



ADVISORY  
BOARD  
for the ARTS

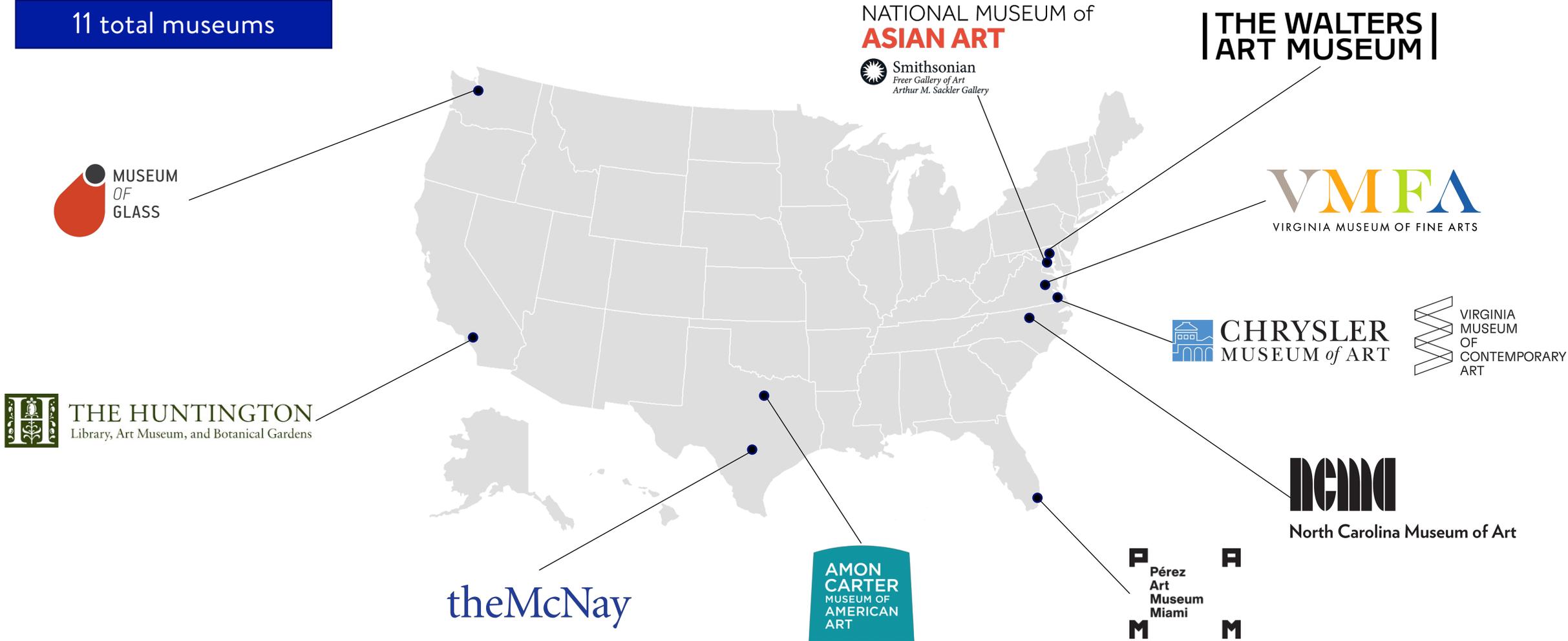
*Transforming Arts Organizations Worldwide*

## Delivering Quality Public Programs at Museums

April 2022

# Overview of Participating Museums

11 total museums



# Four Key Concepts for Effective Public Programs

Our research found four avenues to achieve high quality public programs in museums:

1

Design for your audiences' motivations

- Improve program impact by moving away from demographic segmentation and thinking about audience motivations
- Repeat marketing communications and program series that offer skill building to help attract and hook audiences

2

Structure your programming team to be more collaborative

- Clear ownership and subject matter expertise are more important than finding “the right” organizational structure
- Break down silos and address common challenges with a small cross-department catalyst team

3

Rethink digital as an investment, not a substitute

- With clear program goals and targeted audiences, low-tech digital programs achieve desired results
- Digital serves some audiences more than others and increases collaboration opportunities

4

Build a broad evaluation process to connect activities metrics with strategic goals

- Programs designed around attendee motivations make qualitative success metrics clearer
- Evaluations of partnerships and other community-relation programs offer broad strategic metrics and insights

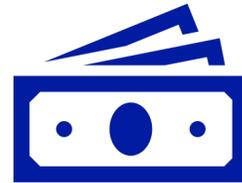
# Certain Elements Are Consistent Across Institutions



## Program quality is not a challenge

Delivering high quality programs with positive participant feedback is not seen as a challenge among our participants.

**The difficulty is in scaling them effectively with limited resources and attracting attendees for initial and repeat visits.**



## Revenue is not the primary goal

At most organizations, public programs are either free to attend or included in the cost of museum admittance.

**The programs that most frequently see associated charges to attend are classes that require additional materials.** The charge is just enough to cover those costs for the institution.

There is, however, the goal that programs will bring in long-term revenue by attracting future visitors/donors.



## Volunteers are key to scale

Volunteers are a crucial part of delivering public programs — primarily through docent programs.

