance and revenue ☐ Reporting is increasingly transparent and widespread

Citation: Jennings, G., Mann, S., Cullen, J., et.al. (2016). *Empathetic Museum Maturity Model.* http://www.empatheticmuseum.com/maturitymodel