Crafting Identity, Creating Community, and Building Museum Exhibits

Aaron Seagraves

Master's Research Project

June 2009

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Approved: _____

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Date: 6 / 2 / 09

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank the Arts and Administration faculty: Dr. Doug Blandy, Dr. Gaylene Carpenter, Dr. Patricia Dewey, Dr. John Fenn, Dr. Lori Hager, Darrel Kau, Dr. Phaedra Livingstone, Alice Parman, and Dr. Janice W. Rutherford. Especially, Doug Blandy, my research advisor, who gave me a lot of support, confidence, and autonomy. I'd also like to thank John Fenn and Phaedra Livingstone for the time they took to meet with me during the early part of my research to discuss it.

I would like to thank everyone who I interviewed and met while working on this research project. Michelle Kumata was very accommodating with her time and effort on my behalf. I wish to thank Joshua Heim and Cristina Seong also for giving me their time and attention. I thank Joshua Heim and the LGBTQ Asian Pacific American Community Advisory Committee for their openness while I attended the committee meeting. I found Karen Meada Allman, Tom Im, & Jeff Sakuma to be insightful and exceptional people. I believe recalling my conversation with Ron Chew will continue to inspire me.

A big thank you to my fellow students for their friendship and support. I expect a lot from each of you in your professional careers.

The staff at the Science Factory Children's Museum have been part of my university experience through my practicum with them over four terms. It was great to work with them. I hope to enter into such a work environment as they share. Another part of my time as a student was my work with Darrel Kau and the Cultural Forum. Mr. Kau and the office impressed me with the quality of the programming and their consideration for the students.

I must thank Jennifer Spencer and my family for not forgetting about me back in Michigan.

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Education

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Masters of Science in Arts Management & Certificate in Museum Studies
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"Crafting Identity, Creating Community, and Building Museum Exhibits"
Master's Research Project, University of Oregon
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Bachelors of Science in Drawing and Painting & Minor in Writing
Northern Michigan University
Marquette, Michigan, May 2000

Related Professional Experience

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Visual Arts Coordinator, Erb Memorial Union's Cultural Forum
Booked artists for the Aperture Gallery and Buzz Café Gallery
University of Oregon, October 2007 to June 2009

Exhibit Volunteer, Science Factory and Children's Museum
Designed and constructed "Shoot a Cannonball of Air" air cannon exhibit
Supported museum staff with exhibit development, planning, maintenance and fabrication
Eugene, Oregon, March 2008 to June 2008, & September 2008 to June 2009

Exhibit Intern, Ann Arbor Hands-On Museum
Designed "Planetary Gravity" Exhibit
Supported museum staff with exhibit development, maintenance and fabrication
Ann Arbor, Michigan, June 2008 to September 2008

Designer, Wired Humanities Project
Web design & exhibit development team for "Meso-American Textiles: Text and Context" exhibit
University of Oregon, September 2007 to June 2008

Related Projects
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Interpretive Master Plan & Exhibit, US Fish & Wildlife Service Forensics Laboratory
Co-wrote interpretive plan and co-created exhibit designs with exhibition development team
Installation scheduled for August 2009
      Ashland, Oregon, January 2009 to June 2009

Association of Professional Fundraisers student group, University of Oregon
Student development and fundraising support for nonprofit organization, Downtown Languages
Drafted grant for operational support & co-wrote development plan for nonprofit organization
      Eugene, Oregon, October 2008 to April 2009

RFP by Port of Ludington Maritime Museum, Mason County Historical Society, Michigan
Co-wrote RFP to develop exhibits with Shogren Consulting of Beaverton, Oregon
      Completed August 2008

Other Employment
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Substitute Rural Mail Carrier, United States Postal Service
      Tecumseh, Michigan, June 2006 to September 2007

Arboretum Grounds, Hidden Lake Gardens
      Tipton, Michigan, April 2005 to December 2006

Radio Coordinator, WNMU, Northern Michigan University
Tracked Public Radio underwriters, sponsors, recordings, and scripts
      Marquette, Michigan, December 1998 to May 2000

Music Director, WUPX, Northern Michigan University
Responsible for radio station's music collection and charting disc jockey music playlists
      Marquette, Michigan, September 1998 to May 2000

Skills
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Fine art painting, drawing, & cartooning
Design software: Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign
Web coding: XHTML and CSS

ABSTRACT

The museum field is making efforts to become more community oriented and open to all of their stakeholders. This research is a case study of the Wing Luke Asian Museum, in Seattle, and their exhibit development policy, named, the Community-Based Exhibition Model. The museum's policy is an example of a participatory museum program that involves specific communities in the work of the museum. The model's purpose is to increase museum access and allow specific communities the opportunity for self-interpretation in the resulting exhibits. The research is developed from a review of literature, site visits to the museum, participation in the process of the model, and from my dialogue with former and current museum staff and community participants.

KEYWORDS

Chapter One:

Introduction & Research Design

Purpose of the Project

This master's research project is a study of the museum field. The intended goal of it is to better understand the relationship between museums and their communities. In the museum field there are museum operation policies that use participatory programs to work toward a shared goal with their audience. The Wing Luke Asian Museum (WLAM), in Seattle, features a long-running participatory program. The end product of this project is an analysis of that particular participatory program and draws findings and conclusions from the collected data and then gives recommendations for the museum field.

Statement of the Problem

A problem for museums is dealing with change and the influence of changing visitors. It seems uncertain that cultural institutions confronting change has ever not happened, but there is recognition in the museum field that new adaptation is needed now (Stam, 2005; Weil, 1999). Perhaps professional museum practices had codified to the point of expert inflexibility that new societal currents are forcing staff and stakeholders to consider what their future operations will look like. There are different social pressures evolving around the museum environment, and in response, new approaches to museum practices are being considered.

Beginning in the 1980s there was a distinct recognition of changes to sources of funding, a newfound spirit of voluntarism, and a movement to privatization (Loomis, 1993). Several practitioners and writers in the museum field were critical of their institutions and were published in The New Museology, in 1989 (Stam, 2005). Deirdre C. Stam listed the social changes those writers outlined as, "economic conditions, patterns of support, visitor

profiles, competition from other institutions and organizations, public expectations,

communication modes, reputation, and political roles" (2005). Those factors of outside

influence often required some alterations to the organizational structure of museums and

even resulted in new professional disciplines. For example, there is an increased importance

placed on visitor studies and evaluation methods (Loomis, 1993).

What is important for the museum profession and field is to continue to be

innovative with their operations so that they are flexible enough to deal with the continued

changes in society happening outside their doors. In 1998, the American Association of

Museums adopted an initiative to foster civic engagement among museums, called The

Museums and Community Initiative (Crooke, 2007). The initiative suggested, in their

publication Mastering Civic Engagement, that although programming and audience

development can be "community-oriented," they are not necessarily "civic minded" (M &

C, 2002, p 16). Finding how to change orientation to mindedness is a new source of

consideration for museums.

Conceptual Framework

This research is designed to better understand a nexus that can be characteristic of

museums where professional interpretation and audience identity coexist. Some of the

concepts of concern that constitute the conceptual framework of the project include the

following: self-representation, identity, interpretation, museum volunteers, museum

professionals, and access. See Appendix A for a graphic depicting the relationships shared by

these concepts.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this case study is to investigate community self-representation in museums by means of community participation in interpretive exhibit development. To accomplish this, the research focused on the WLAM, in Seattle, Washington, an Asian Pacific Islander American ethnic heritage museum. I chose the museum because it touts a museum policy called, the Community-Based Exhibition Model (CBEM). The basic construct of the investigation was built on the conceptual grouping of literature on museums and related disciplines, and furthered by site visits to the museum, participation in the process of the model, and from my dialogue with former and current museum staff and community participants.

Methodological Paradigm

The methodological paradigm the research identifies with is critical inquiry. Critical inquiry underscores how our existence has "multiple levels of reality" (Neuman, 2006, p. 94) and the paradigm places concern on the justness of the overriding social structures and social power (Neuman, 2006). The concepts involved in my research are issues of museum access, audience identity, and the cultural meaning portrayed in exhibits. The museum is a social regulating institution. The professional conventions and the typical institutional approach to developing meaning and interpreting culture can be seen as an audience limitation, one that regulates access to the museum. Most participant communities of a museum are subject to bounded autonomy (agency and limitation)—a construct of critical inquiry (Neuman, 2006, p. 97)—in their dealings with the institution. Communities make value judgments on the meaning of museum exhibits and presentations. The critical inquiry

paradigm is a research lens, and in the case of this study, it views museums as institutions of power and will assess the community based exhibit policy as a form of institutional change.

Role of the Researcher

The project is an attempt to objectively uncover the case study through my research of supporting literature, my act of participant observation, and through interviewing others for information and their opinions. The research of literature in the field found in books, scholarly journals, and other publications framed my research in terms consistent with the scholarship. I developed research questions and answered them based on the findings of the research.

Research Questions

Research questions were written before data was collected. The purposes of the research questions were to focus the findings and help construct a conclusion for the research. The main research question is the following: How do museums benefit from allowing communities to be involved in the process of exhibit development and crafting of their own identities?

The sub-research questions are: How does the process of developing exhibits cooperatively influence the participants? Do the communities participating in the exhibition have a changed perspective on the role of the museum? Did the design process make a significant change in the voice and interpretation of the displayed subject? Did the increased access to the museum increase participation in the museum? Does the process better define the audience of the museum? Does the museum regard the community differently as a result?

Definitions

Some concepts included in this research need defining. These concepts are central to the purpose and goals of the project.

community: not just a geographical neighborhood, but a grouping of people who share a culture, ethnicity, or identity.

community-based: Centered and driven by a community. The particular participatory model resulting in the creation of museum exhibits used by the WLAM is the CBEM.

participatory: Interaction, contributions, and dialogue among different parties. The community-based policy at the WLAM is participatory. It grants organizational access to volunteers and enables them to take part in a functioning museum role.

Delimitations

The case study is limited to the WLAM and their CBEM. However, in order to place the museum and model in context with other museum models that are similar, to fully place the model under investigation to the into context, a background literature review was conducted.

Limitations

Though the study is looking at very broad concepts in the entire museum field, it is a single subject case study. The subject of the case study is a single museum and a single museum policy. The findings cannot be generalized with much value across the discipline because of this. My inherit biases, personal character, and research methodology create an

individual lens which cannot be recreated, or reviewed by others. The research is subjective and the conclusion is based on the judgment of the author.

Benefits of the Study

There is very little research on participatory museum policies of the kind that involves products of the museum, like museum exhibits. There are very few museums like the WLAM that invite volunteers to be a part of the exhibit design process. The scholarship in this area is lacking, and this research is an attempt to make up for that. The research is a benefit to the museum field because it provides insight to the museum's mission and organizational structure, and reveals how it relates to the CBEM's goals and outcomes. These insights are legitimate and detailed examples for use in the museum field.

Research Design

Introduction to Research Design

The relationship between museums and community identity is explored with this project. The WLAM's CBEM is the participatory process selected in order to explore that relationship. My interest is in finding how the process of the CBEM worked from the perspective of the staff and from the perspective of the volunteer participants. By interviewing people on both sides of the community based process, I was able to gather a complete picture of the process. The research was conducted with care to establish a valid and ethical end product.

Research Approach & Strategy of Inquiry

This study is qualitative research and a case study of a museum that uses a policy of community-based exhibit development. Case studies are descriptive and examine a subject in order to gather rich details about it (Carmel, 1999; Verschuren, 2003; Zach, 2006). Another way to define case studies is to call describe them as having depth of description (Neuman, 2006). The more immersed a descriptive investigation is, the more likely that information will become useful to the researcher, the study, and the results of the study.

The "why" of this methodology is to develop a full understanding of a subject of study. This understanding can then be used to place the subject of study into a larger social context. The nature of the research is inductive (Ainsworth, 2000). Patterns are found and then folded into a theory (Ainsworth, 2000; Carmel, 1999; Verschuren, 2003; Zach, 2006). The methodology of case study is widely used in examinations of organizational research, because it is well suited for investigation into complex social structures and settings (Zach, 2006).

Although there is some amount of variation in approaches to the case study methodology, it is certainly easy to define. Maybe the greatest advantage the case study method grants a researcher is the open-ended qualities of the research (Verschuren, 2003), perhaps this is why it is an easy methodology to understand. The final product's quality is a measure of the value and validity of the research (Ainsworth, 2000).

Overview of Research Design

I conducted the research in 2009. I visited the museum twice in February and conducted most of the interviews at the time of those visits. Other interviews were

conducted later over the phone. Previous to conducting the research, I began contacting the

WLAM in late 2008. My review of literature took place in the winter of 2009.

Selection of Participants

The participant subjects were selected based on their past involvement with the

museum policy. The target population for the study are employees of the WLAM,

volunteers of the WLAM, and individuals who were involved in the CBEM and individuals

who were formerly employed, or volunteered. Michelle Kumata was identified as a key staff

person and indicated a willingness to help in the study by participating. She helped to

recruit former members of the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) to participate.

Kumata identified subjects for the research, based on the established criteria of inclusion.

Those individuals were formally recruited by mail, phone, or e-mail, differing with each case.

Data Collection Instruments

To aid the research process and data collection activities, I developed a system for

documenting, filing, and storing the gathered categories of data. This system, or data

collection instruments, used four different formats. Two of the data collection instruments

documented the interviews that conducted, one instrument format for the CBEM members,

or former members, another for the museum staff, or former staff. Another instrument

format was for any documents collected from the museum that were included in the

research. The final instrument format recorded my observations as a participant during visits

to the museum and at the CAC meeting I attended. The four research instrument formats

are included in the appendices. The interview instruments contain questions for the semi-

structured interviews.

The data collected through the use of interviews took the following structure. There were six interviews conducted. The interviews were digitally recorded. Notes were also taken at the time of the interview. Other methods of collection for the non-interview pieces of data were hand-written notes and computer entry. The data collected was coded to aid in the writing of the research.

Recruitment & Consent Forms

All of the participants in the study were formally recruited. Potential participants received a letter from me asking for their voluntary involvement in the research. The letter disclosed the goal of the research and stated the main question under investigation. Those who received the letter were notified about their rights as a research participant and given details on exactly how they would be involved in the case study. The initial correspondences are included in the appendices.

Everyone interviewed for this research was asked for his or her expressed and written consent to participate. With their signature on the consent form they gave me permission to record the interview, identify and quote them, and indicated their right to okay what is attributed to them in the research. They were reminded that their participation was voluntary. The consent form is in cluded in the appendices.

Coding & Analysis Procedures

A technique for coding the data was finding keywords in the notes of my literature review, participatory observations, and transcripts of the several interviews conducted. The keywords were cross-referenced between all the sets of data to find similarities. These groups of similarities were the basis for the subject matter of the research. This cross-

referencing of the data sets was done with implicit and explicit interpretation of meaning in the data and keywords. The groups of keywords and the interpretive meanings found in the data formed themes. These themes provided the form for the research product and findings.

Strategies for Validating Findings

In order to ensure a high degree of validity to the findings of the research, several steps were taken. The research used multiple sources of information. All data collected went through a comparison of meaning by examining the codes derived from the investigation, the commonalities therein, and a triangulation of the sources of data. Member checks confirmed the meaning and perspective presented in the research. The examination of the data did find discrepant data. This was taken into account and the findings reflected any and all disconfirming evidence. The case studies' detailed analysis, rich description, and the steps mentioned establish validity in the research findings.

Chapter Two:

Literature Review

A review of literature was undertaken for the purpose of this research. To examine the Community-Based Exhibits model researching many associated concepts needed to occur. The literature defines and gives meaning to the underlying concepts involved in this research. Certain concepts were selected for review in order to come to an understanding of the how they might inform the research subject and objectives. First is an examination of some of the paradigm changes in the role of museums and overview particular socio-cultural concepts found in museums, then an examination of exhibits and collaborative design. Finally, the literature review will define participatory design and outline the history and process of two museums that practice it.

The Transitioning Museum

An emerging museology has brought out a latent vitality in museums. Many different practitioners and scholars have recognized the development of and advocated for a transitioning of museums toward different purposes (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Kotler & Kotler, 2004; Newman, 2005; Pitman, 1999; Weil, 1999; Witcomb, 1997). The history of the museum describes their beginning function as being in the "salvage and warehouse business (Weil, 1999, p 229)" and housing "cabinets of curiosities" (Pitman, 1999, p 3). The role of museums has since moved beyond these static beginnings. As current literature indicates, museums are now transitioning into expanded areas of concern and purpose. The areas of increasing concern for museums that this research will focus on, can be broadly delineated as access (or inclusively), cultural identities, and community.

