EXCELLENCE AND EQUITY

Education and the Public Dimension of Museums

A REPORT FROM THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF MUSEUMS

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FOREWORD

This report from the American Association of Museums points the way for museums to expand their role as educational institutions, especially with regard to culturally diverse audiences. For many years the Metropolitan Life Foundation has supported museum-based activities designed to benefit minority artists and audiences. Through two museum grant programs, Minority Visual Arts and Multicultural Initiatives, the foundation has targeted grants to museums for exhibitions, outreach programs, professional training, and symposiums.

Our support of *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums* is a natural continuation of our commitment to the museum community. We are delighted to be part of it.

Robert G. Schwartz
Chairman, President, and Chief Executive Officer
Metropolitan Life Insurance Company



Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums is the first major report on the educational role of museums ever to be issued by the American Association of Museums. As such, it is a landmark document. But the dialogue about museums' educational role has stimulated and challenged museum professionals for many decades. With this report, the association stimulates and challenges us in new ways and provides leadership as we take stock and prepare for the realities of life in the twenty-first century.

The title links two concepts—excellence and equity. By giving these concepts equal value, this report invites museums to take pride in their tradition as stewards of excellence and to embrace the cultural diversity of our nation as they foster their tremendous educational potential. Both elements—excellence and equity—must be imbedded in everything we do if museums are to serve a rapidly changing world in a meaningful way.

This report was adopted as a policy statement by the American Association of Museums Board of Directors in May 1991. It reflects the work of the AAM Task Force on Museum Education, which was created by AAM president Joel N. Bloom in September 1989 and charged with describing the critical issues in museum education, recommending action to strengthen and expand the educational role of museums in today's world, and outlining an ongoing role for museums, professional associations, and other appropriate organizations to ensure that the task force's recommendations would be carried out. The work of the task force was an outgrowth of the Commission on Museums for a New Century, which in its 1984 report asserted the far-reaching potential of museums as educational institutions.

Excellence and Equity presents an expanded definition of museums' educational role that involves the entire museum—from trustees to guards in the galleries, from public relations staff to docents who give tours, from curators to educators. The missions of museums, the report submits, should state unequivocally that there is an educational purpose in every museum activity.

This report is based on three key ideas:

1 The commitment to education as central to museum's public service must be clearly expressed in every museum's mission and pivotal to every museum's activities.

2 Museums must become more inclusive places that welcome diverse audiences, but first they should reflect our society's pluralism in every aspect of their operations and programs.

3 Dynamic, forceful leadership from individuals, institutions, and organizations within and outside in the museum community is the key to fulfilling museums' potential for public service in the coming century.

Excellence and Equity represents the commitment of a diverse group of twenty-five individuals who worked together for more than two and a half years. The task force members represented different kinds of museums, areas of the country, professional and volunteer positions, and years of service. We willingly engaged in open and challenging discussions about topics that often touched the core of our beliefs and feelings about the profession. Together, we reached a consensus about the principles and recommendations expressed in this report.

As chair of the task force, I took this complex dialogue beyond the task force and invited responses from other museum professionals in all types of museums in many regions of the country as well as from the AAM Executive Committee and Board of Directors. At a "town meeting" session during the 1991 AAM annual meeting, we solicited reactions from the field to the report and to the association's plans for implementation.

While many reports gather dust more quickly than they generate change, the AAM is actively working to facilitate and implement the imperatives of *Excellence and Equity*. A new Museum Assessment Program—Public Dimension Assessment, or MAP III—provides an avenue for museums to implement the goals expressed in this report. The accreditation process helps museums to articulate the issues, concerns, and methods of public service. In the legislative arena, the AAM is moving to advocate a broader base of funding for museums as educational institutions. Within the museum profession, the agendas of regional and national professional meetings are already reflecting a heightened awareness of the ideas expressed in this report. To promulgate such an awareness on a larger scale, the AAM is developing a major public relations campaign.

EACH OF US MUST EMBRACE THE CHALLENGES EXPRESSED IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES, BOTH PHILOSOPHICALLY AND PRACTICALLY, SO THAT ALL CITIZENS CAN FULLY EXPERIENCE THE PUBLIC DIMENSION OF MUSEUMS.

This report could not have been accomplished without the continued support of AAM president Joel N. Bloom, who formed the task force, and his successor as president, Ellsworth H. Brown. The members of the AAM Board of Directors provided outstanding guidance, as did the standing professional committees, especially the Standing Professional Committee on Education. The lead-

ership of the association's professional staff was also critical to this report. Executive director Edward H. Able, Jr., accepted the challenges articulated in the document and helped secure support for implementation. Patricia E. Williams, deputy executive director for programs and policy; Kim Igoe, director of accreditation and museum standards; Arlene Williams, director of development; and Alma Gates, executive assistant, provided guidance and support, as did Kathy Dwyer Southern, now executive director of the National Cultural Alliance. Ellen Cochran Hirzy's expertise with words and patience through numerous drafts helped us to achieve a thoughtful and coherent document.

Recognition must be given to the members of the Task Force on Museum Education, all articulate, reflective, and passionate people, who brought their considerable experience to bear in serious discussions of complex issues and committed themselves to moving the agenda forward through its review process to reach the consensus expressed here.