**Docent programs, in particular, are a key extension of the curatorial and education teams in providing knowledge to visitors — and require more structure.**

Museums have provided this via initiatives such as:

- Docent representatives at board meetings
- Specialized trainings based on individual docent interests

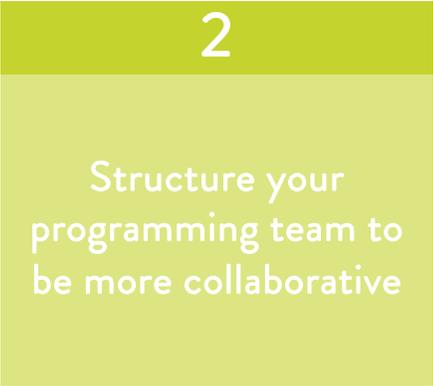
# Four Key Concepts for Effective Public Programs

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From our interviews and ABA research, we established 4 main lessons that can help navigate museum programming to higher levels of maturity and efficient collaboration:



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# Public Programs Often Ill-Defined At Many Institutions

*Exclusive for members?*

## Member Events

### Typical Goals:

Fulfill membership value proposition and generate contributed income

### Characteristics:

- Clear target audience
- Exclusive
- Relationship stewardship

*Is for K-12 classrooms or educators?*

## Education Programs

### Typical Goals:

Support the educational value of museum and serve formal education objectives

### Characteristics:

- Clear target audience
- K-12 programs
- Educator programs

*Everything Else*

## Public Programs

### Typical Goals:

Promote access and inclusion and serve mandate towards the community at large

### Characteristics:

- Often defined by demographics it aims to serve
- Huge variety of formats

The demographic breadth of public programs can lead to staff confusion and audience cannibalization.

# Demographic Segmentation Has Limits

## Example Demographic Groups

- Youth
- Early Education
- Teens
- Family
- College
- Adult
- Seniors
- Young Adult

### Typical attributes of youth segments:

- Ages: 6-12
- In school
- Need program facilitation
- Need adult supervision
- Less pre-visit arts exposure



When demographics of a segment are more homogenous with certain learning objectives and needs, program design and structure are more straightforward.

### Attributes of young adult segments:

- Ages: 20s-30s
- Varied education levels/ college age
- Single, couples, young families
- Varied income levels
- Student, full-time, part-time workers
- Varied degrees of art exposure



When demographics of a segment are not as homogenous, it's difficult to design programs that appeal to the segment at large.

*“Anecdotal evidence and other research I’ve read showed that those early touchpoints of families creating experiences together are more likely to lead to lifelong museum visitors and lead to something monetary.”*

- VMOCA

*“We used to have after hour meet-ups, not necessarily art based - live music, cocktails, etc. These events were not the most creative in how we were trying to engage that audience. Despite the entertainment factor, we were not seeing obvious translations into our larger goal of museum membership, repeat visitation, etc..”*

- NCMA

# Shifting From Audience Demographics To Audience Motivations



ABA Research,  
*Building Loyal  
Audiences*

## Key Takeaways:

- Demographics can provide surface level information about audiences
- **Arts attendance as with most things is less about demographics and more about interests and motivations**
- It's important to understand what motivates our audiences and design programs based on their interests
- This approach leads to a **bottom-up method for program design**

## Examples of original study motivations\*:

*\*based on survey of over 4,000 arts attendees*

**Arts Passionates**  
Motivation: Pursue a passion (*not* a special occasion or shared memory)

**Mastery Builders**  
Motivation: Gain expertise, learn something new

**Willing Companions**  
Motivation: Support friends and family, intergenerational Opportunities

**Civic Stewards**  
Motivation: Create vibrant community. Fulfill duty toward the arts

**Social Samplers**  
Motivation: Try something new (*not* pursue a passion)

**Culture Surfers**  
Motivation: See popular, famous works, Have fun

## Potential additional museum motivation examples:

**Leisure Seekers**  
Motivation: Relax, find an escape from day-to-day, connect to emotions

**Passion Sharers**  
Motivation: Share their passion with friends and family, shared memory, special occasion

# Design Around Motivations To Strengthen Program Impacts

By selecting motivations to prioritize, you can **focus on what audiences want to experience** rather than assume what they want to learn.

## Motivations drive program requirements:



### Design and Target



### Structure



### Metrics and Evaluations

If you are designing programs for your **art passionates**

- Art passionates want to pursue their passion
- This does not need to involve a shared memory or special occasion with others
- Spark personal actualization around artistic excellence

Since they are not looking for a standout event their experiences can be less structured and more self-motivated. Examples include artist talks, tours, etc.

- Did they come away feeling like they nourished their passion?
- Will they come back and further explore the galleries?
- Was this their first time at the museum?

If you are designing programs for **mastery builders**

- Mastery builders want to gain expertise
- Programs should involve and publicize clear learning outcomes
- Building on tangible skills (either soft or hard skills)

Since mastery builders want to gain expertise, they are probably better served with structured workshops or lecture series that build on a know-how

- Did they build on a skill/ gain expertise?
- Will they come back to further enhance this skill?
- Will they share this experience with others?

If you are designing programs for your **leisure seekers**

- Leisure seekers want to find an opportunity to escape from day-to-day
- Not looking for obvious learning
- Would not necessarily identify as art lovers

Since leisure seekers are looking for an escape and are not necessarily art lovers they can engage in alternative relaxing activities like yoga or drawing in the galleries, music concerts etc.

- Did they enjoy their experience and feel they escaped the day-to-day?
- Will they come back?
- Have we attracted them in sufficient number?