Before presenting some of the literature on the concepts listed above, it would be helpful to describe some of the influences on museums that have brought this

transitioning. These influences fall into the categories of funding (Noriega, 1999; Weil, 1999) and in what Ames would describe as the museum's role in social anthropology (2004). The funding structure of museums is at the root of the transitioning role of the public museum in society (Noriega, 1999; Weil, 1999). Largely, museums are non-profit organizations. The special tax status is seen as de-facto civic and government support. Therefore, the business of museums falls in the interests of the commonwealth and public. This notion of the public holding a stake in the museum has created the impetuous for de-leveraging the absolute authority of the museum in order to share it (Noriega, 1999). This has also brought to bear the widening of the audience to include the entire society, not simply portions of it (Weil, 1999). As an institution "dealing with 'art and culture'" (Ames, 2004, p 81), museums are anthropological showcases and central to how society views its own anthropology (Ames, 2004). Museums have come to be seen as representative of power, showcasing particular views, and have been the subject of protest by groups representing claims of injustice (Ames, 2004). Museums are representatives of culture, and constantly subject to the question of which culture do they represent (Ames, 2004; Mesa-Bains; 2004). The public's position of influence on the museum in both their resources for operation and their sources of culture have given cause for the museum to undergo a transition to fulfill Wittlin's second point in her Twelve Point Program for Museum Renewal: "Museums are in the service of men; they are not an ends to themselves" (2004, p 45).

Access & Inclusiveness

As American museums have grown to be seen as an institution of near public ownership (Noriega, 1999; Weil, 1999), there has been an increase in "political demand…

that the members of all social groups should have equal practical as well as theoretical rights of access to museums" (Bennett quoted in Noriega, 1999). However, there are cultural constituencies not being served by the museum, for many different reasons, that have the potential to be (Brown, 1994; Kotler & Kotler, 2004; Mesa-Bains, 2004). To encourage access for these cultural groups, the institution can develop exhibits that reflect on subjects that are of particular interest to civic and service organizations, or social groups and local associations (Brown, 2004).

Beyond developing exhibits to encourage the interest of underserved groups, a museum would need to address the deeper issue of a museum's potential to be more inclusive to cultures of a variety of communities (Mesa-Bains, 2004). Communities outside of the dominant Western heritage are not able "to self-define" (Mesa-Bains, 2004, p 101), when museum curator's practices and interpretation play this role (Mesa-Bains, 2004). Mesa-Bains defines this ability as "power" (2004, p 101). The Western museum is ignorant of cultural resources, multicultural legacy (Mesa-Bains, 2004), and "rasquachismo" (the aesthetics of the downtrodden) (Mesa-Bains, 2004, p 105). Mesa-Bains believes that only the action of power, as she defines it, enacted by multicultural audiences shared with museum institution staff will close the book on the issue of inclusiveness in museums (2004).

Generally speaking, for audiences from any community, the museum is more than an organized space that is open to visitors to experience and learn from but is a location for participation that is not planned by the museum staff and outside of their ability to form (Weil, 2004). The question of how museums can better understand their visitor in order to better connect the outcomes of their programming with them is asked often in the literature

(Belcher, 1991; Weil, 2004). Weil asks if the visitor should be "a collaborator in this effort" (2004, p 79).

Cultural Identity

Culture and identity are intertwined (Crooke, 2007; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). Ethnographical, demographical, geographical, and historical identities share a common culture (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). Cultures can identify with objects they produce and things that are not as tangible, like life-ways (Crooke, 2007; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). It is the identification with specific culture that defines a community (Crooke, 2007).

There are multiple perspectives on how culture is defined (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). Some perspectives are rooted in the products of culture—such as the objects or things produced as a result of cultural processes (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). This is a reflective perspective (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000) and is one that believes culture and art reflects life and reality. Other perspectives, such as the view proposed by Giroux, see culture as a process of learning "signifying practices" (cited in Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p 12) that create meaning for communities, and thus an identity (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000).

As cultural institutions, museums collect and display objects that are products of cultures. Culture is key to the museum's social role; culture is essential to the museum areas of interpretation, pedagogy, and display of visual culture (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). The scholarship of visual culture "insists that vision is socially constructed" (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p 15). Communication, including the type exhibited by museums through their pedagogy, is "an integral part of culture" (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p 139). "Naming, classifying and displaying, the basis on which museums operate" (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p 139), are "tacit or explicit choices made by people to adapt or resist cultural classifications

that affect their lives and identities" (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p 139). Collections of objects and artifacts, like those found in museums, can illustrate a communities identity (Crooke, 2007). Most museums collect for their audience (Crooke, 2007). Usually this is done with an interest to preserve cultural objects that represent a community, a kind of heritage, or items that fit-in (Crooke, 2007).

The museum has been used to signify certain identities (Crooke, 2007; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). It might be a national identity, or any of the identities that relate to Western values (Crooke, 2007; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). This is becoming less and less the case (Crooke, 2007; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). Pluralism, democracy, and multiculturalism are just some of the reasons museums are less likely to be used to communicate monolithic identities (Crooke, 2007; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). Through involvement in activities in cultural institutions, such as museums, individual self-identity can be explored (Crooke, 2007). Participation is the means for communication of shared identity and the exploration of group connections (Crooke, 2007).

Community

Building networks and relationships to the local community is seen as a goal of increasing importance for museums (Brown, 2004; Kotler & Kotler, 2004). Many American museums originated with local history, or regional narratives, as the basis for the organization's founding (Kotler & Kotler, 2004). The region and location that a museum is in will reflect many different communities—ethnic and communities of association (Brown, 2004). Museums can improve their connections to these communities by programming new services that will fulfill their needs (Brown, 2004). Neighborhoods contribute to the sense of self, they are the places where we create lifelong connections (Brown, 2004). To be seen

as an indispensable part of the community, and a part of a life environment, all museums will think of themselves as neighborhood museums (Brown, 2004). Just as a workplace defines an adult identity, so do places where an adult spends less time, such as religious institutions, gyms, barber shops—museums can be such a place to people (Brown, 2004).

The American Association of Museums began a project in 1988 called Museums in the Life of a City (Sperr, 1992; Crooke, 2007). It took place in Philadelphia and involved partnering several museums with several community organizations in the city (Sperr, 1992). The experiment was to create collaborative projects with each partnership in order try to enhance the museum's role in the community with the objective of improving social problems (Sperr, 1992). The project resulted in a report of the same name published in 1992 (Sperr, 1992; Crooke, 2007). In 1998, AAM adopted "The Museums and Community Initiative" (Crooke, 2007). The founding aim of the initiative was to foster more community ties of American museums (Crooke, 2007). It set the tenants for museums to respond to the community, engage the community, and become engrained in local life (Crooke, 2007). The initiative conducted several conversations in six American cities in 2000 and 2001 (Crooke, 2007). The topics of the conversations were explorations in how to conceptualize, strategize, and create a framework for the initiative's objectives (Crooke, 2007). The audience was made up of 65% community leaders and organizations (Crooke, 2007). What resulted was an acknowledgment of a gulf in the community's perception of museums and how the museum staff see their role, but there was an anticipation of potential gain in the sparking of the new connections as a result of the dialogue (Crooke, 2007). The communities "suggested museums should listen to constituencies and demystify the

museum" (Crooke, 2007,p 77). They also wanted relevant museum experiences and a museum pedagogy that reflected the make-up of the community (Crooke, 2007).

Exhibits & Design

Exhibits and museums are almost synonymous. The exhibits are what define the museum for most visitors (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). They form the content of the museum experience. They are a deliberate combination of objects, images, text, and media contained in a physical structure.

Exhibits are the result of the professional work of the museum staff. Depending on the size of the museum, there are typically several people involved with the development of the exhibits in a museum (Belcher, 1991). Curators are usually the staff persons primarily responsible for them. Museums have exhibit professionals dedicated to them. There can be other staff involved with their creation and planning: collections staff, graphic designers, operations staff, programmers, senior staff, and possibly others (Belcher, 1991; Screven, 2004).

Messages & Meaning

A museumgoer learns through a cognitive interaction with their personal, social-cultural, and physical contexts (Dierking & Falk, 2004). The exhibit is a physical context in the space of a museum. An exhibit's design is an important factor on the quality and potential of learning by viewing them (Dierking & Falk, 2004; Screven, 2004). The formulation of exhibit's overall composition can help cue a museumgoer to adjust their museum experience to their better learning style (Screven, 2004). According to Zahava Doering, a Director of the Institutional Studies Office at the Smithsonian Institution, there

are, largely, four types of museum experiences: social, cognitive, object, and introspective experiences (Kotler & Kotler, 2004).

The branching of visitor studies in museums to include more than measuring attendance numbers began to reveal to directors and professional staff the need for ways to improve the museum experience (Kotler & Kotler, 2004; Screven, 2004). To achieve improvements in educational value of exhibits, the involvement of the public in the exhibit creation process became a practical solution to accomplish effective evaluation of the design process (Screven, 2004). The visitor input that evaluates the exhibit development could be done at the front-end—with focus-groups, for example (Noriega, 1999; Screven, 2004). However, these focus-groups and advisory committees can be created by the museum just as a means to satisfy their funding requirements (Noriega, 1999).

Exhibit Development

Exhibit development and exhibit creation is not a process of autonomy for the curator or the museum (Noriega, 1999). The exhibit curator requires the "go-ahead" (Noriega, 1999, p 59) of the staff and board—this results in a pre-determined framework for the exhibit development (Noriega, 1999). There are other considerations and factors that will determine the outcome of exhibit development. Those factors are external to the museum, such as funding sources, the government, and interest groups (Noriega, 1999). There are multiple sources of influence that effect the development of exhibits before the curator's process begins (Noriega, 1999).

M. Belcher, in his book, Exhibitions in Museums, writes about the typical exhibit development process, what follows is his explanation of exhibit development at the time of the publication (1991). A museum may elect to give order to exhibit development in their

organization by implementing an exhibits policy (Belcher, 1991). An exhibit policy is a subdivision of the overall museum communications policy (Belcher, 1991). The following factors influence the exhibit policy: collections, locations and facilities-time and space, museum marketing and visitors, views of the funding body, finance and staff, views of the communicators and interpreters (Belcher, 1991). The exhibition team might include the museum director, the curator, the designer, graphics designer, conservator, security officer, education officer, editor, production staff, maintenance staff, marketing officer, and consultants (Belcher, 1991). The front-end evaluation of the exhibit process would include surveys and interviews of the potential audience (Belcher, 1991). Surprisingly, Belcher doesn't mention evaluation processes that are more participatory, such as focus groups (1991). However, he does cite Griggs as explaining that evaluation "Should be considered not as a means of judgment but as a process of collaboration; a collaboration between the museum professional and the visitor (as cited by Belcher, 1991, p 202)."

Participatory Design

Participatory design is a process that involves the final users in the planning of a product with the intent to fulfill their needs in the outcome ('Participatory design,' 2009). It is commonly found in architecture, urban development, environmental planning, and computer software development ("What is Participatory," May 6, 2005; Sanoff, 1990). Its aim is to change the practice of design to a more egalitarian one and have an effect on the lives of the end-users (Sanoff, 1990). Characteristics of the participatory design process include "open dialogue, communication and trust (Sanoff, 1990, pg 1)." Participants were likely to take from the experiences with a feeling of responsibility about the judgments made on the design and gratification from having shaped the outcome (Sanoff, 1990). The use of

participatory design taps community resources and maximizes the social needs of the community (Sanoff, 1990).

Participatory design is has a lot in common with charrettes—a charrette is "a multiple-day collaborative design and planning workshop held on-site and inclusive of all affected stakeholders" (Lennertz & Lutzenhiser, 2006, p v). Charrettes are primarily used in urban development and community planning (Lennertz & Lutzenhiser, 2006). Some usual characteristics of charrettes that may differentiate them from participatory design are the use of subgroups during the charrette, the short time frame of participation, and their placement on-site (Lennertz & Lutzenhiser, 2006). The advantages of charrettes is in the commingling of the stakeholders and the sponsoring agency working on designs that are created from compromise instantly and have the confidence of both parties (Lennertz & Lutzenhiser, 2006).

Participatory Museums

Leisure studies have found that non-museumgoers do not think that museums give them what they want in leisure, "activities that emphasize active participation … and interacting socially with other people" (Hood, 2004, p 153). Some transitioning museums have developed new innovative polices and conceptualized the museum in original ways reducing the divisions between the cognitive disciplines of museum professionals and increasing the social participation in the museum. Some specific examples of these types of museums include the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum and the Chinatown History Museum.

Community Museums

Community museums are focused on their local culture and are involved with "the well being of the local community" (Gurian, 2006, p 52). They can often do a great deal to preserve non-Western and native traditions (Gurian, 2006). Many times there is a fine line between a community museum and a community center (Gurian, 2006). Eco-museums and native museums have developed particular forms of community museums (Gurian, 2006). The Anacostia Neighborhood Museum is a good example of a community museum in America. It is so for its reputation and the course it took through its history from a strong connection to the community, to a more generalized connection with the community— something that is fairly typical for notoriously under funded and under appreciated community museums (James, 1996; Gurian, 2006).

Anacostia Neighborhood Museum

The Smithsonian created a new museum in 1967 that featured a new conception of museums (Alexander, 1997; James, 1996). The origin of the museum stems from a concept of the secretary of Smithsonian Institution, S. Dillion Ripley, called the "drop-in" or "store front" museum (James, 1996, p 20). The idea for the newly coined museum was to use the extensive collection and artifacts of the Smithsonian somewhere in the inner city (James, 1996). Ripley wanted to place the museum in parts of the city that were not being served well by the main museum (James, 1996).

The community resident's involvement and participation in the new museum was very much a part of the original conception of the museum (Alexander, 1997; Gaither, 2004; James, 1996), even before the Smithsonian selected the neighborhood, according to Ripley

(as cited by James, 1996). A community committee of Anacostia residents was formed to oversee the museum creation and development (James, 1996). John Kinard, the first executive director of the museum, was a minister and community activist before taking the position (Gaither, 2004; James, 1996). Kinard regarded the role of the museum, "as a combination museum, cultural arts center, meeting place for neighborhood groups, and skill training center" (Alexander, 1997, p. 151). The openness of the staff's relationship with the Neighborhood Advisory Committee and the overlap of the volunteer and staff roles resulted in a lot of oversight and responsibility for the neighborhood participants (James, 1996).

The early museum created exhibits featuring contemporary issues in the community, including a popular issue exhibit titled, Rats: Man's Invited Affliction (Alexander, 1997; Gaither, 2004; James, 1996). However, within two years it became a museum that exhibited African-American history and culture, almost exclusively (James, 1996). Even with the origin of the museum being that of a community focus, and existing in a majority African-American community, this was reason for some worry among staff at the Smithsonian (James, 1996). The Smithsonian defined the museum as a neighborhood museum (Alexander, 1997) and in doing so took some objection to the museum's display and research on African-American history and culture outside of the neighborhood (James, 1996). Kinard was always an advocate for the community's role in the museum (Alexander, 1997; Gaither, 2004; James, 1996), but eventually removed "neighborhood" from the title, in order to generalize the subject matter of the museum (James, 1996).

After some time the community participation at the museum dwindled (James, 1996). There were several reasons for this. The new staff professionalism and additions to the number of staff created a more compartmentalized museum structure that diminished

the influence of the Neighborhood Advisory Committee (James, 1996). The growth of the scope of the exhibits, some that used valuable historical artifacts, changed the museum to an increasingly formal one (James, 1996). The decay of the urban neighborhood that the museum was located in caused many residents to avoid the museum (James, 1996). The committee was rolled into a Board of Directors in 1973 and reduced in size (James, 1996). The museum changed locations in 1987 and dropped the "neighborhood" from the title of the museum (James, 1996). The development of the first exhibits in the new building had no community participation involved in the process (James, 1996).

A 1994 exhibit, under the guidance of executive director, Newsome, Black Mosaic: Community, Race, and Ethnicity Among Black Immigrants in Washington, D.C., struck a balance between the competing perspectives of what the museum was designed to be (James, 1996). The objectives of the exhibit were to use the voices of the immigrant community as part of the content, take cues for the direction of the exhibit from the participants, and to interpret the diverse cultures that would be found in the exhibit, based on research, by using the Smithsonian's resources (James, 1996). In other words, it would do all of the things, in a single exhibit, that the museum had as objectives for separate exhibits at different times in its past (James, 1996).