Finally, we acknowledge the support of the Metropolitan Life Foundation. The foundation's generous underwriting of this publication has helped to assure its dissemination to the museum and education fields. The association and the task force are grateful to Metropolitan Life for the vision it has demonstrated as the first corporate sponsor of these important activities.

Excellence and Equity calls for fundamental change in how museums view their service to society. The responsibility for effecting this change is ours. Each of us must embrace the challenges expressed in the following pages, both philosophically and practically, so that all citizens can fully experience the public dimension of museums.

Bonnie Pitman
Chair, AAM Task Force on Museum Education
December 1991

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Against a backdrop of global change, this report from the American Association of Museums—prepared by its Task Force on Museum Education and adopted by the AAM Board of Directors in May 1991—speaks to a new definition of museums as institutions of public service and education, a term that includes exploration, study, observation, critical thinking, contemplation, and dialogue. Museums perform their most fruitful public service by providing an educational experience in the broadest sense: by fostering the ability to live productively in a pluralistic society and to contribute to the resolution of the challenges we face as global citizens. The public educational responsibility of museums has two facets: excellence and equity. In every aspect of their operations and programs, museums must combine a tradition of intellectual rigor with the inclusion of a broader spectrum of our diverse society. By making a commitment to excellence in public service, museums can assure that decisions about collecting, exhibitions, programs, and other activities are supported both by rigorous scholarship and by respect for the many cultural and intellectual viewpoints that museum collections stand for and stimulate. By making a commitment to equity in public service, museums can be an integral part of the human experience, thus helping to create the sense of inclusive community so often missing in our society.

Excellence and Equity is based on an expanded notion of public service and education as a museum-wide endeavor that involves trustee, staff, and volunteer values and attitudes; exhibitions; public and school programs; publications; public relations efforts; research; decisions about the physical environment of the museum; and choices about collecting and preserving. These elements are among the many that shape the educational messages museums convey to the public.

This report urges action on critical issues related to excellence and equity, issues that the museum community must address if museums are to fulfill their positions as vital institutions in service to society. It poses some thought-provoking questions: How can museums, which have so much to contribute to the collective human experience, welcome the broad spectrum of our society? How can they use the abundance of their collections and their scholarly resources to enrich and empower citizens from all backgrounds? How can museum professionals and trustees effect the serious and lasting change needed to assure that museums are integral to the social fabric? This report presents a plan for action that centers on the following ten principles with accompanying recommendations:

1 Assert that museums place education—in the broadest sense of the word—at the center of their public service role. Assure that the commitment to serve the public is clearly stated in every museum's mission and central to every museum's activities.

2 Reflect the diversity of our society by establishing and maintaining the broadest possible public dimension for the museum.

3 Understand, develop, expand, and use the learning opportunities that museums offer their audiences.

4 Enrich our knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of our collections and of the variety of cultures and ideas they represent and evoke.

5 Assure that the interpretive process manifests a variety in cultural and intellectual perspectives and reflects an appreciation for the diversity of museums' public.

6 Engage in active, ongoing collaborative efforts with a wide spectrum of organizations and individuals who can contribute to the expansion of the museum's public dimension.

7 Assess the decision-making processes in museums and develop new models that enable an expanded public dimension and a renewed commitment to excellence.

8 Achieve diversity among trustees, staff, and volunteers to assure a breadth of perspective throughout the museum.

9 Provide professional development and training for new and established professionals, trustees, and volunteers that meets the needs of the museum profession so that museums may carry out their responsibility to their diverse public.

10 Commit leadership and financial resources—in individual museums, professional organizations, and training organizations and universities—to strengthen the public dimension of museums.

These are complex challenges that require time, resources, and commitment. But museums must seek solutions if they are to play a pivotal role as educational institutions. Guided by the spirit of excellence and equity, museums have the potential to nurture an enlightened, humane citizenry that appreciates the value of knowing about its past, is resourcefully and sensitively engaged in the present, and is determined to shape a future in which many experiences and many points of view are given voice.

The educational role of American museums has been central to their history, evolving through the years in relationship to the changing public dimension of museums. Today, as we consider museums and education against a backdrop of global change, a central question shapes the dialogue: How can museums—as multidimensional, socially responsible institutions with a tremendous capacity for bringing knowledge to the public and enriching all facets of the human experience—help to nurture a humane citizenry equipped to make informed choices in a democracy and to address the challenges and opportunities of an increasingly global society? Museums can no longer confine themselves simply to preservation, scholarship, and exhibition independent of the social context in which they exist. They must recognize that the public dimension of museums leads them to perform the public service of education—a term that in its broadest sense includes exploration, study, observation, critical thinking, contemplation, and dialogue.

Museums have a dual public responsibility suited to today's world. One element of this responsibility is excellence: A hallmark of museums is intellectual rigor, a tradition that must continue to be applied in the context of a wider public dimension. The other element is equity: In reexamining their public dimension, museums must include a broader spectrum of our diverse society in their activities. Museums must fulfill both elements of this dual responsibility—excellence and equity—in every aspect of their operations and programs.