# Some Motivations Overlap Well; Design for Both

If one motivation target would be too narrow to achieve your audience goals, consider looking for overlapping audiences – but make sure the motivations don't conflict.

## Example 1: Social Samplers & Willing Companions

### VMOCA Art Crush Program

6:30 | Drinks and pre-gallery fun  
7:00 | Gallery exploration



**Design Philosophy:** they do not design with young adults as opposed to adults generally. They design programs that will appeal to all adults with similar motivations like having fun and experiencing the museum in new ways. Their pre-covid Art Crush program comprised of an optional drink, pre-exploration activity and ice-breaker games, followed by gallery activities.

*“This program helped fulfill ‘I am an art person’ identity and we got such a wide range of attendants, from people in their sixties, to 18-year-olds coming on dates.”*

## Example 2: Culture Surfers & Mastery Builders

### Tacoma Museum of Glass Gather Program

Event: “Try your hand at creating your own glass art by experiencing complimentary glass art workshops taught by professional artists at Museum of Glass. Get your art on. Get your groove on; DJ and dancing, no host bar for 21+.”



**Design Philosophy:** they are looking at Friday and Saturday nights as optimal evenings to appeal to bring in performances and glass blowing activities together. Pairing opportunities for more hands-on experiences with a music component, has been really compelling for a range of people and created buzz around the museum's brand and their other programs and workshops.

*“When we combine glass blowing with music performances in a fun engaging way, that's been really attractive for our young professionals looking to learn and have a great time at the museum.”*

# Successful Principles To Attract and Retain Attendees

After designing with audience motivations in mind, use additional marketing principles and structural elements to help attract new visitors and create reasons for return.



## Programs that foster habits

Programs with regular cadences that happen on a monthly basis for example like “Second Thursday” events, or regular thematic tours can help build **audience habit**.

Additionally, having events happen on a regular basis with a catchy names can go a long way to ingrain the event in audiences’ minds and schedules while also **building anticipation for the next edition**.

These events can also support community connections with other visitors who might **share interests and loyalty to specific programs**.



## Programs that offer skill building

Programs that involve some elements of **skill building and mastery** can **serve several motivation segments eager to experience new things**, like mastery builders, social samplers and willing companions.

Programs with skill building can be both drop in gallery actives facilitated by a staff member or more formalized workshop series with required pre-registration.

Structured programs can support first time attraction and retention. Additionally, having programs for all ages can also build life-long learners and the next generation of patrons.

# Simplicity Is Key When Fostering Habits

**Challenge:** The Amon Carter Museum had two signature event series:

- Spring: Experts Talk on the Carter lecture series
- Fall: “Art Mash-Up” cross-disciplinary events

Their marketing department flagged that it was very difficult to advertise these two types of very different seasonal programs, especially in the crowded post-pandemic digital landscape.

**Solution:** the education and marketing departments reformatted the disparate programs into **“Second Thursdays.”** This recurring monthly event was easier to market and attractive to museum-goers who could build a consistent habit of attendance, knowing they would find a new experience waiting for them each second Thursday of the month.

*“I got so many comments in person or over email from our regulars as well as new visitors about how excited they were to have these monthly new events, and I was like ‘we always were doing this!’ Now that we have a name that makes it super clear that it’s every month, people actually realize that.”*



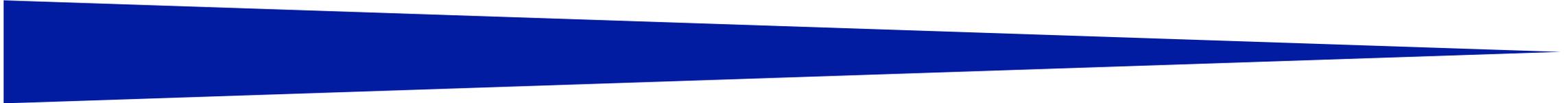
Connect with art through cocktails, conversations, and creativity. Each month you'll find something different—from performances, artist talks, and unique tours to art making, music, and films. One thing's for sure: You won't be bored! Invite a friend and mark your calendar!

Share your experience at Second Thursdays using:  
#CarterSecondThursdays

# Multiple Opportunities to Keep Learning Builds Repeat Attendance

## Tacoma Museum of Glass: Encouraging Repeat Attendance with Skill Building

### Attendance Pipeline



First-time

“Regulars”

#### Easy Trial

Daily hot-shop demonstrations allow all visitors, even drop-in groups, to experience glassblowing and the museum’s glassmaking *raison d’être*.



#### Virtual Reinforcement

a range of virtual offerings allow those interested to watch artists in the studios as well as providing at-home craft project ideas to extend skill-building



EXPLORE THE STUDIO

#### Flexible Pop-Ups

Small pop-up gallery activities encourage a second try for those who might not have been ‘hooked’ into more formal workshops



#### Advanced, Regular Workshops

More formalized studio workshops enable true ongoing mastery building



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# Structuring Your Team

Many factors go into deciding on a structure for your programming team — there is no one best fit for every organization. Each organizational chart on the next page has its own benefits that can be applied to other institutions based on team size and level of centralization.

## theMcNay

- Operating with a smaller team, the McNay has still created an effective structure that emphasizes clear ownership.
- Each educator owns all events and programs within their focus area, ensuring accountability but avoiding one person taking on too much.