What follows is a summary of the exhibit development process of the Black Mosaic exhibit. After determining the objectives of the exhibit, the process of bringing in the participants was the next step (James, 1996). The black immigrant populations in the area that were the most visible were targeted for approach (James, 1996). The individuals with the most connections, were networked in the communities, or had leadership roles, were tapped for their participation and resources (James, 1996). An advisory committee was

created from scholars and community people (James, 1996). Community meetings were held to discuss the subject matter of the exhibit (James, 1996). Go-to people were given responsibility to gather resources, oral histories, and artifacts from their communities (James, 1996). Cultural celebrations and ceremonies were documented and the museum programmed cultural educational events aimed in subjected matter for the participating communities (James, 1996). The community scholars reconstructed family lives by using interviews, photographs, video, and their artifacts (James, 1996). The museum's curators provided the historical context, with archival photos and documents, and the community scholars and participant families provided intimate documentation of community lives and personal history artifacts, in the final exhibit (James, 1996).

The Chinatown History Museum

A Dialogue-Driven museum policy

How is it defined? A dialogue-driven museum is a museum concept that invites the community within a shared museum space in order to collect memories and shape the scholarship of the subject the museum presents. The museum remains a resource for knowledge, but it is so by collaborative learning between the museum and the public. The organization has the task of taking that reconstructed history and use it to improve itself. Essentially, it is community-based work within a museum environment. Community-based work requires a strong policy in order to maintain the process of sustained participation. (Tchen, 1992)

What are some of the advantages of this policy? There are a number of reasons why a museum may want to undertake this type of structure. Museums that are dedicated to a particular history, heritage, or community are better able to reclaim its lost history and

recognize the individuals who were a part of it. The past and the collective research of it becomes a "touchstone" to better understand the present. By participating in a process of giving meaning to a community it provides context for respecting other identities. Also, the shape of self-identity influences the collective identity. These are the means of the museum's mission. (Tchen, 1992)

There are some pitfalls to the dialogue-driven museum. There is a tendency to over define the subjects of the policy. This happens by drilling down into the complexity of the subject and localizing it to the point that it is no longer related to the broader scope of relationships outside of itself. It also may ignore the differences within the community or subject of a dialogue by building its definition to such a great extent. If the subject of the museum mission and the dialogue-driven policy is an ethnic heritage, it is a false assumption to describe the whole ethnic group to be singular, or not subject to the influence of local cultures. One way to avoid some of these pitfalls is to strike a balance between the intensely private and local history of the participants with the macro influences that formed the community. (Tchen, 1992)

How does it function? The policy involves the subject community as a whole. They are the subject and resource. By providing the museum space to the community, a nexus of interaction, participation, and dialogue is opened for museum staff to cultivate for the improvement of the museum and its resources. To better illustrate how the dialogue-driven museum could function, it would be helpful to describe the museum that developed the dialogue-driven museums as a case study of their systematic approach to the policy. The policy described is the approach undertaken at the beginnings of implementing the policy. (Tchen, 1992)

The Chinatown History Museum's Dialogue-Driven museum policy

The CHM developed their policy to convey what the staff and founders of the policy discovered to be a lost history. They claim the uniqueness and risk associated with their approach was out of necessity. The marginalization of the minority community's past did not result in a wealth of artifacts, collections, or information. To develop the scholarship of the local heritage, using alternative means of data collection was unavoidable. Experience and memories were the plentiful connection to the rare past. Somehow, the museum found, or figured, that by combining programming with scholarship they could stand to gain from those experiences and memories in an organized way. When visitors are exposed to the media and events produced by the museum they will often open avenues for the museum to further their scholarship by relating memories of their experiences, giving the museum leads to more information, and perhaps volunteering time or objects for the museum. By opening the museum space and its programming to dialogue it fosters goodwill and leads the public to examine their own lives. (Tchen, 1992)

The dialogue-driven museum, as undertaken by the Chinatown History Museum, involves finding a shared meaning of Chinatown, New York's past along with their residents and stakeholders. There are many different segments of voices that are brought into the process of crafting history at the Chinatown History Museum. To generalize those segments, they can be broken into four different groups of dialogues. First, is planning and discussion by scholars and museum professionals—what can be called the CHM planning group. Another group of dialogue is the collaboration with target segments of the Chinese American community. These exchanges move beyond empirical information and go to

deeper meaning making. Third, the non-Chinese local community is involved. This advances the dialogue to a multi- and mono-cultural identity formation.

Fourth, other interested museum stakeholders become a key resource for historical work of the dialogue-driven kind. The museum involves as volunteers those who have a special interest, or stake, in the museum. They are given some training in historical evidencing and become a volunteer crew that extends the professional staff. (Tchen, 1992)

The evaluation of the process guided by the CHM dialogue driven policy is two-tiered. One tier deals with the planning of the product, such as an exhibition. It involves the audience and the CHM planning team. Under examination is the content of the product. The second tier is the evaluation of the resulting humanities dialogue. The entire process of making meaning from memories is under scrutiny. The policies of the CHM are very complex and are different from the demands of an ordinary history museum. Their exhibits ask many questions about the process of creating meaning from history about Chinatown. (Tchen, 1992)

Chapter Three:

Research Findings

The Wing Luke Asian Museum

The WLAM is in Seattle, Washington and located in the Chinatown/International District. It is the only museum in the nation that exclusively features Pan-Asian Pacific American heritage. Its mission is the following:

> The Wing Luke Asian Museum engages the Asian Pacific American communities and the public in exploring issues related to the culture, art and history of Asian Pacific Americans. (Wing Luke Asian Museum, 2008)

The museum was founded in 1967, just a few years after the tragic death of the museum namesake, Wing Luke, the first Asian American elected official in the Pacific Northwest (Wing Luke Asian Museum, 2008). It was originally the Wing Luke Memorial Museum (Echtle, 2004). The Wing Luke was the first museum in the Pacific Northwest to be invited to the Smithsonian's Affiliate Program (Seattle Channel, 9/12/2008).

The origin of the museum is credited as being the dream and vision of Wing Luke (Guppy, 5/29/2008; Wing Luke Asian Museum, 2008; Seattle Channel, 9/12/2008). He was a Seattle councilperson who was very interested in historic preservation, the arts, and social justice (Seattle Channel, 10/4/2007; Wing Luke Asian Museum, 2008). It was the closing of many of the Chinatown district's mercantile shops that concerned Wing Luke and resulted in the idea (Guppy, 5/29/2008). After his death, it was the friends and family of Wing Luke who founded the museum (Seattle Channel, 9/12/2008). It exhibited primarily Chinese folk art and heritage at its establishment (Seattle Channel, 9/12/2008).

In the early 1990s the museum's board made a change in the direction of the museum (Seattle Channel, 9/12/2008). A primary source of information about this change was the interview that I conducted with former Executive Director, Ron Chew, on February

12, 2009. He was hired as Executive Director in 1991. He became the first Asian American

executive director of the museum (Chinn, 2006). There was only one other part-time staff

person in collections at the museum when he was hired.   His previous professional

experience was not in museums, but as a journalist. He worked as a community journalist

and activist for 13 years prior to coming to the position at the museum. At the time, the

museum was a relatively small operation and was experiencing some financial problems.

Chew made two significant changes sometime after taking the executive director position

that lead to his seventeen-year supervision of the museum. A part of the mission of the

museum included highlighting Asian folk art. He removed that focus from the museum's

mission, seeing it as competing with another area museum, the Seattle Asian Art Museum.

He also implemented the CBEM, the policy that is the subject of this research. As a result,

the museum became more contemporary and a heritage museum for Asian Pacific Islander

Americans.

　　　The museum has twenty-eight professionals on staff. Three staff positions are

employed to develop the museum's exhibits. There are three educators and an assistant to

the YouthCAN program. Four people on staff are with development, not including an

accounting position, a grants associate, and a finance position. Some other position titles

include, the Community Programs Manager and the Librarian and Community Programs

Coordinator. There are nineteen members on the museum's board.

　　　The WLAM has recently completed a move into a newly renovated historic building.

The move in May of 2008 was to the new museum location of the East Kong Yick Building

on King Street (Guppy, 5/29/2008). The building is a very significant part of the

Chinatown/International District. It was determined by the museum to be a "historic

touchstone," as described by Beth Takekawa (Guppy, 5/29/2008), of the district in a site feasibility study done by the museum over twelve years ago (Guppy, 5/29/2008). The construction of the building in 1910 made it the first on the recently re-graded street and the new center point of the city's relocating Chinatown (Wing Luke Asian Museum, 2008). It originally housed import export retail stores, space for worker contractors, two floors of a hotel rooms for immigrant workers, and spaces for immigrant/family associations (Guppy, 5/29/2008; Wing Luke Asian Museum, 2008). The renovation project kept in place a significant part of the original building. In fact, much of the top floor was not changed much at all and became the setting for the museum's historic period tour. While their capital campaign was underway, the WLAM described their plans for the historic building to be similar to the historic preservation programming at the Ann Frank House and the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York (Wing Luke Asian Museum, 2006). The museum acquired the new facility in the late summer of 2003 (Large, 03/14/04). The building was purchased from the owners, the Kong Yick Investment Company—stockholders who are the descendants of the original 170 Chinese worker investors of the building's initial construction (Large, 03/14/04; Butterworth, 06/29/05). The museum is now finishing its twenty-three million dollar capital campaign that had paid for the renovation of the building and will fund other museum operations. The old home of the museum is a historic building, also: the China Garage, a former auto garage, located on Seventh Avenue (Guppy, 5/29/2008). The museum went from a space of about two thousand square foot exhibit space, to a 59,000 square foot building (Guppy, 5/29/2008).

The new facility has given the museum plenty of space to build several galleries for exhibitions. On the first floor there is a 1,000 square foot Special Exhibition Gallery

(Guppy, 5/29/2008). This gallery is for large annual exhibits of different Asian Pacific American topics from any Asian Pacific community. There is also a small space on the main floor for the museum's New Dialogues Initiative, a space that displays current events and contemporary issues. The galleries on the second floor are five Community Portrait Galleries, the Honoring Our Journey gallery, and the George Tsutakawa Art Gallery. The five Community Portrait Galleries are dedicated to Filipino, Vietnamese, and Asian Indian communities, as well as, a gallery for the Cambodian Cultural Museum and Killing Fields Memorial (a collection from a small defunct museum), and a rotating community gallery. The second floor has the KidPLACE and Frank Fujii Youth space, too. The top floor of the museum contains the Governor Gary Locke Library and Community Heritage Center and the museum's guided Historic Immersion tour. The museum also features a large community hall, a marketplace, reflective spaces, the Ping and Ruby Chow & Family Gathering Space and Learning Studio, and the Tateuchi Story Theatre.

    The museum's programming includes docent guided tours. The museum has two tours. The Historic Immersion tour takes groups though unchanged parts of historic building that contains the museum. The tour moves through minimal recreations of the old hotel, its later incarnations as family apartments, a family associations gathering space, and a historic businesses on the street level. The careful renovation into a museum left much of the structure as it was, which made possible the immersion experience of the building's history. Rich Sundberg, the architect of the design, sought inspiration from the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, in New York, for the project (Farr, n.d.). The tour includes the Yick Fung Company store—recreated from its location in the neighboring West Kong Yick Building—and the Canton Alley Family Apartment. The second tour offered is a

neighborhood tour, called the Chinatown Discovery Tours. The walking tour includes visits to local businesses. Other museum programming includes events, film screenings, workshops, lectures, performances, family day, a youth group, and free days.

I visited the museum for the first time on February 12, 2009. I received a short tour of the new museum from Michelle Kumata, the Exhibits Manager. She lead me through all of the contemporary galleries and the Historic Immersion on the top floor of the museum. The exhibit on display in the Special Exhibition Gallery was Ho'omau Ka Huaka'i, The Voyage Continues: Native Hawai'ians in the Pacific Northwest. She described some of the planning that occurred while creating the exhibit using the CBEM. It was also explained that the other exhibits and galleries made use of the CBEM.

The Exhibit

The Ho'omau Ka Huaka'i, The Voyage Continues: Native Hawai'ians in the Pacific Northwest exhibit was the Major Exhibition at the time of my visits for this research. It opened on November 20, 2008. The exhibit features Native Hawai'ians history in the Pacific Northwest and contemporary life experiences of that community. The exhibit was created by the museum in collaboration with several local Hawaiian civic groups and community members using the CBEM. Some of the highlights and themes of the exhibit include: information on Hawaiian cultural traditions and life ways; artifacts from the native land; contemporary life; a timeline of the Pacific Northwest Hawaiians; reproductions of important family and cultural spaces; media playing oral history and something in the native language; film clips on a discussion of a woman's role in the culture; stations for visitor interaction; a small interactive children's table; and more.

Upon entering the first gallery room you get an immediate sense of earthy color tones and can see many natural objects. There were stones on the floor that lie along side the walls and cabinets. I was told that the rocks couldn't be placed upon the walls as they might be in Hawaii and placing them on the floor was a compromise. The rocks form little platforms for objects and cut paths on the floor. A hula skirt is on display, along with baskets and nets that have a similar material look and color.

The second gallery room was a more wide-open space. It had an interesting corner with a recreated kitchen beside a recreated backyard patio. The other side of the room had a display recreating the objects used by a canoe-rowing club. There was a small theater setting in the center of the gallery that played a video about the female perspective of the culture.

There were many opportunities for the visitor to interact with the exhibit. There are two points in the exhibit were the visitor can leave a message on a small piece of shaped color paper—one paper resembling a leaf, the other like a stone. Plus, there were three points in the exhibit with video media that the visitor can watch. There were two audible audio tracks playing. One audio track was in native Hawai'ian. The other track was a woman's voice talking about motherhood that echoed into the first room of the gallery. One of the exhibit's timelines focuses on events of significance to local Hawai'ian organizations. A folder is placed at the end of the timeline that calls for ideas for future events.

There were several exhibit posters and banners, the media on which the majority of the exhibit's text were printed on, that were positioned in places that didn't have much to do with the objects or the other items in the exhibit. For example, in the kitchen recreation

there wasn't any text that I saw that explained the role of the kitchen in contemporary Hawaiian life, though the staff person had given me that explanation of the kitchen during my quick tour.

There were video projections high upon two parts of the gallery walls showing the sky's constellations and the Hawaiian astrological names of the constellations. This brought to my mind the similarities between differing cultures that share a night sky. I learned that "aloha" means love, not "hello," as I had thought. I wrote this down at one of the interactive spaces on a leaf shaped paper. I left it to be posted on the wall near the entrance of the exhibit with the other messages written on the shaped green papers.

The exhibit contains a main message of "voyage" being an important and present aspect of the Hawai'ian culture. A modern incarnation of this cultural message of voyage was reflected visually in the second gallery room with the exhibit component recreating the canoe club. There are also references to the Hawai'ian mainland and a feeling communicated that Hawai'ian Americans share some longing for it.

The Community Based Exhibit Model and Community Advisory Committees

WLAM is unique in a few ways. It is the only Pan Asian Pacific American heritage museum in the country. It is committed to sharing the stories of the communities within those heritages. This commitment has resulted in the museum priority of engaging with those communities. The WLAM has been working with different communities through the museum's exhibits and the museum's CBEM. Few museums use an exhibit development model like the one that the WLAM has been using for over seventeen years. The WLAM's CBEM is described below. These findings are mostly based a booklet on the subject and on

interviews I had with Michelle Kumata, the Exhibition Manager, Christina Seong, Exhibits

Assistant, and the former Executive Director, Ron Chew.

Community-Based Exhibition Model Beginnings

The CBEM began after Ron Chew became the Executive Director of the museum.

It is to Chew's credit that the model began and continued to be used at the museum. I

interviewed Ron Chew on February 12, 2009 to learn more about his role in the CBEM's

creation. He took the executive director position in 1991 with a background in journalism.

He hadn't worked in the museum field before and it was natural to him to use the

professional instincts he learned in his earlier profession and use them in his new career.

Journalists have a much shorter time frame for research than museums usually give

themselves. Journalists use people's stories and oral accounts as references and to gain

information on subjects. Using a more journalistic technique in the museum field seemed

like a way for the museum to connect their research to the current community, rather than

go through a process of an academic learning of the past community. This was seen by

Chew as a more dynamic process and one that would improve the "lethargic" museum field.

When Chew began working at the museum, it was at a time when the museum was

undergoing financial difficulties. Chew believes it was because of this situation room was

allowed for him to experiment with a different museum model.

The first exhibit to be developed under the new leadership in the museum was an

exhibit that dealt with the Japanese American internment experience during World War

Two. It was titled, Executive Order 9066: Fifty Years Before and Fifty Years After. It was

installed in 1992. The museum has developed many exhibits using the model in the years

since. In 2006 the museum published a booklet titled CBEM which described the model

and used the newest exhibit created with the model, Sihk Community: Over 100 Years in the Pacific Northwest, to provide an example of the model's process. It was published after the museum held workshops lasting for two and a half days offered to museum and cultural professionals. The workshops, booklet, and museum documentation of the model were funded by grants from the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the Nathan Cummings Foundation. The publication lists forty-three exhibits created with the model. The booklet was written by Cassie Chinn, the current Deputy Executive Director, she was Program Director at the time of the publication.