Three key concepts are embodied in this report:

- First, the educational role of museums is at the core of their service to the public. This assertion must be clearly stated in every museum's mission and central to every museum's activities.
- Second, museums have the potential to be enriched and enlivened by the nation's diversity. As public institutions in a democratic society, museums must achieve greater inclusiveness. Trustees, staff, and volunteers must acknowledge and respect our nation's diversity in race, ethnic origin, age, gender, economic status, and education, and they should attempt to reflect that pluralism in every aspect of museums' operations and programs.
- Third, dynamic, forceful leadership is needed within and outside the museum community. Strong leadership on the part of individuals, institutions, and organizations will provide vision, inspire broad-based commitment, and generate resources; it is the key to meeting the challenges and fulfilling the promise expressed in this report.

This report is based on the premise that every area of museum activity contributes to museums' public dimension and to the important public service museums provide. The traditional term "museum education" is too specialized to encompass the multifaceted educational role of museums. This report focuses instead on the expanded notion of public service, defined here as a museum-wide endeavor that involves trustee, staff, and volunteer values and attitudes; exhibitions; public and school programs; publications; public relations efforts; research; decisions about the physical environment of the museum; and choices about collecting and preserving. These are just some of the elements that shape the educational messages museums convey to the public and the public service they provide.

THE PUBLIC DIMENSION OF MUSEUMS LEADS THEM TO PERFORM THE PUBLIC SERVICE OF EDUCATION—A TERM THAT IN ITS BROADEST SENSE INCLUDES EXPLORATION, STUDY, OBSERVATION, CRITICAL THINKING, CONTEMPLATION, AND DIALOGUE.

This report also affirms the premise that museums have an aggregate importance as educational institutions, recognizing that not every museum can be all things to all people. Museums' fullest public service derives from their collective contribution to their audiences. Each museum has individual qualities and a local and regional significance; together museums are a pluralistic group of institutions working to benefit society. Consistent with their missions, individual museums of different sizes and types must ensure that they are accessible to a broad audience and that they do not intentionally or even subtly and unintentionally exclude anyone.

This report also stresses the significance of museums in the educational complex of a democratic society. Museums have a vital place in a broad educational system that includes formal institutions such as universities, schools, and professional training institutes and informal agents of socialization such as the family, workplace, and community. Museums have the capacity to contribute to formal and informal learning at every stage of life, from the education of children in preschool through secondary school to the continuing education of adults. They add a tangible dimension to learning that occurs in formal settings. Museum relationships with schools and universities, in particular, have great future potential as new curriculum efforts call for a strengthening of the sciences, arts, and humanities. Museums also have the potential to create partnerships in their communities with other organizations that serve the public in informal settings, such as libraries, civic groups, and social service organizations.

THE CONTEXT FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

The American Association of Museums' Commission on Museums for a New Century laid the foundation for the task force's work and for this document. In its 1984 report *Museums for a New Century,* the commission affirmed fundamental principles of museum education and made recommendations for future action. As they sought to assess and clarify the role of museums in our society, commission members returned often to the themes of public service and education. Throughout their history, the report said, American museums have "embraced the notion that they should communicate the essence of ideas, impart knowledge, encourage curiosity and promote esthetic sensibility." "If collections are the heart of museums," the report continued, "what we have come to call education—the commitment to presenting objects and ideas in an informative and stimulating way—is the spirit." The Commission on Museums also delineated the unique qualities of learning in museums and called for a better integration of the education function in the museum's organizational structure. The commission described, and the task force affirms, the powerful capacity of museums to contribute to "the richness of the collective human experience."

With the new century now less than ten years away, how can museums best enrich the collective human experience? And how are museums preparing to fulfill their public responsibility? As we approach the end of the twentieth century, national boundaries are shifting. Diversity—cultural, intellectual, environmental, social, economic, ethnic, national, educational, and generational—is seeking full expression. As a nation, we are engaged in a debate about how we will think about and respond to the issues of diversity and to demands for equality, a task with which we have historically struggled. Multinational corporations and new economic communities cross political barriers, while at the same time imbalances of wealth and poverty threaten political stability. Rapid economic development poses clear environmental dangers. These are shared challenges with global implications, and there are no easy answers. The solutions our society seeks must respect the interests of individual communities as well as those of our nation and our planet.

For the individual, living in a pluralistic society and contributing to the resolution of multifaceted global questions requires a range of distinctive skills and abilities, including:

- an understanding of and a respect for all peoples
- a spirit of inquiry and an openness to new ideas and approaches
- an ability to address issues and problems through the rigorous application of creative and critical thinking skills

- an ability to become involved in one's surroundings on visual, verbal, and auditory levels
- an understanding of history, science, the natural world, artistic expression, and humankind, along with the conviction that this understanding is essential for a fulfilling and responsible life.

Museums, through their collections, exhibitions, public and school programs, publications, public relations activities, scholarly activity, and other programs, foster these skills and abilities, thereby contributing to a learning process that continues throughout life.

Since the report of the Commission on Museums for a New Century was issued, there have been significant changes in the way the museum field and professionals in individual museums view the public responsibility of museums. Recent statements of professional ethics and standards reaffirm museums' educational role. The AAM Education Committee's statement on Professional Standards for Museum Educators elucidates the museum educator's obligations to the public. The new Code of Ethics for Museums adopted by the AAM Board of Directors makes public service and education central to museum responsibilities. A critical aspect of the self-study required for museum accreditation is the public educational function. The Museum Assessment Programs of the AAM and the Institute of Museum Services now offer museums the opportunity to examine the effectiveness of their public service.