- Focusing each manager on a specific audience decreases overlap and gives each a strategic focus.
- The Carter supplements a mid-sized team with a dedicated group of local artists and part-time educators to support the execution of programs.



North Carolina Museum of Art

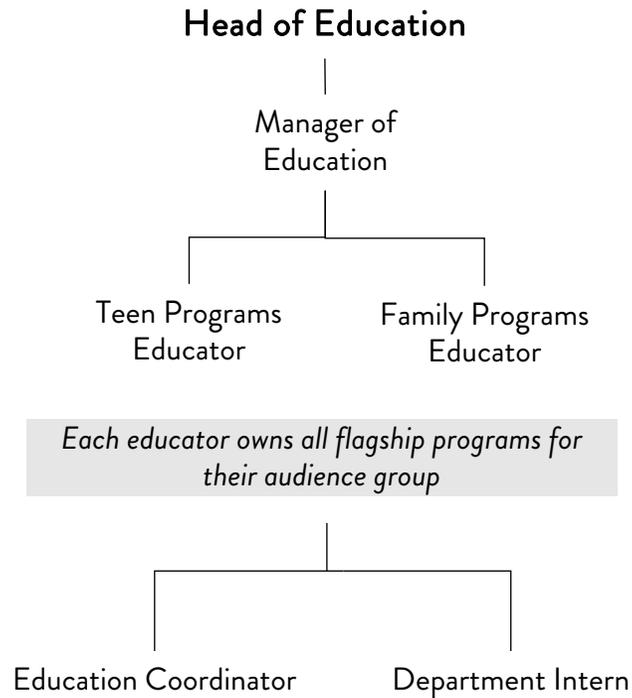
- The largest team we encountered, NCMA has structured to be highly specialized. As with the other team structures, this allows for clear accountability and decreased overlap — but also creates experts in how to make specific types of program work best.

# Reference: Structuring Your Team

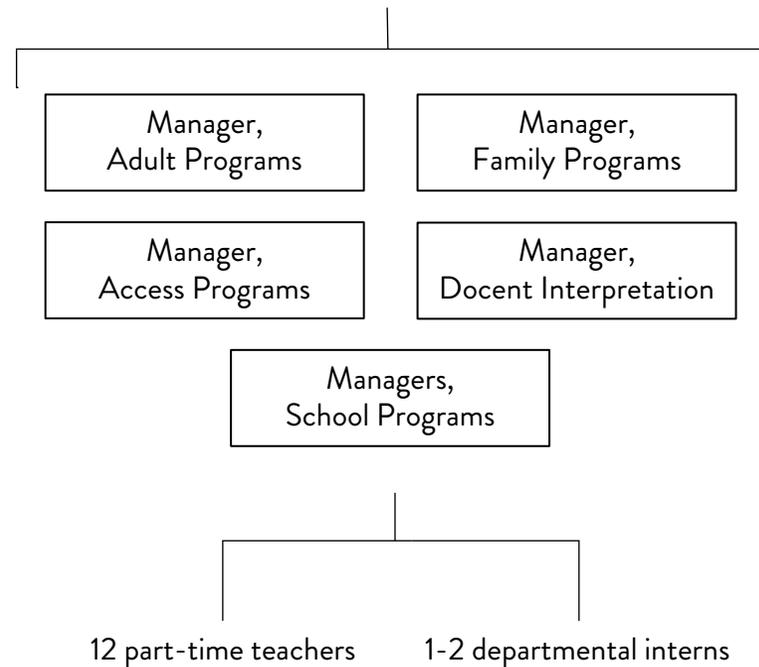
Centralized

Decentralized

theMcNay



Director, Education, Library & Visitor Experience



North Carolina Museum of Art

Deputy Director



# The Challenge of Cross-Functional Collaboration

Across our conversations with museums, the most consistent challenge we heard — and the one whose solution made the biggest positive impact — was collaborating effectively with other departments to deliver programs.

## Challenges

- Different departments have their own unique goals or measurements of success. There are particularly strong differences between the mindsets of curatorial and education teams, in terms of how to speak about art most effectively.
- Programs for members and the public can sometimes self-cannibalize or be lost opportunities to engage multiple constituencies.
- Collaboration between full departments can be challenging to manage or result in ideas not being heard.



## Solution

### Cross-Functional Catalyst Team

- Individuals from various departments come together to form a smaller team that focuses specifically on planning programs for a defined period of time (often the fiscal year).