Exhibit Planning

The museum asks for exhibit proposals. It is an open call and ends in December. At the start of the year, in January or February, the museum creates a plan for the exhibit schedule for the next two to three years (Kumata, personal communication, February 12, 2009). At the annual meeting the staff brainstorms additional exhibit ideas that could be included in the schedule (Kumata, personal communication, February 12, 2009). The museum strives for balance in the exhibit schedule—meaning: they try to give opportunity for each Asian Pacific American community to have the chance to work on an exhibit with the museum as regularly as is possible and not rely too heavily on a particular heritage or ethnicity (Chew, personal communication, February 12, 2009).

Outreach

Once a community is selected for an exhibit project, the museum staff begins by doing research about it (Chinn, 2006). The initial community discovery uncovers "its dynamics, including existing leaders and organizations and their interrelationships,

geographic concentrations, current issues and concerns, existing projects and initiatives, and marginalized groups with the community (Chinn, 2006, p 15)." This is done in order to find the appropriate individuals connected to the community to participate in the exhibit project (Chinn, 2006). The museum staff develops a list of people to contact from the community of whom they could involve in the project (Kumata, personal communication, February 12, 2009). The list is put together from the relationships and networks of the staff and board, if any exist with that particular community, or cold calls if they don't (Chinn, 2006). Sometimes the museum will send recruiting letters or emails "to whoever you think might be a good fit for it" (Seong, personal communication, February 12, 2009). The inquiries made of individuals in the community can result in recommendations of additional people to add to the contact list (Chinn, 2006). Everyone on the list is contacted to see if they have an interest in participating on the exhibit project (Chinn, 2006). The museum's goal is to find enough participants to establish a committee. The museum is also looking to for a committee that contains enough diversity (Kumata, personal communication, February 12, 2009).

Community Advisory Committee

A Community Advisory Committee (CAC) is created for every exhibit developed using the CBEM. The individuals on a CAC are representatives of community that is the subject of the exhibit or have some "connection to the topic of the exhibit" (Kumata, personal communication, February 12, 2009). The CAC is the body responsible for the exhibit development and exhibit content. The CAC usually consists of around ten to fifteen people. Some museum staff are CAC members. There is one WLAM staff person, typically an exhibits staff person, who oversees and is charged with the CAC's progress through an

exhibit project. Many times there are other museum staff on a CAC besides the principal

staff person. There are people from within the community who have particular abilities or

who are adept at certain practices that can help the exhibit project, they are included in the

CAC if it is thought necessary (Chew, personal communication, February 12, 2009). A mix

of elders and students is sought, also (Chew, personal communication, February 12, 2009).

At times, a Committee Chair, or a Project Advisor, is appointed within the CAC (Chinn,

2006). This person is meant to complement the exhibits staff person in facilitating the CAC

and is selected "because of his or her role within the community" (Chinn, 2006, p 15).

Exhibit Development Process

The Community Advisory Committee is the exhibit developer. At the meetings of

the CAC, the museum staff act as guides for the participants on the committee and can have

different levels of involvement. The museum exhibit staff person on the CAC usually

functions as a facilitator during CAC meetings (Chinn, 2006; Kumata, personal

communication, February 12, 2009). If a Committee Chair, or a Project Advisor was

designated from the CAC, that person will take on a role of facilitation in place of the staff

person, or in addition to (Chinn, 2006). Chew described the WLAM's process of exhibit

development as a dynamic and fluid one (Chew, personal communication, February 12,

2009). Other people can be included in the CAC throughout the exhibit development

process (Chew, personal communication, February 12, 2009).

The objectives of the CBEM's exhibit development process is to:

…have all the materials we need to move forward with Exhibit Design,

assured that we have identified the vision, including the main messages,

themes, content and form of the exhibition and its related components,

desired by the CAC. (Chinn, 2006, p 16)

It is the members of the community that "drive the exhibit" (Seong, personal

communication, February 12, 2009).

The CBEM follows a very structured timeline of CAC meetings with goals for each

meeting (Chinn, 2006; Seong, personal communication, February 12, 2009). Usually, the

CAC meets once a month (Seong, personal communication, February 12, 2009). There are

six to eight meetings, depending on the size of the project (Chinn, 2006; Seong, personal

communication, February 12, 2009). At each meeting food is provided and a relaxed social

atmosphere is created for the participants (Kumata, personal communication, February 12,

2009).

The Community-Based Exhibit Model booklet outlines the goals of every meeting,

from the first meeting to the sixth meeting (Chinn, 2006). The first meeting includes

introductions, an overview of the project, a draft of the timeline, explanation of the CAC's

role, identification of the audience, and a brainstorm of the exhibits messages and themes

(Chinn, 2006). The second meeting concentrates on the main messages and themes to

clarify them and they are prioritized (Chinn, 2006). At the third CAC meeting the priorities

placed on the themes and messages are finalized and a storyline is started (Chinn, 2006).

During the forth meeting small groups diagram the flow of the exhibit experience and more

brainstorming occurs (Chinn, 2006). When the CAC meets for the fifth time they review

the storyline developed in the diagrams from the previous meeting and they discuss the

visuals in the exhibit and atmosphere of the displays (Chinn, 2006). At the sixth meeting the

CAC will try to "refine (the) look, feel, atmosphere of exhibition" (Chinn, 200, p 17).

The CAC meetings will also discuss the possibility of conducting oral histories on the exhibit topic and themes and who in the community would be a good person to interview (Chew, personal communication, February 12, 2009). It is also through the exhibit development process and during the CAC meetings that possible objects for inclusion in the exhibit are discussed (Chew, personal communication, February 12, 2009).

The exhibit staff working on the project serves as "project coordinators" (Chinn, 2006, p 15) outside of the meeting times. Cristina Seong, the Exhibits Assistant, estimated that she devotes about 30% of her work time to CAC responsibilities (Seong, personal communication, February 12, 2009). Some of the exhibits staff primary responsibilities between meetings are to develop the agendas for the meetings, prepare written notes of the meeting's proceedings and brainstorms, "refining and grouping" (Chinn, 2006, p 17) the information from CAC meetings, and staying in contact with the CAC participants whenever it is necessary (Chinn, 2006; Kumata, personal communication, February 12, 2009; Seong, personal communication, February 12, 2009). During the meetings the exhibit staff will collect the information from the brainstorming and discussions, review the exhibit's development with the group, and clarify the decisions made by the CAC (Chinn, 2006; Kumata, personal communication, February 12, 2009; Seong, personal communication, February 12, 2009).

The aims and goals of the CBEM are carried out primarily during the exhibit development process. It is during the CAC meetings when the participating community is engaged with the museum (Seong, personal communication, February 12, 2009). Kumata summarized the process of the model as communication (Kumata, personal communication, February 12, 2009).

Implementation

After all the CAC meetings have occurred the exhibit project begins to be designed and fabricated. The museum employs a graphic designer to create the text panels and other design elements for the exhibit (Seong, personal communication, February 12, 2009). The CAC usually will meet the designer, but the museum exhibit staff is responsible for maintaining contact with the designer during the creation process and giving the go-ahead on the final work (Seong, personal communication, February 12, 2009). If there is room on the schedule, the CAC might be given the opportunity to give more direction to the design. The exhibit is designed using the guidelines and recommendations of the CAC (Chinn, 2006). By participating on the CAC, community has developed for the exhibit the mood, colors (Kumata, personal communication, February 12, 2009), how it feels, looks, and smells (Chew, personal communication, February 12, 2009).

Any collected oral histories are reviewed by the museum staff and possibly select CAC members (Chinn, 2006). The transcripts can be used for exhibit text or used as exhibit media (Chinn, 2006). Objects are usually selected by the CAC during the exhibit development (Chinn, 2006). Exhibit objects have been selected on a special all day Selection Day, in which the CAC members can stop into the museum and go through the collected artifacts with the museum staff, as well as bring in objects to be selected (Chinn, 2006).

The CAC Process

The Community Advisory Committee meeting that I attended was held on the 27th of February in 2009. The meeting was for the continued planning of the upcoming Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer Experience in the Asian Pacific Islander American

Community. The exhibit is to be placed in one of the museum's Community Portrait Galleries. It is scheduled to open in July of 2009. This CAC meeting was the third for the group. Present were individuals from the LGBTQ Asian Pacific American community. A WLAM Exhibit Developer facilitated the CAC. At least one of the participants had been involved with a CAC before. One other participant was an intern at the museum. There were nine people at the meeting. It lasted for approximately two and half hours.

The meeting took place in the museum's Community Hall. People signed-in as they arrived to the meeting. The sign-in table had meeting materials on it for them to pick up. Some of the materials were from previous meetings and there was a folder with new documents inside to be used with the evening's meeting. There was also food available for everyone. After some brief introductions, the CAC meeting for the development of the group's community exhibit got started.

There was an agenda provided for the meeting. The agenda document lists the goals of the meeting. The goals were: Confirm Scope – Goals, Develop Main Messages, Confirm Storyline, Confirm Oral History Program – Participants and Questions (museum documents). There was also a walkthrough of the exhibit space on the agenda. There was a document that listed the Target Audience, the Goals and Sub-Goals, and Emerging Main Messages of the exhibit. The Target Audiences listed on the document are: Queer APIAs (Asian Pacific Islander Americans); Broader APIA Community & Broader Queer Community; and Allies, Friends, and Families—both blood and chosen. The Goals of the exhibit are listed as: Empower Queer Asian Pacific Americans; Educate & Challenge Stereotypes about Queer Asian Pacific Americans; and Build the Queer Asian Pacific American Community. Another document lists the themes of the exhibit. They are:

History; Sex(uality): Identities, Representations & Identities; Coming-out and Conflicts; In and out of the family: Living day-to-day; Support: Creating and Connecting Families/Communities; and The Politics of Acceptance. Visitor Questions were listed on a document. Potential Oral History Participants was the heading of a document that contained a list of names. Other documents were provided, including the agendas from the previous meetings, object loan forms, an announcement of an oral history workshop, an explanation of the project, a graph with showing quadrants dividing Politics-Art-History-Culture and another graph with the same quadrants filled in with the themes of the LGBTQ exhibit, and an explanation of the CBEM.

There was a discussion of the Goals document. The facilitator had asked if the Goals and Sub-Goals that were listed on the document accurately reflected the discussion of the group from the previous meetings. The Goals and Sub-Goals were based on exercises that the group had done at previous meeting. One such exercise was the "Community Portrait." The CAC wrote letters that were titled Community Portraits. These used these letters to help create the goals, sub-goals and main messages.

The group began discussion of the Goals. There was a discussion of stereotypes in the LGBTQ community. It was suggested that the point of the exhibit was to celebrate the diversity, and to not comment on the stereotypes but reflect them as a way of introducing the diversity of the community. There was some question of the goal of building community. The facilitator suggested that there might be programming that could reflect that goal of the CAC group. He brought up the other CACs as examples that had done this.

They discussed the Main Messages culled by the facilitator from the meetings and the group activities. The Main Messages that were outlined and given to the group in the

document were said to be samples of language that could be used in the text of the exhibit, or the "building blocks" on which to wordsmith the language to be used in the exhibit. They were to form the concepts of the "walk aways" of the exhibit. There were discussions of about half the items on the list. For example, the first and last items tied together. There were comments on the item describing love, family, the message of acceptance-and-struggle, the oneness of the community and the distinctions within the community (or the diversity).

The facilitator talked about how the "content drives the design." He said the Goals were usually done earlier, but that the exhibit development timeline was tried differently this time. During the process the content could be added, or changed. He mentioned the design work can sometimes cause a loss of sight of the Goals.

There was an interesting practice activity that was done at an earlier session that the group referred to. A grid was used to visualize the Themes of the exhibit on a continuum/quadrant diagram. The quadrants represented Art, Culture, Politics and History. The participants worked in pairs and placed the Themes and Sub-Themes on the grid pattern and where they felt they could be placed in the representative continuum. The participants worked in pairs. The topics did form some patterns but it was mostly random.

The group went upstairs to the gallery where the exhibit was to be installed. They walked through the surrounding exhibit spaces. They had diagrams of the layout of the room. The facilitator described some of the different types exhibits in terms of the variety of focuses of content that they can have. He asked the CAC to think about how they might develop their own exhibit and lead then through the other Community Portrait Galleries to give them examples of exhibit types: for example one was art based exhibit, one was an immersion exhibit, one was a history exhibit.

Standing in the gallery where the exhibit was to be placed, there was more discussion about what could be the goal and theme of the exhibit. Based on the discussion the content still seemed to be unclear. It seemed as if part of the struggle people had was trying to relate the place of the exhibit with the Goals of the exhibit. There was more discussion of the theme and some specific design content. The first idea was a lifetime cycle of some representative people of the community and the life experiences that they had through the course of their life; from cradle to grave. There was one person joking about making it pink with boas. There was the suggestion that the floor could be used as a fifth wall and the visitors could walk on content. Another suggestion was using a large graphic of a heart and placing within it several relevant stories (the heart would be graphically constructed by the placement of the text). One participant said they were siding more on deciding that the type of exhibit would be an artistic type of exhibit and that they would like to see something "about me as I walk in," something that is comforting and reflects the community.

At the end of the meeting the facilitator asked everyone what they thought the exhibit was a story of and asked for one word to complete the sentence of what the story was. Some of the words used were, love, identity, community. I was asked to contribute and I reused the word love—having been motivated by imagining the graphic heart that was described earlier. The CAC members went over the Oral Histories list. They added people to the list and subtracted names. CAC members were asked if there was anyone on the list that they would be willing to gather an oral history from.

I found the facilitator to have a few significant tasks at the meeting. The facilitator asked questions of the group, but often did so in connection with the documents that the facilitator drafted. The CAC were essentially verifying the facilitator's draft of the exhibit

development documents. Any questions that were asked of the CAC that did not regard the language or lists on the provided documents were done so as a part of a brainstorming session. The facilitator was also there to answer questions from the CAC. The facilitator often answered them by providing examples of what the museum has done in the past, or by telling the CAC members what the museum typically practices with regard to the question.

The CAC participants were very respectful of the other members. They almost never debated each other during the meeting. Any comment that was followed by a comment in response was rare. Everyone had a chance to participate. Some members contributed more than others. Some seemed to have a grasp of the developing exhibit, some were struggling when presenting ideas, and others seemed to just give their two-cents on occasion.

Research Data Summary

The WLAM is a unique and renown museum. The museum is the only one to feature Asian Pacific American heritage. A long running program at the museum is a very complex participatory exhibit development process. The CBEM results in exhibits that are owned by the participating community. The museum acts as a partner to the participating community throughout the process of exhibit development.

Chapter Four:

Findings

Research Questions

The goal of this research project was to investigate self-representation in museums through the means of community participation in interpretive exhibit development. The previous chapter detailed the findings of my case study of the WLAM's CBEM. The CBEM is a long running example of community participation in interpretive exhibit development. I conducted the research for this case study by site visits to the museum, participation in the process of the model, and from my dialogue with former and current museum staff and community participants. Research questions were written prior to conducting the research. These questions were used to give the case study direction and expressed the research goal as different frames of reference for inquiry. Again, the research questions were stated as the following:

- How does the process of developing exhibits cooperatively influence the participants?
- Do the communities participating in the exhibition have a changed perspective on the role of the museum?
- Did the design process make a significant change in the voice and interpretation of the displayed subject?
- Did the increased access to the museum increase participation in the museum?
- Does the process better define the audience of the museum?
- Does the museum regard the community differently as a result?

The answers to these research questions provided the information to answer the main research question: How do museums benefit from allowing communities to be involved in the process of exhibit development and crafting of their own identities?

I interviewed people associated with the museum and the exhibit model, three community participants of the museum's model, two people currently on the museum exhibit's staff, the founder of the model. I used the findings from those interviews as the primary data to answer the research questions of this project outlined in Chapter One. Other sources of data were also used for comparison and for additional context to answer the research questions. The volunteer CBEM participants that I interviewed were the following people: Karen Meada Allman, who was a part of the mixed race exhibit called, Your Place Or Mine; Jeff Sakuma, a member of the CAC for the LGBTQ and the Asian Pacific American community exhibit project—the CAC that I participated in; and Tom Im, who is employed as a neighborhood planner at the Inter*Im Community Development Association, the organization has partnered with the museum and he had participated in a museum programming CAC before the opening of the new museum.

