



# BEING OF VALUE: INTENTIONALLY FOSTERING & DOCUMENTING THE PUBLIC VALUE IN MUSEUMS

Lynn D. Dierking, Ph.D.  
Sea Grant Professor, Free-  
Choice Education  
Oregon State University  
Corvallis, OR USA



*"In everything museums do, they must remember the cornerstone on which the whole enterprise rests: to make a positive difference in the quality of people's lives. Museums that do that, matter-they matter a great deal."*

Stephen E. Weil, 2002

# Overview



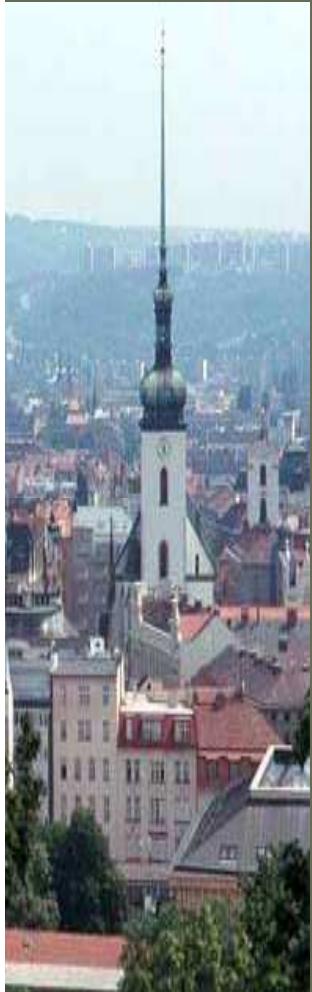
**Exploring public value:**

- Defining it;
- Frameworks for planning & documenting it;
- Outcomes & indicators that demonstrate public good



# Defining Public Value

- Strategic impact *for and with communities*, rather than *institutional* impact;
- Fully connected to fabric & community needs
- When start from institution perspective, result can be what institution *thinks* community needs (healthy, vital museum, content they've defined)!
- Healthy, vital museum is means toward public good, rather than goal itself



# Why Now?

Isn't the good work of museums given?

- Achieving and documenting public value is important because:
  - Need to refocus & return to core values & mission
  - Must concretely demonstrate public value for funding & sustainability over time
  - Elephant in room: museums may not be as relevant perhaps as professionals working within them think they are



# Reality is....

- As well-intentioned goals are, some approach from power position & self-preservation
- Work collaboratively *for & with* citizens to identify content that is valuable, empowering & meets needs of community, rather than deciding what community needs to know

# Planning For Public Value



How will *community* be different because museum exists?: Reframe activities thru lens of impact on *community*:

- ❑ Who is/are primary audience(s)? Why?
- ❑ What specific needs or wants of audience are being met? How do you know?
- ❑ Have “right” people been involved *from outset*?
- ❑ How will audience benefit from activities? How will you know?
- ❑ How will *community as whole* benefit from activities? How will you know?

# Achieving *Intentional Impact* on Community



- Frame work within fabric of community & institution; buy-in top down to ensure centrality to mission & day-day activities;
- Develop theory of change & Logic Model; foster looking *outward* while developing innovative ideas, values & habits inside
- Situate assessments of progress within day-to-day activities of organization as integral part of planning & development



# Assessing Community Impact

- ❑ How do you develop activities & build capacity in assessment with organizations for which this is not their expertise?
- ❑ Can you develop practical & intuitive tools for assessment, that reframe it as day-to-day activity (not report card at end) that organizations can & even more importantly *want* to use as tools
- ❑ What are meaningful indicators for community impacts?



# Possible Measures

## Urban Institute ([www.urban.org](http://www.urban.org))

- The Outcome Indicators Project
  - Track & self-assess community impacts. Four of 14 areas relevant to museum outcomes: Adult Ed. & Family Literacy, Health Risk Reduction, Youth Mentoring & Tutoring
- Arts and Culture Indicators in Community-Building Project
  - Focuses on ways to document how cultural activities, in this case, arts, support the quality of life in a community: cultural vitality & magnetization



# Some Longitudinal Data

## Impacts of Gender-Focused Programming in Science

- Positive, detailed, & lasting memories of experiences years later
- Influenced future engagement in science (education, careers & hobbies), attitudes towards, perceptions of & understanding of science & scientific habits of mind
- Influenced personal & science identity, social capital, networks, skills & civic engagement
- Perception that experiences filled important developmental needs not met by school