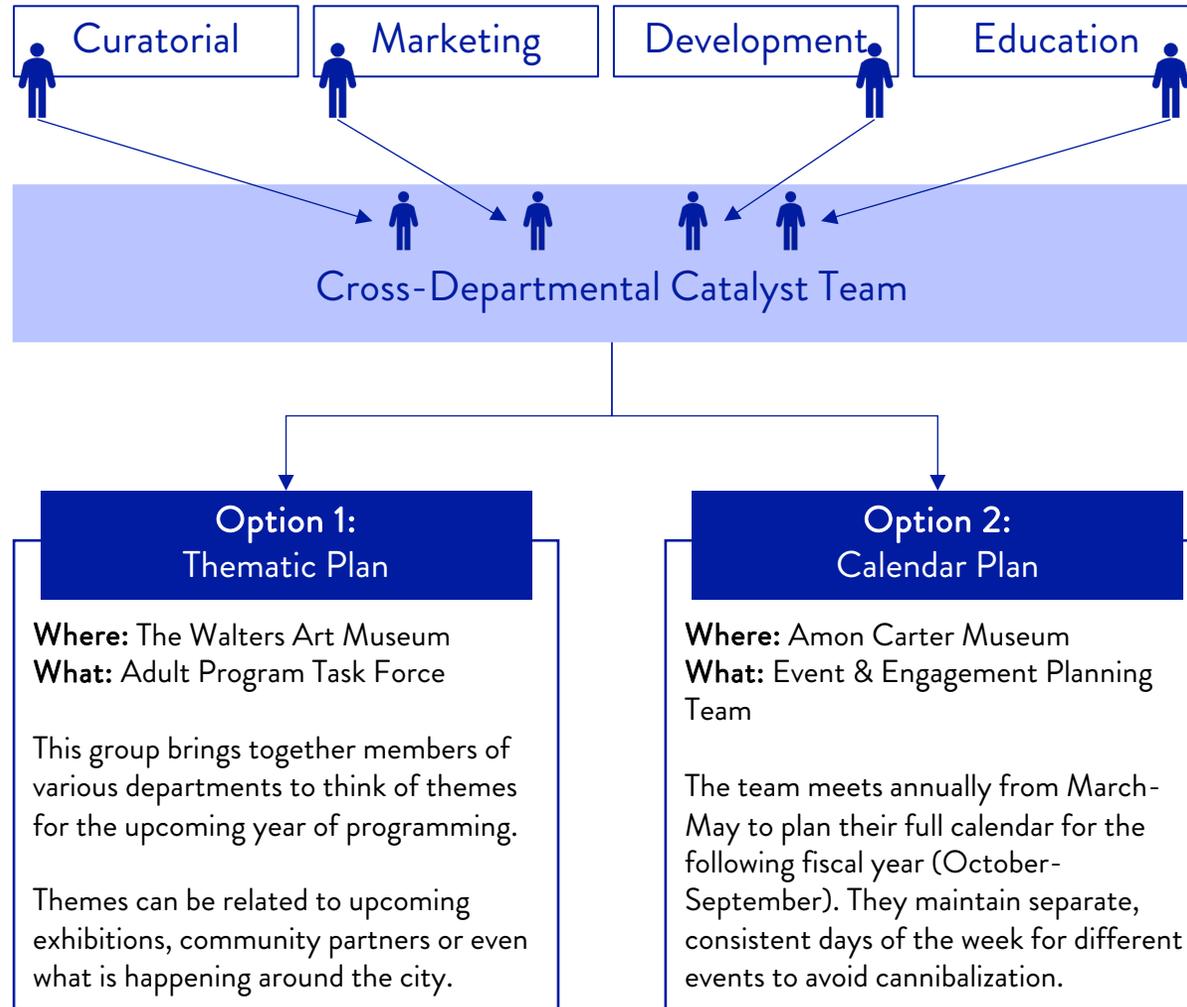
## Why It Works

- The first goal of the small team is to create common objectives, giving the group a shared language and metrics that can hold true across the institution.
- A shared language alone is helpful, but the addition of a defined planning period for the small team ensures that action is taken.
- A catalyst team is a much more manageable size that allows for freer idea exchange, but still represents the interests of all departments.

# Organizing for Cross-Functional Collaboration

## Phase 1: Breaking Down Silos

- Organizations reporting highest satisfaction with their program planning process have built intentional cross-departmental collaboration.
- This often takes the shape of a **small “catalyst” team**, with representatives from each department that has a stake in public programs.
- An alignment between curatorial and more administrative departments will be crucial and may take some time to build.



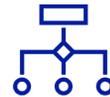
## Phase 2: Leveraging Guiding Principle to Schedule

- Once this small team is formed, they bring together priorities of each department into one calendar of programs in a manner that avoids cannibalization and competition between events.
- Successful organizations find that a unifying principle helps this process immensely — either thematic (i.e., major exhibits, strategic plan, ad hoc themes) or calendar-based (i.e., reserving specific days of the week for specific departments or program types).

# Case Study: Bringing It All Together (Part I)



The North Carolina Museum of Art has built a cross-collaboration model that incorporates the entire organization through a careful mix of structure and flexibility. **By restructuring throughout the program planning process**, the museum ensures that all departments have input and ownership over the calendar.



Standard Structure

**Deputy Director oversees:**

- Education Programmers
- Outreach & Engagement Programmers
- Performing Arts Programmers
- Visitor and Retail Experience Programmers

**Chief Advancement Officer oversees:**

- Advancement programmers (member/donor events)



Programming Structure

**Deputy Director oversees:**

- Education Programmers
- Outreach & Engagement Programmers
- Performing Arts Programmers
- Visitor and Retail Experience Programmers

**Deputy Director also temporarily oversees:**

- Advancement programmers

### Increased Creativity in Brainstorming

This process has three key benefits:

By allowing for ideation to happen both in a catalyst team and in individual departments, this process opens more doors for creative proposals within a still-defined timeframe.

### Institutional Buy-in & Ownership

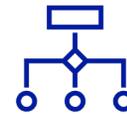
The process includes all teams with programs in the ideation stage and opens even broader to all departments for feedback. This helps give the full organization a sense of ownership and input in the museum's offerings.

### Execution by Experts

While the process encompasses many corners of the museum, the tactical planning has a clearly-delineated owner: the group of programmers. This ensures accountability and allows for these individuals' skills to be maximized.