The answers to the questions are specific to the subject of the case study, the WLAM's CBEM and cannot be generalized to other community based museum models with much correlation. However, they do provide valuable insight into the outcomes of a community based exhibit model that can be applied to many different museum settings. The answers to the research questions follow.

How does the process of developing exhibits cooperatively influence the participants?

There are different spheres of influence experienced by the participants. The exhibit projects and real-time process of exhibit development on the Community Advisory Committees are of a particular impression on the museum volunteers. There are also residual influences that are carried out after the cooperative experience. The action of involvement in the CBEM can be an empowering situation.

All of the voices on the CAC are shared and the committee members add individual contributions of the exhibit development process. Everyone gives his or her opinion, expertise, feelings, knowledge, and resources. At least, this is the goal of the model. The museum's model tries to balance the types of people brought onto the CAC, in terms of expertise, social position, and resources they bring. The facilitator of the CAC has the goal of making sure that everyone is heard during the meetings.

Both Karen Meada Allman and Jeff Sukama expressed being "impressed" by their participation in the museum exhibit model. Meada Allman used the word to refer to the outcome of the exhibit development meetings. Sukama was "wholly impressed" by the process itself (the product of the process was still forthcoming at the time of our interview).

Meada Allman also pointed out several times that the museum work that took place for the exhibit felt as though it was progress and positive. She cited the inclusion in the CAC of a member who has a transgendered sibling. That their work included underrepresented histories was also significant to her. The history of Native Americans and Filipino marriages and Indipino children is a history she mentioned as being "left out a lot" (Meada Allman, personal communication, February 25, 2009). Their story was in the final exhibit product.

The research was not conclusive about if the community members engaged in the open conversation of the subject of the exhibit project were undertaking a form of learning and discovery about the subject. I asked Karen Meada Allman if the dialogue during the exhibit development meetings result in anything new or reflective for her regarding the subject. She could not answer the question directly—describing it as a question she would have to think more about. She had studied the subject in the past while working on a doctorate. Her involvement and learning about the subject had been happening for a long time before working with the museum, though she was not actively studying mixed race identity. Meada Allman had a lot of materials and documents about multi-ethnicity that are now in use for the exhibit and donated to the museum. She told me that she was eager for the opportunity to work on the exhibit and said the work "reignited me, it brought me back to looking at where we are at this point." I asked Jeff Sakuma if his outlook of the subject of the exhibit and the community he worked to represent changed because of the committee's work on the exhibit. He, like Meada Allman, was very familiar with the issues associated with the subject. Though, it was his opinion that "any time you engage in anything, you're going to have some learning." He told me that learning about the representative community was not the significant part of his learning, suggesting that what he learned about the exhibit development process at the museum was of a greater value to him.

Do the communities participating in the exhibition have a changed perspective on the role of the museum?

Implicit in this question is the assumption of unity among a community and the perspective it might have. What I learned from the research is that although representatives

of the subject community develop the exhibits, it is very difficult to generalize a perspective for the entirety of a community.

Although it is difficult to know to what degree non-participating members of a community are able to discover about the museum by visiting an exhibit about their community, it is likely that they will share many of the same depicted aspects of culture, history, concerns, issues, outlooks, and interpretation found in the exhibit. The chance of the exhibit being meaningful to the subject community audience is good. The museum used a consultant to administer a visitor survey for the old museum space. The results found that visitors spent something close to two hours in the museum's gallery space, which was only a 1,000 square foot space (Chew, personal communication, February 12, 2009). "The consultant couldn't understand how can you spend so much time in this small gallery, standing in essentially the same place" (Chew, personal communication, February 12, 2009).

Evidence from the interviews indicates that the perceived role of the Wing Luke has been altered for the participants in the CBEM. Sakuma felt the process of the exhibition development to be a learning experience about the museum itself. He is gaining a sense of the museum's mission and "what their intent is and what they want to represent for the community (Sakuma, personal communication, April 21, 2009)." His perspective on the role of the museum is different now that he had been a participant in the community-based exhibit process—seeing the museum's engagement of the community as participation in the community's "actual existence, to its ongoing existence" (Sakuma, personal communication, April 21, 2009). He described the museum as "an activist museum" (Sakuma, personal communication, April 21, 2009), something that is "a whole element other museums don't really have" (Sakuma, personal communication, April 21, 2009).

<u>Did the design process make a significant change in the voice and interpretation of the</u>
<u>displayed subject?</u>

The CAC member interviewees believed that there was an obvious difference in the interpretation of the exhibit subject. The usual museum process for exhibit development would center on the work of the curator. The curator would not necessarily be a part of the community to be interpreted. The CBEM replaces the work of the curator with the work of the community. That work is self-representation. Cristina Seong, of the exhibits staff, said that she would sometimes go into facilitation of a CAC and have a certain idea about different elements of the exhibit, whether it be aesthetic, or what it might "be like" (Seong, personal communication, February 12, 2009). However, after going through the CAC process, the group the ideas she initially had about what the exhibit might become, and it is sometimes a much better idea. As an example, of how a community interprets themselves, she explained that Hawaiian exhibit uses a spelling for the community that is spelled differently the general public would believe to be the correct spelling (Seong, personal communication, February 12, 2009).

The CAC participants I spoke with were very aware of the different interpretations that they could have chosen for the exhibit. One of the main outcomes of the CAC process is the defining of goals and themes of the exhibit project. These goals and themes are arrived at cooperatively among the participants of the CAC. It is through the facilitated discussions that the members of the CAC deliberate on the messages of the exhibit interpretation.

There was some suggestion that the community advisory members were not entirely pleased with the end product at times. Though Meada Allman said she was happy with the outcome of the exhibit she was a part of, she suspected that not everyone who participated

in the CAC thought that the exhibit reflected what those members wanted (Meada Allman, personal communication, February 22, 2009). She based this assumption on some of the comments that were made at the exhibit's opening (Meada Allman, personal communication, February 22, 2009). Meada Allman herself would have preferred that the exhibit would have included more interpretation, because there were topics included in the exhibit that the uninitiated would not get the full significance of (Meada Allman, personal communication, February 22, 2009).

Did the increased access to the museum increase participation in the museum?

The museum's community-based model is a participatory process. There are several Community Advisory Committees ongoing throughout the year. The CACs are working on upcoming exhibits, programming, and sometimes other museum operation areas. Without these committees, the active participation of volunteers at the museum would decrease very significantly.

The increased access to the museum the question is referring to is the CBEM. Without curators on the staff of the museum, the community participants fill that role for the museum. The purpose of the increased access is to complete an exhibit project. The goal for the museum for doing this is to bring communities into the museum and create a dynamic relationship between the museum and communities. The participation of volunteers and stakeholders would not be relevant if it ended with the closing of the CAC project. The true measure of the worth and value of the increased access is the continued relationships it established.

By the accounts of the museum staff, an outcome of the CAC member access to the museum is increased participation with the museum. Chew related his experience with the

first exhibit the museum build using this process. The exhibit was Executive Order: 1099, Fifty Years Before & Fifty Years After, in 1992. He said there were a number of second generation Japanese American Nikkei who were interned who began volunteering, joined the museum's fundraising mailing parties, became docents, and staffed the front desk as a result of the community-based process in developing the exhibit (Chew, personal communication, February 12, 2009). Their children also began taking on a greater role at the museum. In this example, it is unclear if the volunteers were members of the CAC, or if many of them began volunteering because of the strength of the final exhibit product, though in either case it is an attestation of the museum model that resulted in the increase in participation. Kumata described a traveling Korean American art exhibit that the museum did not curate, but organized CACs to develop museum programming in relation to the exhibit. Much like the Japanese American internment exhibit in 1992, the museum has seen that through the programming CAC for the art exhibit, there are members of that committee who are volunteering at events and wanting to work on oral history projects in the Korean American community. "You see this continuation. Once people have started working with us, we develop these relationships. Its such a great feeling its not like the exhibits over and that's the end of the relationship, it just continues and builds from there" (Kumata, personal communication, February 12, 2009).

The community-based model is a format that increases the museum's networks in the communities that it serves. The growth and strengthening of relationships is an opportunity for museum funding (Kumata, personal communication, February 12, 2009). Chew credits the success of the capital campaign to the community-based model (Chew, personal communication, February 12, 2009).

The members of the CAC have a continued sense of ownership of the museum. After the capital campaign and the transfer of the museum to the newly renovated historical building, the look and feel of the museum has gone from a "grassroots" appearance to a more "sophisticated" space (Seong, personal communication, February 12, 2009). The transition resulted in the need for the museum to change the expectations of the some community partnerships that the museum had gained in some cases (Seong, personal communication, February 12, 2009). The move has put the museum in a position to no longer give some community groups "favors" as they had been freer to do in the other space (Seong, personal communication, February 12, 2009).

<u>Does the process better define the audience of the museum?</u>

There is little evidence as a result of the research that can answer this question. It can be assumed that the audience of the museum is the members of the communities that were the subject of the community-based process. The CBEM results in self-defined communities. The process is community driven and the museum's role in defining their audience as a result is limited.

However, the museum does select the topics of the exhibits. The museum holds an annual planning meeting among the staff. They select the schedule of museum exhibits for the next three to five years (Kumata, personal communication, April 9, 2009). The staff maintains an awareness of the ethnic communities who have a longer history with the museum and the local community, and those ethnic communities that do not. They take these things into account when they are planning the museum's schedule of exhibitions. They try to maintain a balance of all the communities when planning the museum programming—so if a particular community was featured recently, then the museum will opt

to undertake an exhibit project with a different community (Chew, personal communication, February 12, 2009).

I interviewed Tom Im, a neighborhood developer at a community development non-profit located in the Wing Luke's Chinatown / International District. He identified the audience for the museum as a few different demographic sets of people. He believed the Asian Pacific American's who were under 60 years old had a stronger association with the museum than those people who were older (Im, personal communication, April 29, 2009). Another audience come from outside of the geographical community of the Chinatown / International District, and are made up people who have a recognition of the district as being the Asian cultural hub of all the Puget Sound (Im, personal communication, April 29, 2009). He thought that many people saw the museum as a neighborhood and Chinatown / International District icon, and as a result the audience of the museum is informed by that perspective (Im, personal communication, April 29, 2009).

Does the museum regard the community differently as a result?

The community-based model is inclusive to volunteers and museum stakeholders. The model defines community not in terms of audience, but as a partner to the museum. Museums that use a community-based model perceive the community differently than a museum that doesn't program a community-based model. Museums that implement a community-based model are taking a step to incorporating community into the operational structure of the museum. A community that is involved with the operation of the museum is no longer regarded as a demographic target for the museum.

When the implementation of the CBEM it occurred mostly because the new Executive Director, Ron Chew, felt the museum field "was lethargic, a little bit backward

looking, and that really didn't place an emphasis on building external relationships and bringing people into the process" (Chew, personal communication, February 12, 2009). It was because of his opinion on the state of the museum field, and his experience as a community journalist, that the community-based model was used and became defined as it continued to be used (Chew, personal communication, February 12, 2009). The center of the museum's work shifted to storytelling and away from collections (Chew, personal communication, February 12, 2009). The shift to storytelling was done to "look forward" and it "engaged the community in things that were on their minds; here and now (Chew, personal communication, February 12, 2009)."

Christina Seong of the museum exhibits staff told me that she had recently attended a museum field conference. She found that there were very few museums, if any at all, that were operating a community-based exhibit model similar to what the WLAM had. The attendees of the conference were interested in knowing how the museum process worked. Her observation of museums that programmed community dialogue did so after an exhibition was implemented and installed (Seong, personal communication, February 12, 2009). The question for her was how could an exhibit be made without "consulting with a specific community," because, for her, it is "vital to get that point of view, or how are you going to know if it's accurate or not" (Seong, personal communication, February 12, 2009).

The museum's mission serves several communities. There are dozens of Asian Pacific American ethnic communities. The geographic community of the museum, the Chinatown / International District is in an area recognized as a historic and continued Asian American center in the Seattle area (Im, personal communication, April 29, 2009). The museum staff connects to the community by working "through their interpersonal relationships with other

agencies" (Im, personal communication, April 29, 2009). Im has called upon the museum to

represent the community in meetings and on projects in which that perspective was needed.

He has feels that the museum staff has always been very "good players" when it comes to

interacting with the community (Im, personal communication, April 29, 2009). He found

in the connections he has had with the museum that they are always willing to take positions

on neighborhood issues or issues of local controversy that were not necessarily self

interested, but had the interest of the community foremost in their stance on the issue (Im,

personal communication, April 29, 2009).

Chapter Five

Conclusion & Recommendations

The findings in Chapter Three and Chapter Four provide information to answer the main research question. Based on the answer to the main research question, I will draw conclusions and then present my recommendations to the field. The following is the main research question and answer:

Main Research Question

How do museums benefit from allowing communities to be involved in the process of exhibit development and crafting of their own identities?

A museum becomes a center for dialogue when they program for audience input to develop their exhibits. The dialogue has different products, purposes, and outcomes. The most obvious end result is the exhibit itself. Intangible benefits are difficult to evaluate, but can be ascertained from speaking with the staff and participants.

At the WLAM, the museum exhibit staff plays a different role in museums that program for these dialogues than those that do not. They are not curators. The museum exhibit staff fills a support role to the dialogue process. Staff are facilitators to the dialogue and have different skill sets than museum curators (Chew, personal communication, February 12, 2009). This is the most significant change to the museum's organizational structure. The lack of curators, academics and experts on the staff changes the basic orientation of the museum. What results is a museum that is a programmer and service provider, not an origin source of knowledge and original research. The museum employs "community activists" (Chew, personal communication, February 12, 2009). The skill sets they bring with them—including, cultivation of dialogue, communicating a shared sense of

work and participation—changes the organizational culture of the museum. This culture is more outward looking, one that is more tuned-in to the stakeholders of the museum, than a museum that is inward looking and focused on their subject discipline.

Shifting the orientation of a museum to have an outward looking organizational culture has several outcomes. In the case of the WLAM, the orientation shift begins with the community based exhibit development process. The WLAM involves communities in exhibit development (Chew, personal communication, February 12, 2009; Chin, 2006; Kumata, personal communication, February 12, 2009; Seong, personal communication, February 12, 2009). The process of the CBEM involves outreach to, facilitation of, participation of, and partnership with, the community (Chew, personal communication, February 12, 2009; Chin, 2006; Kumata, personal communication, February 12, 2009; Seong, personal communication, February 12, 2009). The community establishes a tangible stake in the museum's operations.

Employing community activists to work in partnership with the community results in other products that benefit the museum. The connection to the participant community continues to provide resources for the museum after the exhibit development is finished. The WLAM has found that the participants of the CBEM process are much more likely to remain with the museum as volunteers (Chew, personal communication, February 12, 2009; Kumata, personal communication, February 12, 2009). The volunteers are also likely to further the museums fundraising, by increasing donor base and by the strength of their support for the community participation (Chew, personal communication, February 12, 2009; Kumata, personal communication, February 12, 2009).

Additional, the community-based exhibits presenting a different interpretation of the subject to the visitors of the museum. The exhibits reflect what the community wants to be interpreted right now, so the messages conveyed through the exhibit are contemporary (Chew, personal communication, February 12, 2009). Contemporary exhibits made by communities have relevance. The exhibits also reflect what the community wants to be interpreted. The themes, messages, and meanings are selected by the participants and are self-representations of the community (Chew, personal communication, February 12, 2009; Chin, 2006; Kumata, personal communication, February 12, 2009; Seong, personal communication, February 12, 2009). By allowing participants to select and determine how aspects of their identity are presented museums are relinquishing one of their primary roles of controlling what messages they transmit and communicate (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). This access to the museum operations is a substantial boon to the museum's social capital with the participating communities. It generates a perception of community ownership of the museum and the community activists at the museum provide a forum through their operations to foster that perception (Chew, personal communication, February 12, 2009).

Further Thoughts

Upon answering the main research question regarding the benefit to the museum in having a participatory process involving exhibit development and community identity, there are several benefits that can be summarized from the answer. The CBEM gives the museum an increased participation, more volunteers, an expanded donor base, and strengthened social capital. The CBEM creates a contemporary museum that is people-based. Additionally, the museum benefits as the community benefit from having a forum, a source to contribute a representative identity, and a feeling of ownership in the museum. However,

it would not be fair to ignore any challenge posed by the CBEM and community-based museum operations and only talk about the benefits of it.

The staff identified some challenges of the community-based process. Kumata described the process of consensus as slow and required great deal of verification with the participants (personal communication, February 12, 2009). Of course, volunteers are not at the museum full time and have work and lives to attend to. Seong described conflicts in people's schedules as a challenge of the CAC process (personal communication, February 12, 2009). She also thought there were consistently certain types of people who were usually able to participate—people who seemed to have free time, like "academics," for example (Seong, personal communication, February 12, 2009).