Again and again in individual museums, education has been affirmed as an essential part of the institution's mission. The tension between the concerns of collecting, preservation, and research and the responsibility of public access is giving way to partnerships among curators, educators, and designers that combine their interests and strengthen the linkage between scholarship and interpretation. In many museums the educational function is no longer the discrete province of educators but a fundamental task that involves all staff. It is important to caution, however, that while the case for education has been made and strengthened, the term too often continues to connote specific programs for school children rather than an institution-wide commitment to sharing knowledge with the public, as the task force has described it in this report.

WITH THE NEW CENTURY NOW LESS THAN TEN YEARS AWAY, HOW CAN MUSEUMS BEST ENRICH THE COLLECTIVE HUMAN EXPERIENCE? AND HOW ARE MUSEUMS PREPARING TO FULFILL THEIR PUBLIC RESPONSIBILITY?

The very nature of interpretation is in transition as well. In many areas of scholarship, what one task force member called a "quiet revolution" in the philosophy of interpretation is underway. Concepts of the "meaning" of objects and the way museums communicate about them are

changing. Objects are no longer viewed solely as things in themselves, but as things with complex contexts and associated value-laden significance. Each visitor supplies yet another context and another layer of meaning by bringing individual experiences and values to the encounter with objects in a museum setting. Changing interpretive approaches will have a strong impact on museum collections and the public's understanding of them.

WHAT MUSEUMS CAN CONTRIBUTE

As educational institutions with a long tradition of public service and scholarship, museums make essential contributions to today's society. In the task force's discussions, certain characteristics emerged as the essence of museums' educational function. Museums

- provide meeting grounds where enriching experiences are offered both through human interaction and interaction with objects and ideas
- offer direct encounters with objects
- are grounded in a tradition of intellectual rigor and high standards of scholarship and balanced by an understanding and representation of cultural perspective
- encourage lifelong learning among people of all ages and backgrounds, at all levels of capability, mastery, and interest
- supply a context in which to trace the continuity of human experience and the natural world and to examine change critically
- serve as appropriate places to confirm and validate accepted ideas and can be forums for presenting and testing alternative ideas and addressing controversy
- offer the potential to present a variety of cultural and intellectual perspectives
- communicate change in global systems and the urgency of addressing questions that affect the global village
- communicate through a variety of means—from exhibitions to interpreters to electronic media—in many combinations, both within and outside their walls
- offer the opportunity for experiential, emotional, and intellectual learning that is self-directed and voluntary
- provide places for reflection and contemplation as well as avenues for exploration and discovery
- serve as training grounds for current and future professionals in museums and in the field of education
- contribute unique resources to the process of collaboration with other institutions and organizations in their communities.

CRITICAL ISSUES IN SEEKING A WIDER PUBLIC DIMENSION

Some museums have been successful in many aspects of their public dimension. But despite their potential, some have not fully used their impressive qualities consistently and creatively enough to achieve their educational role. The task force reached several conclusions:

- Many museums have not made a strong enough commitment to an expanded public dimension that makes them true centers of learning for the diverse audiences they are responsible for serving.
- Some members of the public feel that museums have no relevance to their lives. Some people do not feel welcome in museums; others visit museums only to leave feeling inadequate. Only a few understand the whole spectrum of museums as educational institutions.
- Museum professionals have not adequately recognized that virtually every decision, from collecting and exhibition policies to public relations plans to architectural design and security arrangements, shapes their institutions' public service and educational mission.
- Some museum staffs and boards of trustees are not adequately representative of our pluralistic society, and the voice of the community is not widely heard in museum decision making.
- Few museums have made rigorous scholarship a high priority in support of presentation and exhibition programs.
- Too few museums are involved in systematic evaluation and self-study as a stimulus for institutional vitality and growth.
- Many museums could be more effective in working with formal and informal educational institutions and organizations as partners in carrying out their public service.
- Museum professionals have few models of organizational structures and exemplary programming that encourage an expanded educational role for their institutions. They are further restricted by the absence of a body of professional literature, lack of contact with the broader field of education, and limited availability of training for staff members and volunteers.
- Declining financial resources often force the reduction in or elimination of public programs, an indication that public service has not been fully incorporated in museums' missions.

The challenge for museums today is to resolve these critical issues and reach for their full potential as educational institutions with a vital public service to perform. The following action plan points to opportunities for embracing and implementing the changes that are necessary if museums are to meet that challenge.

A WIDER PUBLIC DIMENSION: A PLAN FOR ACTION

This report presents ten principles with attending recommendations for consideration and action. The principles and recommendations emphasize museums' dual responsibility to achieve excellence and equity in defining their public dimension. Although each principle focuses on a particular concern museums must address, the principles and recommendations must be considered not in isolation but in the context of the broader ideas expressed in this report. The task force recognized that some institutions in the heterogeneous museum community are already carrying out these recommendations in an exemplary fashion.