# Case Study: Bringing It All Together (Part II)

Throughout the program planning process, the NCMA team switches between its two structures depending on which is most effective for each planning stage.



## Stage 1: Feedback Gathering *Programming Structure*

Programmers have a meeting with all departments (Food & Beverage, Curatorial, Parks, Facilities) to assess the current season of programs, to avoid the same mistakes before confirming the following year's plans.

## Stage 2: Selecting Themes *Programming Structure*

Following conversations with curators, the team of programmers meets to plot out the values, themes, and goals of the year, which are based on upcoming exhibitions and the collection, including incoming loans.

## Stage 3: Ideation & Planning *Standard Structure*

Programmers return to their departments and sub-departments with the year's themes and have one month to plot their programs. They add each program to a shared whiteboard on a color-coded sticky note.

## Stage 4: Calendaring *Programming Structure*

Program leadership gathers up the submitted plans and make decisions on which to hold, to cut, or to combine. One programmer inputs the final list into a Google document and calendar that are shared across all departments in the museum.

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# Larger Digital Investments Can Draw New Audiences...

Dedicated staff and tech capabilities have allowed some museums to push their virtual slate, reaching new levels of audience exposure.

## How digital is organized:

- NCMA has a dedicated Manager of Digital who, in partnership with others, oversees the website and online middle and high school courses through the NC High School system.
- This position also oversees virtual field trips and other web-based programs, such as the forthcoming NCMAExplore, which will be an interactive site that is specific to middle-school educational standards.

## How is it executed:

- NCMA has succeeded in providing ongoing virtual programs in both 100% digital or in a hybrid formats, thanks to dedicated media specialists on their team.
- They are also able to charge a nominal virtual fee if an equivalent in-person program also require a small fee.

## Major successes:

- The museum's virtual field trips have grown exponentially since their inception — expanding from an initial approximately 800 students to currently 9,000 taking part — signaling interest in digital education opportunities, especially for more distant districts.



# ...But Smaller Investments Can Get Great “Bang For The Buck”

## Access-Focused Programming



At the Amon Carter Museum, they have continued their *Artful Moments* for people with early-stage dementia both online and in-person upon request.

Access-focused digital programs have paid off as they allow those at-risk for COVID or unable to access the physical space to interact with the museum.



## Adult Learning



VMFA found online adult learning expanded the reach of students and instructors the museum could work with for art history classes. Offering online programs that were recorded also meant they could reach people who might not normally be able to attend due to scheduling conflicts or distance from the museum.

VMFA secured an NEH grant to aid in the continuation of their digital work.

[70] Thomas Jefferson in England  
Thu, Apr 7–28 (4 sessions), 2–3 pm | Virtual  
Dr. Craig Reynolds, Chief Administrative Officer and Curator, Capital Square Preservation Council, Virginia State Capitol

Jefferson visited England in 1784, 1786, and 1789. He gave an overall unfavorable opinion, calling London's architecture the "most wretched stile," declared that England "hates" America, and openly opined on the royal government's "follies & frauds." Yet, Jefferson was attracted to England's visual and mechanical arts, his London shopping was ceaseless, and his tours of famous architectural works and sprawling gardens in and around London are well documented. This class will explore Jefferson's tours of England and the lasting English influences Jefferson helped transplant to Virginia.

\$90 (VMFA members \$75)

Register Now

## Niche or Distant Speakers



VMOCA found that virtual programs not only worked to engage larger audiences, but also created opportunities to bring in prominent guests at reduced cost.

The museum invited The Guerrilla Girls and culinary historian Michael W. Twitty for an interdisciplinary talk on an exhibit whose themes intersected with their own work — an event that would have been more challenging to organize without the ease of connecting virtually.