The challenge for the museum staff and volunteers to scheduling time to participate brings us to an important point. The community becomes only those individuals who participate. Though they maybe representatives of a particular community, they are only a selection of the community. Exhibit development with the CBEM is limited to the viewpoints and opinions on the CAC. If the CAC isn't very large group of people, the exhibit project might be further reduced to the selected themes and messages of a few more vocal people. The practical obstacles of volunteering and free-time produces exhibits that are representative of participants who identify with a community, but may not be for the entire community.

During my interview with Michelle Kumata, she told me that a lot of people there feel that, "the process is more important than the product" (personal communication, February 12, 2009). This summarized the organization's outlook of the process for me. All the planning for the product is a shared experience. It is shared with exhibit development

professionals, novice exhibit development community members, and participants with a variety of skills that may or may not lend themselves to the end product. After the planning is finished, the exhibit staff are responsible for the end product.

Sakuma told me that his biggest fear regarding the process was aesthetic concerns (personal communication, April 21, 2009). He said that he is realizing that planning the museum experience is about tying a message and an aesthetic together, and questioned whether the participants of the CAC process had enough consistency in participation and enough unity to accomplish that (Sakuma, personal communication, April 21, 2009). CAC facilitator and exhibit assistant, Seong, felt that it was her role to focus people on the themes, goals, and messages of the exhibit, rather than the visual design elements of the exhibit (personal communication, February 12, 2009). She believed that the participants readily and naturally discussed those aspects, and at times, at the expense of the basic planning of the figuring out what messages the exhibit will communicate (Seong, personal communication, February 12, 2009). Meada Allman called the work the exhibit staff did with the final exhibit "alchemy," because she still didn't know how they were able to take the discussions they had and translate it into an exhibit (personal communication, February 22, 2009).

The exhibit product of the CBEM is not unlike all museum exhibits. They are physical elements arranged in space that contain visual culture and usually communicate passively. The CBEM is a dynamic process that brings dialogue to a table and shares with the community a space for interpretive cultural work. Many things stem from that. The process does not have a single product at the end, but has several auxiliary products that are of more importance.

Recommendations

A goal of this project was to develop recommendations for the museum field based on the findings of the case study. The CBEM process is well documented. So, rather than make recommendations that generalize the model in order to fit with other institutions in the field, I chose to make recommendations that build upon the CBEM. These recommendations are not necessarily intended for the WLAM staff to implement, but are alterations to the CBEM that could be used in the field along with an alternative version of the CBEM. These recommendations are reflective on the information collected from the CAC participants I interviewed.

Open the CAC to public forums and online forums

CACs are limited to those individuals who are able to attend about six meetings, usually over six months time. The results of the CAC process reflects only those individuals who participate and only those individuals are to be representative of a whole community. The sample size of ten to fifteen people on the CAC is probably too small to be an accurate representation of a whole community. The addition of input from the wider public, such as a few public forum events, or an online forum, to coincide with the CAC process would widen the sample size and hear from a greater diversity of voices from the community. An online forum linked from the website could be in place for the entire time the CAC meets and the comments and suggestions posted online could be brought into the CAC process for discussion.

Involve a CAC in the design process

In my experience there is not much of a distinction in exhibit development between the design aesthetics and the content of an exhibit. The two things overlap and though it is necessary to separate them, it can be difficult to do so. Some of the staff and CAC participants expressed this overlap in exhibit development as a problem, because the goals of the CAC do not continue through with the design and aesthetic development. They do contribute ideas for the look, feel, and experience, but do not see the designs as they develop.

Much like the charrette process described in the literature review, it is possible to provide structure to a participatory design program. Professional designers can be brought in to participate along with the CAC members. The experienced designers can design multiple thumbnails, mock-ups, or prototypes, to show to the CAC. The CAC members can then give their input on which design they prefer and which direction the final design should go.

Start another CAC process for evaluation of the exhibits using different community participants

The members of the CAC do not view the exhibit until the opening. The opening is when the museum staff are able to hear from CAC participants about how they see the results, get their opinions, and ask how they would evaluate it. It is done informally.

The evaluation of the community-based exhibit could be completed in a more formalized way. There will be some sensitivity to evaluation by the members of the CAC who developed the exhibit that is why different participants for an evaluative CAC can provide critical feedback with directly offending the original CAC members.

It is likely that the evaluation of a community-based exhibit may be more beneficial for the museum staff to gain more insight into the community, than it would be in evaluating the CBEM process. Therefore, if the evaluation sessions were recorded, they could be added to the museum's collection of oral histories. They wouldn't be oral histories from-and-of the community in-and-of themselves, but recorded evaluations of the museum's community-based exhibit and the discussions in support, or critical, of the exhibit's design, content, themes, and messages. They would be more like oral histories of the museum and how it relates to the communities it serves.
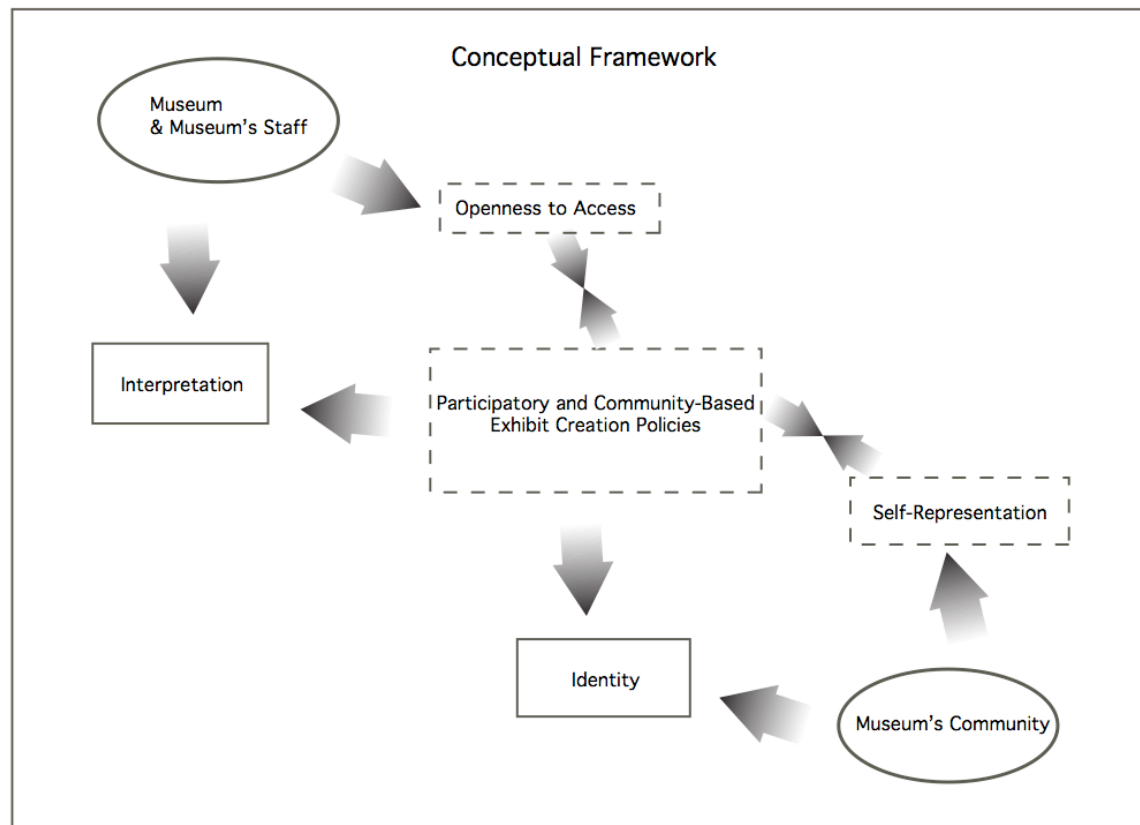
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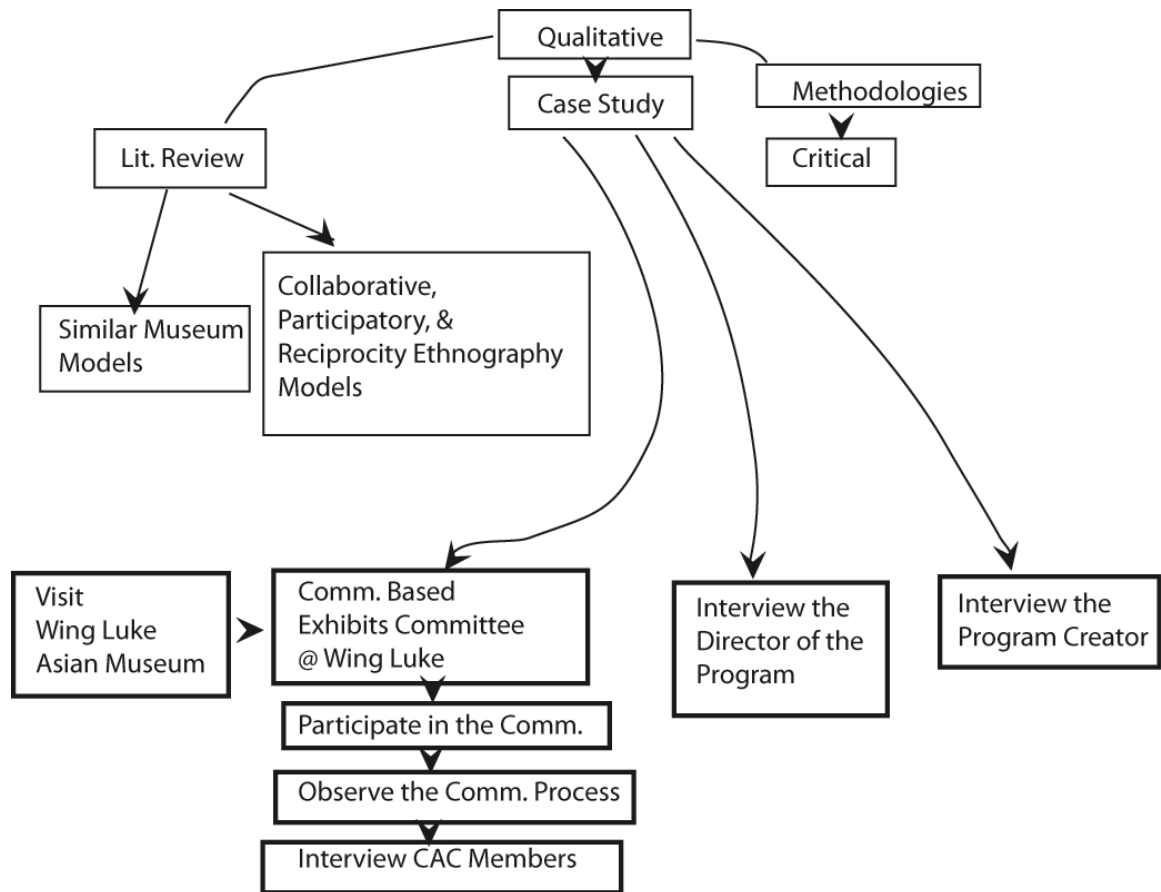
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Appendix A: Conceptual Framework

Conceptual Framework

Museum & Museum's Staff

Openness to Access

Interpretation

Participatory and Community-Based Exhibit Creation Policies

Self-Representation

Identity

Museum's Community

Fall 2008
Completed final research proposal
Completed human subjects compliance application materials
Submitted human subjects application
December: Contacted Wing Luke Asian Museum

Winter 2009
Began literature review
February 12: Interviewed Ron Chew, Cristina Seong and Michelle Kumata
Collected materials for document analysis
February 25: Interviewed Karen Meada Allman & participated in the CBEM CAC
Prepared detailed outline of research document

Spring 2009
Converted proposal into chapter drafts
March: Completed literature review
April: Completed Chapter 3
April 21: Interviewed Jeff Sakuma
April 29: Interviewed Tom Im
May: Completed Chapters 4 and 5
May 12: Completed first full draft of document
May 15: Master's Research Project defense
June: Submitted final document as three bound copies and one PDF file on CD

Appendix D: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Questions for Community Advisory Committee Members and Former Members:

How would you describe the CBE model?

What were the challenges of the process of exhibit creation?

What guidance, structure, advice, or help did the museum staff provide you?

Did the CBE process result in a change in your view of role of the museum or did it result in any personal changes or outlooks?

What did you learn about the museum during your involvement?

How does the museum's CBE policy reflect the reality of the CBE process?

How did the CBE process define the community you represented?

How was interpretation of your community expressed in the exhibit?

Did the CBE process challenge your outlook on the community you represented?

Questions for the Museum Staff and Former Staff:

How would you describe the CBE model?

What was the impetus for the CBE policy?

What were the challenges of the CBE policy at the time of its creation?

How and in what ways did the CBE policy change the museum?

How does the staff of the museum interact with the CBE committee? How is the process structured?

How do you describe the CBE model's process?

How has the CBE policy changed the exhibits in the museum? Has it resulted in different kinds of concepts and content? How do you think they differ?

What has resulted in the museum's relationship with the community after implementing this museum policy?

Appendix E: Interview Recruitment Letter

Name
Address
City/State/Zip

Dear <POTENTIAL INTERVIEWEE>:

You are invited to participate in a research project titled Crafting Identity, Creating Community, and Building Museum Exhibits, conducted by Aaron Seagraves from the University of Oregon's Arts and Administration Program.

The purpose of this case study will be to investigate how museums use participatory policies in exhibit creation. The Wing Luke Asian Museum's Community-Based Exhibits model will be the primary focus of the case study. It is hoped that by understanding the relationship between the museum and the volunteers who participate in the exhibit model that a broadening significance of the role of museums in communities will be realized.

You were selected to participate in this study because of your role at <ORGANIZATION> and your experiences with and expertise pertinent to the Community-Based Exhibit model at the Wing Luke Asian Museum, in Seattle. If you decide to take part in this research project, you will be asked to provide relevant organizational materials and participate in an in-depth interview, lasting approximately one hour, during winter 2009. I will contact you via email after you receive this letter to answer any questions you might have and arrange an interview time if you agree to participate. If you wish, interview questions will be provided beforehand for your consideration. Interviews will take place over the phone or face-to-face. Interviews will be scheduled at your convenience. In addition to taking handwritten notes, with your permission, I will use an audio recorder for transcription and validation purposes. You may also be asked to provide follow-up information through phone calls or email.

I anticipate the results of this research study will be of some value to your organization, as strengths and weaknesses of the community's role in the Community-Based Exhibit process will be examined. This study is valuable and relevant to the museum field on a national level, as it will fill a gap in the research regarding the participatory and community nature of the museum's policy. However, I cannot guarantee that you personally receive any benefits from this research.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (517) 442-5318 or aseagrav@uoregon.edu, or my Research Advisor, Dr. Doug Blandy at (541) 346-3631, or dblandy@uoregon.edu. Any questions regarding your rights as a research participant should be directed to the Office for the Protection of Human Subjects, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403, (541) 346-2510.

Thank you in advance for your interest and consideration. I will contact you shortly to speak about your potential involvement in this study.

Sincerely,

Aaron Seagraves
1647 River Road
Eugene, OR 97404

Research Protocol Number: _____
Crafting Identity, Creating Community, and Building Museum Exhibits.
Aaron Seagraves, Principal Investigator
University of Oregon Arts and Administration Program

Dear <PARTICIPANT>:

You are invited to participate in a research project titled Crafting Identity, Creating Community, and Building Museum Exhibits, conducted by Aaron Seagraves from the University of Oregon's Arts and Administration Program.

The purpose of this case study will be to investigate how museums use participatory policies in exhibit creation. The Wing Luke Asian Museum's Community-Based Exhibits model will be the primary focus of the case study. It is hoped that by understanding the relationship between the museum and the volunteers who participate in the exhibit model that a broadening significance of the role of museums in communities will be realized.

You were selected to participate in this study because of your role at <ORGANIZATION> and your experiences with and expertise pertinent to the Community-Based Exhibit model at the Wing Luke Asian Museum, in Seattle. If you decide to take part in this research project, you will be asked to provide relevant organizational materials and participate in an in-depth interview, lasting approximately one hour, during winter 2009. Interviews will take place over the phone or face-to-face. Interviews will be scheduled at your convenience. In addition to taking handwritten notes, with your permission, I will use an audio recorder for transcription and validation purposes if possible. You may also be asked to provide follow-up information through phone calls or email. There are minimal risks associated with participating in this study, particularly since this phase of research is exploratory and descriptive in nature.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study will be carefully and securely maintained. Your consent to participate in this interview, as indicated below, demonstrates your willingness to have your name, organizational name, and any resulting documents and publications to be used in the final document. It may be advisable to obtain permission to participate in this interview to avoid potential social or economic risks related to speaking as a representative of your institution. Your participation is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (517) 442-5318 or aseagrav@uoregon.edu, or my Research Advisor, Dr. Doug Blandy at (541) 346-3631, or

dblandy@uoregon.edu. Any questions regarding your rights as a research participant should be directed to the Office for the Protection of Human Subjects, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403, (541) 346-2510.