This action plan is directed to

- museum trustees, who establish policy for individual museums and provide leadership in fulfilling museums' missions
- museum professionals, who create and carry out the programs that advance the public responsibility of museums
- museum volunteers, who are partners in many aspects of museums' public dimension
- professional organizations at the national, regional, state, and local levels, which provide leadership and technical assistance to support museums' public dimension
- university-based programs that prepare professionals for museum work, including programs in specific disciplines, education, and museum training
- educators in other segments of the educational complex, who work in partnership with museums
- community leaders, who are links between museums and their audiences
- representatives of public and private funding sources, who provide support for museum programs and activities

MISSION

1 Assert that museums place education—in the broadest sense of the word—at the center of their public service role. Assure that the commitment to serve the public is clearly stated in every museum's mission and central to every museum's activities.

This report speaks to a new definition of museums as educational institutions that carry out their public service in the spirit of excellence and equity. Museum missions should state unequivocally that an educational purpose is imbedded in every museum activity. The new definition requires a commitment to achieving the full pluralistic potential of museums by embracing the diversity of our society and

reflecting it in all activities and at all levels.

Trustees, staff, and volunteers must make a personal investment in expanding the public dimension of museums. Each of us brings to the task of public service our own knowledge and experience and our own biases, however unconscious. Self-reflection is an important first step if we are to recognize the gaps in our own knowledge and experience as well as the nature of our biases. Those charged with making museum policy, as well as those charged with carrying it out, must understand the diversity of our society and support the implications of that diversity for museum operations and activities.

THIS REPORT SPEAKS TO A NEW DEFINITION OF MUSEUMS AS EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS THAT CARRY OUT THEIR PUBLIC SERVICE IN THE SPIRIT OF EXCELLENCE AND EQUITY. MUSEUM MISSIONS SHOULD STATE UNEQUIVOCALLY THAT AN EDUCATIONAL PURPOSE IS IMBEDDED IN EVERY MUSEUM ACTIVITY.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ensure that the museum's mission statement expresses a primary commitment to education and public service for diverse audiences.
- Ensure that the museum's strategic plan acknowledges the institution-wide nature of public service and states clear goals and objectives for expanding and improving the museum's public dimension.
- Ensure that all staff members and volunteers understand the implications of their decisions and actions for the educational and public service dimension of the museum's work.
- Place new emphasis on public information and public awareness programs to promote an expanded public dimension for the museum.
- Allocate sufficient resources to ensure that the museum's commitment to education and public service is carried out.

AUDIENCE

2 Reflect the diversity of our society by establishing and maintaining the broadest possible public dimension for the museum.

Museums are, or should be, important social and community centers. By achieving equity in the public dimension, museums can assure that they are an integral part of—rather than adjunct to—the multifaceted human experience. Museums can then help to create the sense of inclusive community that is so often missing in our society. Surveys and even casual observation of visitors to most museums will usually reveal that

they do not reflect the racial, ethnic, or economic heterogeneity of our society or even of museums' own communities. We need to gain a sophisticated understanding of visitors' expectations of our museums and of the experience and attitudes they bring with them. Museums should be more welcoming places for all people regardless of their age, ability, education, class, race, or ethnic origin. We must make a concerted long-term effort to become involved with our communities and to inaugurate programs that are responsive to the needs and wishes of our potential constituents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Require that trustees and staff achieve an active understanding of the political, social, economic, and demographic characteristics of the museum's current and potential communities.
- Conduct audience research to determine who does and does not visit the museum for the purpose of expanding the museum's service to its public.
- Identify audiences with special needs, develop ongoing working relationships with them, and make the museum's programs, exhibitions, services, and information more accessible to them.
- Identify specific segments of the community that the museum would like to serve more fully, develop working relationships with them, and initiate programs to involve them in substantive ways.
- Assemble staff and volunteers with the knowledge and skills necessary to fulfill these mandates.

LEARNING

3 Understand, develop, expand, and use the learning opportunities that museums offer their audiences.

Museums are uniquely qualified to provide a variety of learning experiences for people of all ages, interests, and backgrounds. As places of informal, self-directed learning, museums stimulate visitors to create their own encounters with objects and ideas. Adults, in particular, are seeking opportunities to learn both individually and with their families. The voluntary nature of the museum experience can be compatible with the interests of the casual visitor. Unlike schools, museum visits have no prerequisites and no sequential curriculum. Often the learning experience is a moment of reflection or a chance discovery that moves the visitor in a lasting way. No matter what the visitor's level of capability, there is the potential for learning, for expanding horizons.

Objects and exhibitions are a source of the learning potential. Objects raise questions not addressed by documents; they can be more adequately representative of natural and cultural heritages; they can provide information and enlightenment that can-

not be achieved through any other means; they call forth wonder and reflection. A panoply of other resources—including lectures, classes, publications, public relations efforts, docent tours, and interactive devices—help shape the encounter. Even the museum's architectural design, the resources in its library, and the selections in its museum store affect the learning experience.