Guerrilla Girls: The Art of Behaving Badly Zoom Event

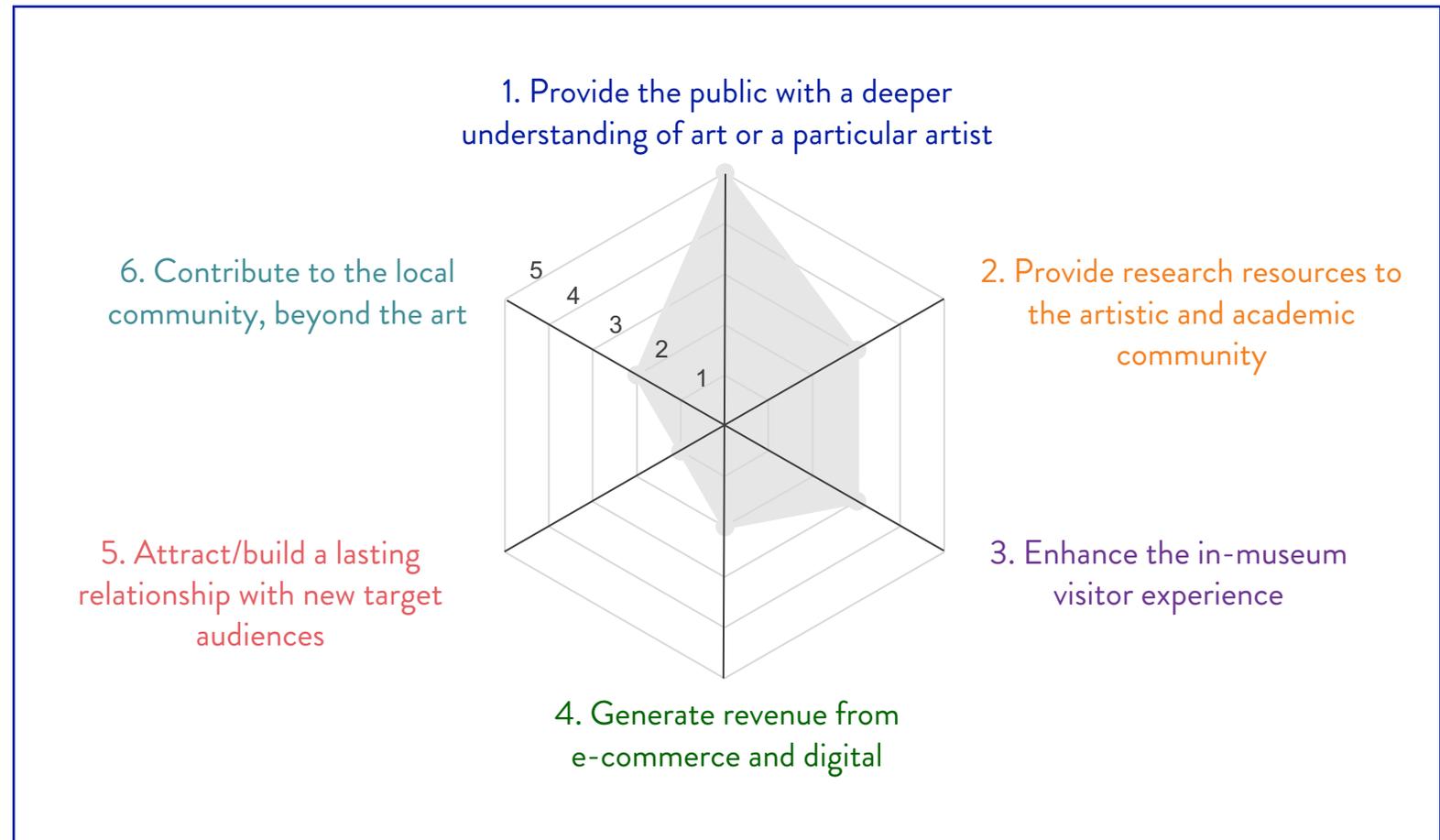
# Understanding Your Digital Opportunity

With limited resources, it is important to prioritize 1-2 strategic aims for your digital efforts. A **spider diagram** can be a useful tool to visualize possible areas of focus in digital, and to indicate how much of your time and funds you will dedicate to each.

Questions to ask yourself when determining where to focus include:

- Which audiences benefitted the most from online programs? Which are least likely to return in person?
- Which new audiences did your digital programs reach?
- What programming gap can digital fill?
- Do you have the tech equipment and digital skill sets required to deliver quality programs?

**How to use this tool:** ask your team to answer the questions above. For each vote that implies a particular audience focus, give that one point. Diagram the points on a chart such as the one to the right. Use this visual as a guide when determining where to invest in digital - the more points something gets, the more it merits investment.



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# Evaluating Your Programs Is Crucial – But Comes With Challenges

## Hallmarks of successful public program evaluation



### Goals and outcomes of the work are determined early in the planning process and are flexible over time.

Define upfront what the goals and outcomes are with all parties involved. This ensures everyone is aligned to the same metrics. However, be willing to keep measurements flexible as the nature of programs evolve over time.

Tip: budget for metric collection needs during the program planning process (both time and financial).

#### Challenges:

- Agreeing on a manageable number of metrics to track
- Dedicating resources to set up and maintain the tracking
- Feeling like metrics collection will require significant investment over time



### Metrics go beyond attendance and include more qualitative evaluation of the full program ecosystem (including partners).

Participants in the research outlined several creative metrics they use to go beyond attendee numbers. These included visitor contact hours, pre-, during, and post-attendance to a program.

It is also key to look beyond your walls. Many museums spoke to the importance of partners in executing public programs. These collaborations can also provide strong indicators of impact and success.

#### Challenges:

- Identifying which metrics to capture
- Measuring and analyzing qualitative metrics

### Paid resources: worth the investment?

While dedicated resources can be cost-prohibitive, some can be highly impactful if funds become available.