Please read and initial each of the following statements to indicate your consent:

_____ I consent to the use of audio recording and note taking during my interview.

_____ I consent to my identification as a participant in this study.

_____ I consent to the potential use of quotations from the interview.

_____ I consent to the use of information I provide regarding the organization with which I am associated.

_____ I wish to have the opportunity to review and possibly revise my comments and the information that I provide prior to these data appearing in the final version of any publications that may result from this study.

Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty, that you have received a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies. You have been given a copy of this letter to keep.

Print Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Thank you for your interest and participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Aaron Seagraves

Interview Form

Interviewees:	Community Based Exhibit Committee Members and Former Members		Data ID	
Description				
Date		Location		
Details				
Consent				
	(Oral, Written, Audio Recording, Okay to Quote)			
Member Check		Date		
Notes on Interview				

CODING	INFORMATION	NOTES

Interview Form

Interviewees:	Museum Staff and Former Staff	Data ID	
Description			
Date		Location	
Details			
Consent	(Oral, Written, Audio Recording, Okay to Quote)		

Notes on Interview

CODING	INFORMATION	NOTES

Data Collection for Document Anaylysis

Case Study:		Data ID	
Description			

Date		Location	

Details	

Type:
Report, Article, Book	
Policy Document	
Museum Document External	
Museum Document Internal	
Museum Document Other	
Online Information	
Job Description	
Notes	
Other	

CODING	INFORMATION	NOTES

Data Collection for Participant Observation

Case Study:		Data ID	
Description			
Date		Location	
Details			

Activity: Committee
Museum Management
Museum Visit
Event
Other

CODING	INFORMATION	NOTES

February 12, 2009

How would you describe the Community Based Exhibit model?

The CBE model is a process that involves heavy community involvement in the planning and execution of exhibitions inside the institution. There's a process of dialogue a process of give and take and through that process exhibits are developed that have a large component of input from a variety of folks. As a result you have exhibits that are dynamic. That relate to issues and concerns happening in the community and that promote further dialogue and discussion.

How did it begin?

A little bit of background: I spent 13 years in journalism as a newspaper editor and community organizer. So, when I was hired at the WLAM in 1991, I brought a lot of my instincts and skills into the museum profession. When I first came to the museum I talked about the focus of story gathering as a central mission of the institution rather than the collection of objects. I began to talk about creating exhibits that didn't necessarily look backwards at what had already happened but looked forward and engaged the community in things that were on their mind; here and now. The research that's typically done in museums is a more academically based research and that it is a lot more lengthy. Coming from a journalism background my feeling was we needed to apply a lot of journalistic approaches to a kind of research a kind of background that went to creating exhibits. So, things need to happen more quickly. Need to be a much more dynamic process. We need to get much more people involved. Stories need to be at the center of the creation of these exhibits and not the objects, physical objects. That's really how it started was my importing my experience as a working journalist into a field that i felt was lethargic, a little bit too backward looking, and that really didn't place an emphasis on building external relationships and bringing people into the process.

Did you have any examples that you were basing this on?

I didn't have any examples that, to draw from, I think it happened organically. When I was hired at the museum the museum was facing a serious financial shortfall and in those situations you have a opportunity to experiment. If the roof is falling in then people are more open to finding ways to keep an institution going. Sort of to make a current analogy, with the economy being the way it is, roll out massive trillion dollar potential solutions because people are grappling with more substantial change. So, there was a little window of opportunity for me to create some change. For me it was a little bit about experimenting. The first major exhibit that i worked on at the museum was an exhibit on the Japanese American Interment. It was an exhibit entitled Executive Order 9066: fifty years before fifty years after. It was centered around the notion that there was this issue around the Japanese

American community which had great relevance to a lot of people, and who do we create an exhibit that relates to this issue. That looks at what happened during wartime and the abridgement of civil liberties, the emotional impact of families the loss of jobs, how the community was wounded and transformed in the process of this happening. And then engage younger people in a dialogue with older people and create an intergenerational bridge through talking about this issue that had been silent for so long. We created that exhibit through this CB organizing model. It was pretty profound, the transformation in the community, the relationships that were developed, the kind of media visibility, the attendance. It was a pretty broad based success. The success of that experiment enabled me then to do more experimenting whereas I wouldn't have had that opportunity before. In terms of your question about other models I'm not sure there was necessarily other models. I was just following my instincts about bringing other people into the process and then using some of my journalistic and community organizing skills as the backdrop for making this happen.

In what ways did the policy change the museum?

The shift was pretty profound. When I came aboard in the beginning it was very little community support and obviously people feeling that their story was highlighted in a sensitive and significant way inside the institution began the process of building some longterm relationships. Number of Japanese American Nikkei second generation American's who were interned began volunteering on a regular basis. They were a part of our mailing parties. They were docents. They staffed the front desk. They had that sense of ownership which then gave it a new vitality and interest to the institution. It wasn't simply those second generation Nikkei, it as also third generation. Their children came in because they finally had an opportunity to talk to them about their history and background. Institutionally our fundraising was profoundly impacted because everyone who was part of that exhibit felt like we needed to pull together to develop resources to make this happen. People stepped forward and used their contacts to bring individual donors into the fundraising in for the exhibit and for the institution. It also triggered some corporate and foundation support from folks who know people in those places because when your passionate about the exhibit or the institution then your more apt to do something for the institution. It really elevated i think that sense of ownership and then paved the way for us to do similar projects in similar communities as well.

What were the challenges of the policy at the time?

It was a very risky proposition in some respects because the base of the support, the institution was, the mission was a little bit vague. It was both to highlight Asian folk art as well as Asian American art and history. The mission was spread in a number of places. What i did was i consolidated the focus on Asian American art and history and cast aside the Asian piece, which i felt was being done in not a real great way, we were sort of a junior low level Asian art museum. There is a Seattle Asian art museum. But there was a niche that wasn't filled that was the Asian American experience. So we shifted in the direction of Asian American that really made it clear to people what we were as an institution.

How in terms of the organizational structure, what began to change or what was added?

It was a gradual process. When I came aboard there was only one and a half staff. We were about a 130000 a year operation. We had a pretty big deficit. So institutionally i began to restructure piece by piece. We had a part time collections manager, very part time. I cast that aside and threw all of my resources into. Obviously, i was hired as the director and i hired my first hire was an education coordinator. I felt at the core of this we needed somebody in the education area who was a community builder so she was a Japanese American woman who had a long history in the community. Was an educator and she was my first building block and then from there we began to develop out the institution step-by-step. I was there for seventeen years, it didn't happen over night. Relative to the exhibit area, we hired folks gradually over time who became our exhibition developers. We didn't have a curator in-house curator, because the way we positioned the exhibition development was because it was a community based model, the folks we were looking for to work in that area were really more community organizers, who happened to be working in a museum. And then their job and skillset was really more related to relationship building collaborative processes. Inviting people to share stories. Their expertise was not as subject experts in a particular area of art or history. They are community builders.

Following that, how is the process?

In brief, to not be repetitive. What happens is the museum is engaged in an ongoing dialogue with the community. Out of that dialogue emerge ideas for exhibitions. Its based around whats on peoples minds. What are the issues that are current. The exhibition program department is involved in that dialogue theyer responsibility is to bring some of those ideas to the fore. In staff meetings and in department meetings they hone in on particular exhibits with the notion of balance. So want some art exhibits, wanna balance that with heritage history exhibits, different ethnic groups. If you do a Japanese American exhibit time to focus on another Asian group or pacific islander group. That department sort of culls through those ideas with the notion of creating a dynamic exhibition. Then once a exhibition decision is made to do a certain exhibition. A committee is created which consist of there generally about 10 to 15 core members. Theyre people who have some expertise in the particular subject matter that's the core of the exhibition there is a floating pool of folks who are community practitioners who come in and out of the process. Sometimes they are brought in for exhibits if its felt appropriate for them to come in. there are community elders that are brought in. like to have a mix of students as well, because they bring some fresh ideas. So this committee begins meeting. In the beginning perhaps they might meet once every couple of weeks or once a month. They in turn bring in other people into this process. It's a very fluid and dynamic process. They begin to shape the theme. They talk about what this exhibit feels like looks like smells like. They brainstorm of people who also could be interviewed as a part of gathering information for this project. Ultimately they brainstorm as to what sort of objects could be used to be included in the exhibit. Its really their job to create this exhibit and the museum staff in a sense are facilitators. It's a very delicate process obviously. Communities are filled with points of controversy nad personality conflict. It's a skillful negotiating process to bring to birth an exhibit. You don't really know in the beginning what the exhibit is going to be. It's a very

fluid process so its more about the process yielding something that hopefully will be relevant out of the dialogue and discussions that happen over the course of the developing it.

I terms of the practitioners. How involved is the committee besides just creating themes and the overall feel?

Every projects different there needs to be a presence of people inside the institution to set boundaries and to say whats doable. That's a delicate balance. On the front end you want people to have excitement and hope about what can be done. At the same time your looking at your budget and you also see how much space you have. Time is ticking and so forth. I don't know how to describe it other than to say it is very fluid and each project is very different. Some projects you have a very strong core of folks who sort of know what to do. There is a skill set to move forward. Lets say there are a bunch of oral histories that need to be done. There may be some people that are very experienced in doing that and wanting to do it and can do a good job. But you may have another project where say people what to do it, but then nobody can really do it. Then you've got to train them or you have to pick up the ball and run with maybe an interview or two to set the pace. Each project is very very different . ther may be times when as an exhibit developer, you realize there is a hole there. And its your job to find some people to bring into the process just to balance things out.

Would you say the people who are on the committee from the museum who have been most traditionally an exhibit developer?

I don't know that we've really had. I have to think about that. In general, people who have worked as our exhibit developers, their background has not been exhibit developers. Theyre, I would say, community organizers types. Theres been some journalists, obviously because I have a biased, community journalists types and there is some people in the education arts area. But obviously as people work in that area they develop some expertise in moving that process forward.

Do you think the policy has changed the exhibits in the museum? What has resulted in terms of different concepts and content that the museum has offered?

I think what is created through this process is a lot of original exhibits that blend lots of different influences. I think more and more, and this is happening in the museum field in general, it used to be you'd lined up certain exhibits based on a discipline or category . You have a fine arts exhibit or you have a science related exhibit or some kind of history diorama assemblage that's sort of a heritage exhibit. Because a community process brings in people who may not have been in a museum before, into a the process, then you end up with new hybrids with people who aren't stuck in certain boundaries of seeing how things can be presented. We've had some exhibits that are really very imaginative in terms of how they've been presented. We did an exhibit titled if tired hands could talk, which was about garment workers, history of Asian garment workers in Seattle. The person who curated it was actually from the theater arena. So it was very theatrical, but we also had lots of oral histories we had a lot of video projection. We had recreation of a factory floor with sewing

machines, timelapse photography, fabric draped from the ceiling on down. It was really interesting stuff, principally it was because nobody was thinking in traditional ways and so whatever came up during the process was appropriate to do.

Has that been one of your favorites?

That was one that won quite a number of awards. Western museum association given the award for best exhibit of the year at on e fo the conferences. It was also then created as a piece that aired on the seattle channel. A video documentary, about a half hour, people took all of those interviews and sliced and diced that into a video documentary.

What year was that?

Im guessing about 2001. Theres probably a copy of it floating. It airs periodically.

What has resulted in the museums relationship in terms of the community after implementing this?

The sense of ownership has grown profoundly. It also has laid the foundation for us to be very successful in developing our capital campaign. Which you may have read about. We took a historical hotel and remodeled it and converted it into a museum. It was a big capital campaign at 23 million dollars campaign. It wouldn't have been possible for a small institution like ours, except for the strong sense of community ownership that really emerged to make that happen. And that happened as a result of this community based museum program model.

How much space is devoted to what is created by committees?

It is hard to say now because we are in a new facility and I'm no longer there. Our exhibits were typically pretty small 500 to 1000 sq feet. We were in a tiny 7000 sq ft facility. Exhibits weren't big but they had big impact. We did a vistor survey which as very interesting because it actually found that people spent an average, i think its, one to two hours, maybe closer to two hours in the actual gallery. The consultant couldn't understand how can you spend so much time in this small gallery-standing essentially in the same place. But once your in this space you kinda know that it is really about the quality of the experience that results in whether people –you can have a huge space and theres nothing to see, your not engaged so you just kinda scoot right through it.

What has resulted in terms of your career or your experience with the museum with your profession since?

Well, I left at the end of the capital campaign.. in December 2007. Im teaching at the university of Washington as a scholar in residence in the museology program. Im teaching this community based model. I'm also doing some consulting with museums locally. I also

do some speaking at national conferences. Both about the museum's community based model as well as about other issues related to museums. I'm still have my hands in this area. Im also doing independent projects which are about documenting community history.

Have you been able to convert any museums toward this process or change any minds?

I would say people don't really, in theory they think it's a really cool thing, i don't know that most museums are prepared to give up that much authority to make it happen. Old habits die hard. Then its just a complex model because it means your hiring people that are trained very differently they have different set of skills. Essentially what your talking about is hiring community organizers, community activists and placing them inside a museum, rather than people who are subject experts who are trained in more traditional museum practice. So were do you find people and how do you change the profession? That s part of the reason why im in the museology department is to create some new thinking about how— what kind of people we should be training. When I came to our department essentially it was created to train people to care for collections. That's how i'm suspecting other museuology programs are built. They've evolved to museum education they've evolved to audience development, visitors—you know , the usual stuff. When i came to our department i was essentially saying well why are we training people to care for collections. I mean there is not even a whole lot of jobs as you know even in that area, if you wanted to focus on that. It should be about teaching oral history development it should be creating this dynamic model of community building. It should be about training people for example in what I'm doing, which is relation based fundraising. Museums actually have probably more development staff than they do collections staff certainly, so why aren't we training people to develop resources for museums. More recently im taking about the notion of why arent' we training people to become consultants in the museum profession. Why don't museology department s do that because that's were a lot of the jobs are and ultimately that's were the majority of jobs will be. Im trying to get people to think about the dynamic nature of museums and how they are positioned in communities and how do we train people. What is it we actually want to train people for because maybe collections care is just like a subset is just an optional class. Museum education there is a big area of museum education. I;ve raised this question, why are we teaching that? In the way that we do, because maybe everybody's job should be education. Just as maybe everybody's job should be development. So there is a different construct we look at. Maybe we should be training museum guards, because there is more jobs there. Trying to look objectively to see were are the jobs. Maybe you link museum education with training for building maintenance visitor services security guards. they are the ones with the actual visitors. They are the ones that carry in their head as we talk to folks all that education stuff that we embed elsewhere. Its about trying to think outside the box. It's a profession that's changing a lot that we need to recognize.

Examples?

One of the inspirations for some of my work. Later as I got into the field was the anacostia museum. Located in wash dc. A guy by the name of john kinard, community response exhibitions. Located in the African American community. He essentially helped in creating

one of the first of these store front museums that really were about engaging the community in issues that were relevant to the community. So he had an exhibit about rats.

There is not really a whole lot on him. If you go on google. Hes sort of a vanished figure. There are museums like that here and there, but truthfull it is still a very un developed model.   Unless there is museums I don't know about. Its kinda an odd process—not odd process, it's a strange thing to me that there aren't more museums like the wing luke. I think there will be. I think that will begin to emerge.

Do you see it in other places besides museums?

Essentially, hey, there are some tribal museums that are doing stuff. I mean really there is in my mind, a museum should be a community center. When I first started in the profession I promoted that idea and people thought i was crazy. It was sort of demeaning the profession it was like your not a community center, it was like the place where there is appropriate scholarship and appropriate ways to do things. So there were a lot of people who didn't agree with me years later. AAM has this museums and communities initiative, lo and behold it was like museums should be linked to their communities. It was like, i told you so, you know? So were still in that phase of really realizing that museums and communities link. I think there is other ways that museums should be thinking ahead of were we are at now, because you look at the advent of the internet and how people get information digitally, i don't think we've really imagined how we can harness that whole world of information and digital presentations in a way that links it to museums. Museums will also may still be museums because they are some core stuff, because you want to see the real thing, i mean, you cant replace, you can come close, but you cant replace the real experience of actually seeing the thing that you want to see in person. There is a lot that museums can do, even the notion of collections, i find that a strange thing. There is a lot that we—you know why are we still warehousing things, we should consolidate some of those functions if we are going to continue to do that. And maybe its not simply a bunch of different museums with their own behind the house collections maybe we find some warehousing system were things can get out to different places. It doesn't make any sense. There is no other reason other than you want to hang onto your donors to support your institution. That's a pretty outdated model.