During the past twenty years there has been a rapid expansion of knowledge about how people perceive and process information and experiences. Although progress has been made toward developing a fuller understanding of the nature of learning in museums, further study is needed and is a key recommendation of this report. We must understand the relationship between the visitor and the setting in which the encounter with object or idea takes place. Research, experimentation, collaboration between curatorial and program staff, consultation with experts on learning theory, and collaboration with educators from other settings can expand our comprehension of the learning that occurs in the museum environment. Museum professionals also need to study and test the implications of communications technologies, ideas from the field of educational psychology, and the latest exhibit design principles. Ongoing assessment of the effectiveness of exhibits and programs is critical, because the assessment process stimulates the capacity for change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop and expand audience research methods that will test and document how people learn in the museum environment. Apply the findings to exhibition and program development.
- Develop educational experiences for schoolchildren, families, and adults that reflect a knowledge of the different learning styles visitors bring to museums.
- Experiment with exhibition and program strategies and innovative technologies to enhance the capacity of museums to reach a wider audience through exhibitions and programs.
- Assess the effectiveness of exhibitions and programs in an ongoing evaluation process that encourages revision and experimentation to improve the visitor's experience of learning from objects and exhibits.
- Utilize the growing potential for extending the educational role of museums beyond their walls through electronic media, and conduct systematic studies to assess the effectiveness of these resources.
- Establish "learning laboratories" in selected museums for research, experimentation, and dissemination of information about exhibition and program development, implementation, and evaluation as well as about the special nature of museum learning and museum audiences.

SCHOLARSHIP

4 Enrich our knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of our collections and of the variety of cultures and ideas they represent and evoke.

The responsible scholarship that is a hallmark of museums is essential to fulfilling museums' public service. Decisions about collecting, exhibitions, programs, and other activities carry a powerful, value-laden educational message. These decisions require excellence in scholarship as well as respect for the cultural and intellectual viewpoints that the objects in museum collections stand for and stimulate. Scholarship in museums supports education, exhibitions, and publications, and it informs the public, students, and scholars.

The pursuit of knowledge about our collections should be carried out in an atmosphere of intellectual rigor. Scholarship must include the fair and serious treatment of cultural perspectives and the acknowledgment that every scholar brings particular cultural and intellectual biases to his or her work. Also critical to scholarship in museums are an appreciation for the cultural and intellectual complexity of objects and an active interest in communicating the products of scholarship to visitors. Heightened cultural sensitivity is especially important to today's research and interpretation, which is struggling to shed the limiting cultural biases and ethnocentrism of the past. The return of cultural patrimony is one of a number of issues that will fundamentally alter the way museums interpret their collections in the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Apply rigorous standards of scholarship to the development and presentation of exhibitions and programs.
- Make information about collections more accessible to academic and nontraditional scholars, museum professionals, and the public.
- Increase opportunities for research in relevant academic disciplines by both curatorial and program staff.
- Initiate scholarly research in conjunction with colleges and universities and with other museums.
- Develop and refine scholarly methods and techniques that permit sophisticated analysis of the context of objects.
- Explain the important role of research in museums to the public through exhibitions, programs, publications, and electronic media.

DECISIONS [ABOUT MUSEUM ACTIVITIES] REQUIRE EXCELLENCE IN SCHOLARSHIP AS WELL AS RESPECT FOR THE CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL VIEWPOINTS THAT THE OBJECTS . . . STAND FOR AND STIMULATE.

INTERPRETATION

5 Assure that the interpretive process manifests a variety in cultural and intellectual perspectives and reflects an appreciation for the diversity of museums' public.

All museums have objects or represent concepts that relate to some aspect of the human experience. They are ripe with possibilities for visitors to find personal meaning and to appreciate other cultures. But the perspectives of mainstream cultures still pervade many museums. By cultivating and expressing a variety of cultural perspectives in the presentation and interpretation of their collections, museums can foster inclusiveness. They can invite a broader spectrum of the public to participate in museums and experience a relationship with what museums have to offer.

Divergent points of view as well as different cultural perspectives can be given voice in the interpretive process. Fearing that the neutrality of the institution might be compromised, many museums are reluctant to present informed but differing viewpoints. Yet debate, even controversy, is integral to the scholarly endeavor, and it can stimulate a balanced interpretive message that can challenge the visitor to discover ideas and form opinions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Involve representatives of various communities and diverse cultural groups in the research and documentation process relative to their cultural experience in order to broaden the range of perspectives and deepen the understanding of museums' holdings.
- Enrich the intellectual debate in the earliest stages of exhibition and program development by supporting staff research and encouraging the introduction of new ideas and new approaches.
- Introduce visitors to differing perspectives by including statements by those who have developed the exhibition and by making full use of interpretive programs, exhibit labels, publications, and electronic media.
- Expand the scope of interpretation to assure that the products of research are accessible and understandable to visitors with a range of expertise.

COLLABORATION

6 Engage in active, ongoing collaborative efforts with a wide spectrum of organizations and individuals who can contribute to the expansion of the museum's public dimension.

In a world of diminishing resources, museums have much to gain by collaboration with individuals, institutions, and organizations in public service and public education.

Museums engage in collaborative efforts with other museums, universities, schools, libraries, visual and performing arts groups, the media, and historic preservation organizations; they work with social service groups; they form partnerships with city and state government agencies. They have a long and highly successful history of collaboration with elementary and secondary schools. They are forming new relationships with the private sector.