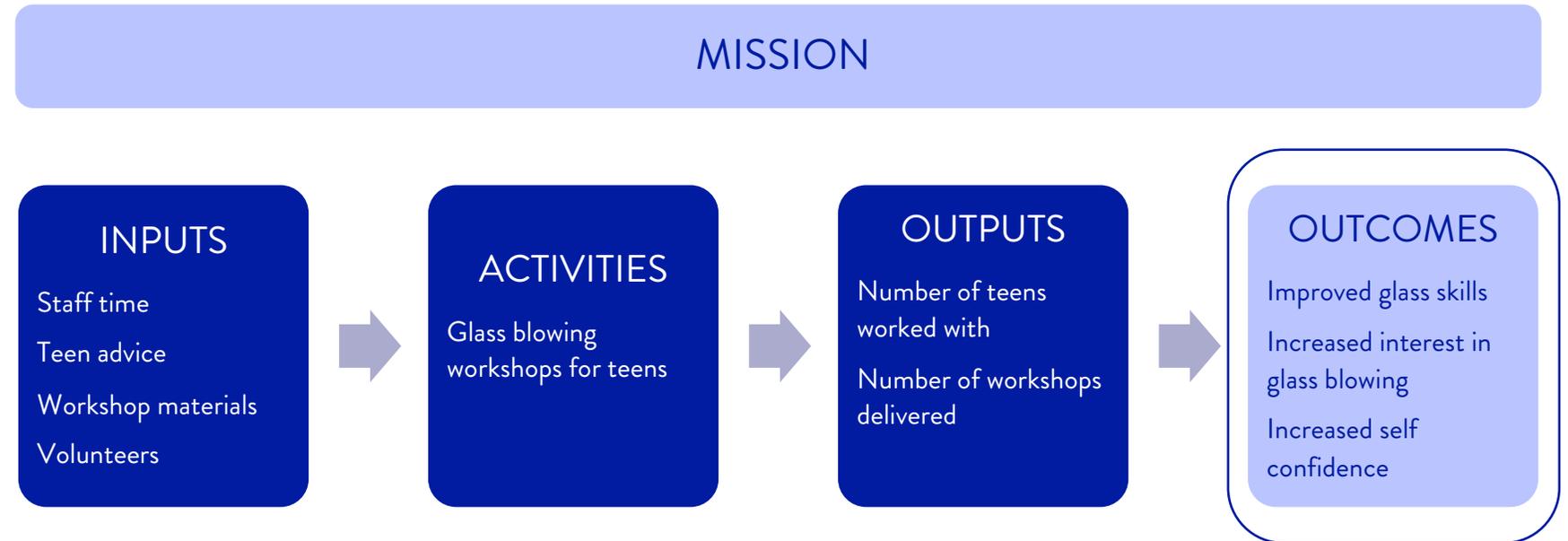
- Some institutions have invested in a low-cost, user-friendly surveying technology that allows anyone in the organization to pull helpful reports and dashboards – and with minimal training needed.
- Several organizations have brought on an Evaluations Manager, who works across departments to align metrics.

# Align on Manageable, Actionable Metrics

Before implementing a new public program, define its goals and outcomes and focus early resources on the metrics that will impact your decision-making the most. **It is better to track fewer things consistently and make changes based on metrics rather than track many things and not act on them.** This ensures that throughout the lifetime of the program, everyone is working towards the same goals.

The following framework is adapted from Nesta UK's impact measurement approach, which recommends **focusing impact measurement on a single activity rather than entire portfolio.**

Identify outcomes that would directly move your mission forward – this allows you to say no to certain metrics, so you are only focusing on those with the most impact on your actions.



# Understand and Measure Your Partnership Impact Goals

## Offsite Programs

Bring your ready-made programs beyond museum



### What it gets you:

- Build ties within the local community
- Meet audience where they are across your community
- Share your expertise beyond your museum walls

### Things to evaluate:

- How many people did you engage with offsite?
- What were the learning outcomes of your programs?
- How many different sites do you work with?
- What range of local districts do you reach with off site programs?
- Do these engagements translate into onsite visits?
- How many teachers are trained to work off-site and hoe often?

## Onsite Activations

Invite outside groups into your space



### What it gets you:

- Amplify other perspectives in the museum
- Leverage your exhibitions to inspire others
- Build ties with your community

### Things to evaluate:

- How many people did you engage with onsite?
- What elements of the museum inspired the programs of others?
- How many partners do you trust and invite to program in the museum?
- What kind of programs do your partners usually ask to present?
- Do partners feel welcome to return onsite?
- Do the partners bring in their own audiences?

## Mature Collaborations

Co-creation of programs with partners



### What it gets you:

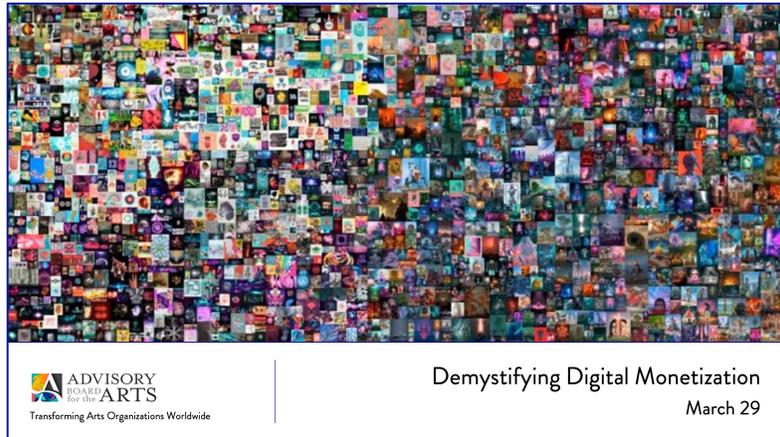
- Develop long-term relationships
- Leverage mutual interests and strengths
- Co-create public programs together

### Things to evaluate:

- How long have you worked with higher-level trusted partners?
- What kind of mutual programming do you work on together?
- How do they support museum events?
- How do you support their events?
- Have you seen repeat engagement from partner audiences and networks?
- How many events do you work on throughout the year?

# Appendix: Additional ABA Member Resources

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[Demystifying Digital Monetization](#)  
[Signature Research – March 2021](#)



[Capturing the Digital Opportunity](#)  
[Member Inquiry – March 2022](#)



[Designing Community Engagement Programs](#)  
[Member Inquiry – March 2022](#)