Looking to the future and considering the nature of our global society, collaboration has new urgency and new promise. Museums cannot operate in isolation in a world of shifting boundaries. Collaboration today has expanded possibilities for ensuring that museums use their collections, programs, and resources effectively. It is a way to invite more participation from outside the museum in shaping ideas and making decisions and to augment the personal experience and professional expertise of a museum's staff. Collaboration enhances the ability of each participant and provides a unified, focused mechanism for achieving individual goals. The collaborative dialogue should also involve museum visitors—both actual and potential—in determining how to broaden presentation and therefore participation in the institution by underserved audiences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop collaborative efforts with individuals, organizations, corporations, and other museums that extend the museum's public dimension and enhance its ability to fulfill its educational mission.
- Recognize museums' responsibility to share in the education of children by strengthening services for preservice and inservice classroom teachers.
- Develop undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education courses for teachers that help them understand the value of learning with objects and in the museum environment.
- Strengthen relationships with administrators, school boards, and other educators to develop better museum-school partnerships beginning at the state and local policy-making levels.
- Encourage museum staff to represent the museum in community activities.

DECISION MAKING

7 Assess the decision-making processes in museums and develop new models that enable an expanded public dimension and a renewed commitment to excellence.

An expanded public dimension for museums demands something other than traditional hierarchical decision making. A collaborative framework for planning and de-

cision making emphasizes that public service is a museum-wide endeavor, not a group of isolated functions. An effective organizational structure encourages internal dialogue, transcends the intellectual hierarchy often imposed on staff, stimulates cross-fertilization of ideas, and may even provoke argument and dissent. The perspectives of the museum audience and potential audience must be represented as an important ingredient in planning and decision making.

AN EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE ENCOURAGES INTERNAL DIALOGUE, TRANSCENDS THE INTELLECTUAL HIERARCHY OFTEN IMPOSED ON STAFF, STIMULATES CROSS-FERTILIZATION OF IDEAS, AND MAY EVEN PROVOKE ARGUMENT AND DISSENT.

Museums everywhere are experimenting with different organizational structures that affect their educational role. In many museums education and public programs are becoming equal partners with, not adjuncts to, curatorial and collections-related functions. This structure stimulates greater staff interaction about service to the public, and the interests of the museum audience are given a higher priority in museum planning and management. The team approach to exhibition and program development is another concept that has currency in many museums. Using teamwork to plan a program or an exhibition—as opposed to combining the discrete efforts of different staff members—encourages a healthy blend of ideas and perspectives that enriches the final product.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish decision-making structures for the development of exhibitions and programs involving formal interaction among staff who are knowledgeable about content, audience needs and interests, and the ways people perceive and process information.
- Experiment with museum organizational structures that accommodate broad staff participation in decision making, and document and publicize effective models of these structures.
- Ensure that decision making about exhibitions and interpretive programs involves all staff members who administer programs related to the museum's public service.
- Involve community advisory groups in decision making about ways the museum can serve the public in different aspects of its programs and operations.
- Develop ways for volunteers to contribute their knowledge and experiences to improve the museum's service to the public.

BOARDS, STAFF, AND VOLUNTEERS

8 Achieve diversity among trustees, staff, and volunteers to assure a breadth of perspective throughout the museum.

The task force has reiterated the concerns that the Commission on Museums for a New Century expressed about cultural, racial, and gender imbalance on museum boards, in the museum work force, and in the ranks of volunteers, particularly in light of the sense of urgency that task force members feel about expanding museums' public service dimension. If museums are to be welcoming places for people of different racial, ethnic, social, economic, and educational backgrounds and if they are to use their collections to present a variety of perspectives, they must recruit, hire or select, and foster the professional growth of trustees, staff, and volunteers who reflect diverse audiences and multiple perspectives.

A serious commitment to diversity will require widening the arena for recruitment. The search for professional staff should be expanded beyond the academic disciplines that traditionally lead to museum work when those disciplines do not reflect diversity in cultural background, race, or gender. Moreover, museums should recruit and hire staff members from sectors of the community not traditionally served by institutions of higher learning. The recruitment of trustees and volunteers, too, should be extended to parts of the community not typically represented on museum boards and in volunteer organizations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recruit trustees who are representative of and involved in all segments of the museum's community.
- Recruit and hire staff to reflect diversity at all levels in the museum.
- Recruit a volunteer corps that is representative of the museum's entire community.
- Establish scholarships and stipends to attract a diverse pool of potential museum professionals to university training programs.
- Establish paid internships and scholarships for young professionals designed to increase the cultural diversity of the museum work force.
- Provide professional development opportunities to ensure the retention and promotion of the staff that is recruited and to support staff in expanding their own professional knowledge and expertise.

THEY MUST RECRUIT, HIRE OR SELECT, AND FOSTER THE PROFESSIONAL GROWTH OF TRUSTEES, STAFF, AND VOLUNTEERS WHO REFLECT DIVERSE AUDIENCES AND MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

9 Provide professional development and training for new and established professionals, trustees, and volunteers that meets the needs of the museum profession so that museums may carry out their responsibility to their diverse public.

Many professionals enter the museum work force through university training programs and, once involved in the museum field, continue their education through programs, workshops, and meetings carried out in a variety of settings. The concept of the whole museum as an educational institution should be introduced to students from the beginning of their preparation for museum work and be a cornerstone of continuing education for practicing professionals as well as for trustees and volunteers.

Degree-granting programs, continuing education programs, and training programs conducted by individual museums all have vital roles to play. In the university setting, a thriving dialogue about the public responsibility of museums will stimulate in prospective museum professionals a strong commitment to the principles of excellence and equity. In continuing education programs and in museum programs for staff, trustees, and volunteers, reflection and debate in a collegial atmosphere will provide the inspiration and the incentive that enable the participants to reassess and clarify their institutions' missions as educational institutions and to understand how their own work is integral to that role.

In addition to formal programs, museum professionals need informal opportunities for professional growth through exposure to current ideas in their fields and to a variety of models for carrying out the museum's public service. They also need uninterrupted time to engage in productive thinking and dialogue about their work. By offering options for sabbaticals and flexible work schedules, museums can give staff members valuable time for reflection, planning, research, writing, and teaching.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ensure that the principles of this report are reflected in the missions, policies, management practices, and curriculums of all professional development and training programs.
- Initiate and identify model training programs that focus on the public dimension of museums and make these programs known in the museum field.
- Expand recruiting efforts by creating opportunities for professional development and training programs in order to enhance diversity in the staffs of museums.
- Provide programs for all staff that raise awareness of the value of cultural diversity and inspire the development of a truly diverse museum.

- Require that volunteers who carry out educational services perform at a professional level.
- Develop active collaborative efforts among museums, professional associations, and universities aimed at expanding the content of training and professional development to include the public dimension of museums.
- Expand the content and availability of training opportunities for both experienced and beginning museum trustees, staff, and volunteers.
- Provide on-the-job learning, sabbaticals, flexible work schedules, and other avenues for the professional growth and development of museum staff.

LEADERSHIP

10 Commit leadership and financial resources—in individual museums, professional organizations, and training organizations and universities—to strengthen the public dimension of museums.

Advancing the ability of museums to carry out their public responsibility will require forcefully articulated leadership and a substantial financial investment. These elements must be firmly in place throughout the museum field, because ultimately they are the key to achieving excellence and equity in the public dimension of museums. Museum leaders must actively advocate education for a diverse audience as a museum-wide function with a high priority, and they must revise their financial plans to reflect this priority.

Leadership is the foundation. Museum leaders set the tone for the institution and establish the values that guide decision making. To foster both excellence and equity, museum trustees, directors, management, and staff along with the American Association of Museums and other professional organizations should increase their efforts to advocate the primacy of educational and public service functions. Sensitive, strong leadership will also guide museums as they seek to include a broader spectrum of their communities.

As museums reinforce and redefine their mandate for public responsibility—both in individual institutions and for museums in the aggregate—they must also reassess how their financial decisions are made and what the implications of those decisions are. In a world of shrinking resources, this process will necessitate difficult choices, but a financial investment in the museum's public dimension must not be compromised. Exhibitions, programs, and other activities that enable museums to fulfill their public responsibility need financial backing if they are to reflect high standards and engage a diverse audience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- State the museum's primary commitment to its public responsibility in the financial priorities included in the institution's strategic plan and budget.

- Hold museums accountable for their public responsibility in statements of professional ethics and standards, accreditation criteria, and museum assessment program guidelines.
- Diversify sources of long-term support, such as endowments and earned income, for the museum's public dimension.
- Increase support from foundations, corporations, and government agencies for the goals expressed in this report.
- Use the media to promote awareness of the museum's commitment to public service.
- Form resource-sharing partnerships with community organizations that advance the museum's educational mission.
- Be aggressive in pursuit of financial support traditionally designated for formal educational institutions.
- Identify and commit resources to provide the leadership to implement the recommendations of this report.
- Encourage museums of all types and sizes to work together to implement these recommendations by sharing staff, programs, ideas, and resources at local, state, regional, and national levels.

CONCLUSION

The issues this report considers go to the very core of what museums are all about: How can museums, which have so much to contribute to the collective human experience, welcome people from all racial, ethnic, social, economic, and educational backgrounds? How can they use the abundance of their collections and their scholarly resources to enrich and empower their visitors? How can we, as museum professionals, trustees, and volunteers, effect the serious and lasting institutional and professional change necessary to resolve these issues? The complex challenges at hand require time, resources, and continuous review and assessment, but above all they require commitment.

The community of museums in the United States shares the responsibility with other educational institutions to enrich learning opportunities for all individuals and to nurture an enlightened, humane citizenry that appreciates the value of knowing about its past, is resourcefully and sensitively engaged in the present, and is determined to shape a future in which many experiences and many points of view are given voice. In this endeavor, museums will play a powerful, beneficial role for the people of the next century.

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ABOUT THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF MUSEUMS

The American Association of Museums is the national organization that represents the entire museum community and addresses its needs, thereby enhancing the ability of museums to serve the public. AAM represents and advocates the interests of U.S. museums, promoting understanding of the responsibilities, functions, and needs of these institutions among the general public and leaders in the private and public sectors. The association also leads the effort in establishing and advancing professional standards in museum programs and operations.

AAM members include museums of all sizes and kinds from throughout the United States—from art museums, natural history museums, and historic sites to science and technology centers, aboretums, planetariums, children's museums, zoos, and botanical gardens. The association counts more than 11,200 active members, including more than 8,000 museum professionals, volunteers, and trustees; more than 2,500 museums; and nearly 650 corporate affiliates.

For further information about the association and its active efforts to implement the principles and recommendations expressed in *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums*, write to AAM, 1575 I Street NW Suite 400, Washington, D.C. 20005; telephone (202) 289-1818.

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