Other statements that we haven't covered?

In the beginning of my museum career i was considered kinda a kook. I think some of my ideas have become a little more mainstream. Which is nice. There are probably other folks that can carry this much further.

February 12, 2009

Describe the community based exhibit model as an overview?

What we usually do at the museum is we bring together about 10-15 community members that have some kind of connection to the topic of the exhibit, so for example we have a refuge exhibit that were going to start developing—we'll get together a list of potential CAC members try to represent the different communities that were affected by the refuge experience. Then start contacting these people and make sure we have a diverse representation and then we'll facilitate—its not a curated exhibit. We have staff members facilitate the meetings, so they will kinda guide the CAC and talk to them about how we develop exhibits and then help guide them to develop the theme of the exhibit and main messages and main messages are the concepts or ideas that they want the visitors to leave with. They also help in gathering oral histories and their also a way to connect and out reach to those different community members to help gather artifacts photos, oral histories. Then they also do give imput on the design of the exhibit too. We usually work with a graphic designer or exhibit designer. But the CAC members will help envision what the flow of the exhibit will be. Kinda the flow feel or mood that they want to envoke. Maybe even the colors or different ideas about media or presentation of the materials. Basically the CAC helps develop the content they have input to the design and they also help develop programming too . we usually have public programs that are related to the exhibit, so they help think of speakers or what kinds of presentations they might have. Whether it be family day program for kids and families or lecture or panel or whatever.

What are the challenges of the CAC?

It's a slower process. Because we have to check back with the advisor committee. Ultimately they have to come to consensus on making decisions on whats going to be in the exhibit and its not like having one person or one curator make all the decisions we have to check in with the advisor committee to make decisions. They might want to have something and its just not possible for just budgetary or time reasons, so we might have to back with them with an alternative idea and say is this okay. We cant do this but can we do this instead. So there is a lot of checking in. that's probably the main difficulty with it. We just, a lot of the people here feel like the process is more important than the end product. It's a process of developing the relationships with the community and developing-a lot of people who start working on an exhibit in the future or help out with a program. They might even help with become a member help with fundraising. Our auction other events too. Its really vitally important that we develop and maintain those relationships in the community.

Do you have other museum experience?

I did work with the burke museum on a local component of an exhibit, they had a traveling exhibit that was called "strength in diversity" this is a long time ago. I helped lead the local component which was an exhibit on Japanese American women, so we brought together a CAC for that and they helped identify Japanese American women that showed a diversity and age experiences and career path. And we put together , it was more like a photo or portrait brief bio exhibit. So basically that's the only other.

Was that prior to working here?

Well I started working here after ron started in the early 90s. that was my first exhibit was the executive order 9066 exhibit and his first foray into the community based exhibition model where he brought together community members to build this exhibit. Rather than academics or curators. It was kinda like a, for him it was no big deal i think, but for other museums looking at the wing luke, they thought it was really radical, to bring in community members. I worked on that exhibit and several other exhibits after that for wing luke as a contractor i work at the seattle times for almost 11 years as an artist and then ron had told me that someone was leaving out of exhibits and asked if I was interested in coming back, so i came back almost 3 years ago.

In what ways do you think the cbe policy effects the rest of the museum who are not necessarily involved in exhibit making?

For development its great because we're making all these connections with people who are potential members, funders, whatever. Everyone knows the importance of that. A lot of, education, that important, to have all these unique exhibits to show different schools and colleges. Everyone knows the importance of it. That they understand the importace of that. I think for development its great because we already are reaching out and making those contact—its not like their having to make cold calls to people for having to fundraise. A lot of people know about the museum because of our community countacts and outreach.

Describe the education staff and how do they relate to this?

We the education staff they deal with a lot of the tours so they have to know about the exhibits. They tour people through the exhibits and they usually do hands on activities if those are requested. There staff is not very large actually, i think it is only a few people, but they also, some of them go out to schools and do presentations. Like they have right now theyre working with several schools on day of remberance, which is feburary 19th which is the anniversary of the executive order 9066. That's something that has carried on from when ron started or before that the museum has always had a strong connection with the tours and its because were the only pan asian American museum existing. We provide a unique resource for people.

Describe the process of how the staff interacts with the community?

For example, initially when we meet with the community members. I think that you want to provide a comfortable atmosphere were people want to share information. You know we

always have food at the meetings. We want people to feel like their welcome, to feel comfortable here and that we value them and we value their input. One of the things I think with asian culture is you always feed people, so we always have food and make sure people have food and that there is some what of a social atmosphere. Try to make it feel relaxed, although we do have to make people under stand that we have a deadlines so we have to keep moving forward, so basically it just a lot of making sure everyone feels like their heard and that we're getting input from everyone. We have the meetings and then we usually send out notes from the meetings to everyone so that they can review if there is something else that they want to add or they have a question about they can contact us, or they can email back to the group as a whole. I think that the communication thing is really important. In terms of the decision making if people cant make it to a meeting and we're making a decision we try to still give them an opportunity to give their two-cents in. make sure that the dialogue continues. It is a lot of facilitating a lot of communication a lot of emails. There is a lot of-that's what it is-there is a lot of communication, making sure everythings clear to people that they understand the process. We usually at the beginning we give them a timeline. We give them the booklet so they understand what community based exhibition model is.

How else do you prepare people? Do you prepare them in any way, as far as the considerations of the museum this is the text the graphic design? Those sort of structural things?

We try to make things as clear as possible and i think that since we've been through it so many times that you have to explain every thing all the time all over again. So we have to try to be very conscious of, you know, this is the process and this is what we usually do, this is our timeline. This is our timeline because of this and this and this. Because we have to still proof things, we have to send them out to be printed, the designer needs time, we have to go back and forth and do corrections. That's why we have to be really clear about that, because a lot of people may not, if they don't understand, that they'll think that we can bring in artifacts or photos the last minute, or just add to it.   So you have to keep explaining the process over and over. And checking in and making sure everyone is clear on everything. Also with the design process, ive done, since ive worked with graphics and things like that before, i usually bring in samples of different images to show how powerful visuals can be. And how they should think about how color can affect people, and how lighting, and how large the images are, whatever. How all those things can play a big role in the presentation. Theres a lot of, i think a lot of it is education, and getting them to understand the process and our role, their role. So it is a very intensive process. Most of the people have never done this before. We usually try to bring in a few people to the CAC that have been on an advisory committee before so they know the process, just so its not like we're starting from scratch, but a lot of people have not done it before so it is a lot of explaining.

Do you thing creating exhibits this way, do you think it changes what is exhibited had it not been done that way?

Definitely, because we have so many different voices. Once you bring all those people in to start brainstorming, its really a great dialogue, because someone will say what about this and

someone else will say don't forget this, or whatever . you know its not like there's just one person making all of those decisions with one point of view. It's a community of people developing it together. Making the decisions on what is the most important thing, what, how much space do we want to dedicate to this topic. They also have to help, we do have limited space for everything, we can't put everything in. Theres always a process of editing so we have to prioritize. Usually what happens is they'll give us their priorities and then as a staff when we're designing and fine tuning the exhibit we may have to cut things out, but we try to focus on the priorities.

Is that something that they establish the priorities?

Yeah, we usually ask them what are the most important things to keep in here, you know what is the most important thing to you that, you know if we have to cut anything—you know tell us what your priorities are. So that we know that their not going to be with us through all of the design phase and because that would just not be possible to, we would not be able to finish anything on time. That's why we get those priorities from them so that we can make the decisions later. Based on their priorities.

When do they leave the creation phase?

Usually for the larger exhibits we have a year or so production time. For smaller exhibits its about six months. So usually what they do is the brainstorm ideas. They develop the messages and themes and prioritize those. Then they also give input to the design and once they've done that and we have all their priorities then we let them rest and they usually don't come back until the exhibit opens. They also give input on the programming, too.

Do they give out input on the education staff tour component?

They can. I think what we've learned is that were going to try to include people that have some kind of connection to education in our CACs too because, that makes a big difference. Like i showed you on the permanent exhibit, about the whole barracks issue of not having the barracks in there. While the CAC that we had, I don't think that we had any educators or elementary school, or high school educators in that group and they really didn't want to have the barracks because they really didn't want to emphasis the Japanese American community and make that social justice timeline all about the Japanese community but show how social injustices happen to other groups besides the Japanese American community, so we are still trying to make it balanced too, to show that there are other groups affected by social injustice too. But we know that that barracks is really important so we have to keep somekind of aspect of that in there. Its hard, you know, you can't keep everyone happy. Especially when we're working with large groups of people. So we have to try to make the decisions as best we can based on the information we have. You know everyone is not going to be happy with every single thing.

What do you owe the CAC after the job is done and there has to be change made do you feel like you have to get permission?

It just depends on what it is, you know. We get feed back at the openings, people say oh, you should have this and this and this. Like i should you that Hawaiian container in the exhibit the poke thing. You know and your so tired because you have the exhibit finished and the people are like, oh you need to have this and this. So we try to you know if its something that is not something that I have to go back to the whole group and ask and it was just an idea or thought for authenticity. You know it was just a nice little added thing. It depends on our budget on our time it depends on, you know what we have discussed earlier. You have to take everything into consideration.

Could you describe what has the resulting relation with the community and the museum?

I think the CAC members have a deeper understanding and appreciation of the museum and the work that we do. Their kinda getting the behind the scenes tour, so to speak. They are able to participate and help make the museum, so they have more of a stake in the museum. They have ownership. I think they feel a responsibility to the museum too. A lot of people once they've started working on it, they want to help us and they want to help make this a good place and they want to help tell these stories. So for example for the still present past exhibit the Korean American arts exhibit, we didn't have, that was a traveling exhibit, and we had a CAC help develop programming, a lot of the people that were on that CAC are helping to volunteer. Their doing oral history training or their wanting to connect in other ways and help out. They've also been participating in the different programs and things like that. You see this continuation. Once people have started working with us, we develop these relationships. Its such a great feeling its not like the exhibits over and that's the end the relationship it just continues and builds from there.

How do you start the outreach to get the people on the CAC?

All of the different exhibit have really different topics, so they are usually really different circles of people. What we do is we try to see if we have, like if there is someone we don't know we try to see if within our board or staff is somebody knows that person or that organization to reach out to them, so its not like were going in cold. You can say my name is Michelle and I know so and so and they recommended you to be on this advisory committee and usually people are really happy to be asked, because they know that we are asking them as an important resource and that they are going to be—were asking them to be included and choose the content for this so it's a really. It's a responsibility, but I think its also like a great opportunity for people too. For the most part people unless they have time constraints their very interested in participating. I think too since we have a large board, a really great competent board and staff that have a lot of connection to different communities. So that's our strength, i think definitely.

The board participates in the outreach?

We might contact people individually and say oh, do you know, where trying to find someone connected to this do you know any one. I did that also for the selection panel for an upcoming call for artists. I talked to other people that I know that have some connection to the museum and say you know we are looking for someone for a selection panel members

and we'd like a diverse community do you have any recommendations and we're looking for new people do you know someone who hasn't worked with us before who has an interest in doing that? I'm mean its not like we do cold calls usually. We might do cold calls but usually we go through this path of trying to make a connection, too.

Ron described this as being community activism or community activists as the facilitators of the CACs?

The staff members, I mean there are a lot of people who are community activists. Maybe hes calling us activists because were facilitating the exhibits. I'm not sure.

I might be misquoting him?

Well he was a community activist.

Do you agree?

I guess it depends on how you define that. I think an activist can be someone who helps empower people so maybe that's what we means by that. I mean that would make sense, too. I think our role is just to help people, to guide them. But they are the ones that have the material and the potential for making this thing happen, so were just kinda like a container, or something to help guide people through. And you know we just provide the professional experience of having done this before, but we're trying to get them to make the thing. Its kinda more like a humble position. We're providing the space and the guidance and the professional experience and then their providing all the material for the thing.

Cristina Seong, is our exhibits assistant

She coordinated the dance exhibit which is in the kid place and working on an animation exhibit for kid place. And an exhibit tentatively called return home for war, so its like a veterans exhibit. She's newer to the exhibit facilitation process, but she also was a CAC member for the adoptee exhibit. And was an intern here before. There are a lot of people here how came out of the American ethnic studies program at UW and she did.

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What is your position?

Im the exhibit assistant at the WLAM. I work in exhibits were assigned different exhibits to work on. I deal with the CAC process. I do a lot of research for exhibits, text writing, stuff like that.'

How many CAC process have you been through?

I feel like I've been through a lot. Either as a participant, or I've only facilitated one by myself. And then the other ones ive either participated in or helped out with. Theres been. I helped with in 2005 we had an asian adoptee CAC. I was really involved with that one. Ive been involved with the museum since 2003 of December. I'm pretty familiar with the process. I started out as an intern, then volunteered and then got hired on full time.

Michelle mentioned you went to the university. And studied what?

American Ethnic studies and communications.

How would you describe the community based exhibits model and the CAC?

I think that we like to engage the community and so with the community based model its not one person deciding what goes into an exhibit and not their point of view. We get all different kinds of point of views from individuals from a certain community. I'm working on a new exhibit about veterans, younger veterans returning home from war. With that my intention isn't to have it be pro-war or anti war—that's, how would I put it, were not trying to take a political stance on anything and so we want to get different individuals from this specific community to be able to talk about it and have an open dialogue about it. Rather than take a stance on it and have my personal views on it. That's not necessarily what we want. We want the community. The community members from a CAC are what drive the exhibit. So its more exciting you get to see their thought process because you get to see developing content themes and messages. Throught that we're able the museum is able to take all of those ideas and work with a designer and fabricate an exhibit for the community. So its community lead community run sort of thing.

As far as you're your position here if you were to give it a percentage, how much is devoted to the CAC process and how much is devoted to design of exhibit without the interaction?

To me, like what I'm working on right now. Probably like 30% working the CAC and 70% doing other stuff. With a lot times with CACs people are really busy so you can only meet once a month. You meet 6-7 times before an exhibit prior to it opening then within those

times you have to communicate through email or phone. Really the CAC process is so limited so you have to have it structured and you know what you want to talk about and you really want to get the information from the CAC member when you meet with them. It's a really vital time to get ideas out and to really clarify things for them. I have another CAC meeting this Saturday actually, its my second meeting but I already know what i need to get done, cause we only have a short amount of time and we don't want to like to dilly-dally trying to figure out stuff with people.

Michelle mentioned the timeline.

Our timelines are very very very structured. We have to be sure to follow our time lines. There is always lee-way, but still we kinda have to follow through on it.

Do you know anything about the history of it?

Of the Community Based model?

Yeah, here?

Not a lot. I know that the origins of the museum Wing Luke wanted to create a Chinese folk museum. It wasn't until ron chew became the ED and started working with the community more and involving the community with the museum, then it started shifting into a more community based model here at the museum. Hes the one that really wanted to engage community members with the museum versus having a traditional museum like the seattle art museum, or something like that. Where you just have a curator who picks and chooses which items that the public is going to see and learn about. It was this idea of bring the community to the museum in order to facilitate an exhibit, which is different cause you usually don't have such community involvement in an exhibit aside from maybe programming. As far as I'm aware of things it was probably more Ron that helped bring the idea of a community based model here.

What do you find to be the challenges, I think you've already mentioned a few, of the process?

Lets see. First thing is from my experience first thing is scheduling. Its really hard to schedule people cause everyone has jobs and sometimes like availability for people is totally hard. Another thing is people like to talk about, they like to visualize what an exhibit is going to look like, so like where a chair is going to go or where a chair is going to go, or something like that. So when you are trying to get like themes and content, everyone already has their preconceived notion of what they want the exhibit to look like so they totally jump to that first. So, Im like okay, lets bring it back, what do you want, how do you want this video to be presented and what do you want the viewer to get out of it. So you kinda have to like, not tell them what to think but try to guide them to like the ideas to what you want them to come up with. For like themes and messages, because really, a lot of times when you go see and exhibit you see like the design and you see whatever is there video audio, picture kinda thing. But then its like those underlying themes and messages

that you take away that you might not necessarily realize that need to take a lot of planning, so sometimes with a CAC they'll get really excited about the actual like installation of an exhibit, so you have to like reel them back in and say, oh but first we need to talk about this and we need to like deal with this kinda stuff. That's what I've noticed is that they are real excited about like oh, we could do like this, we could put a wall right here, or we could put a podium or a pedestal, or whatever. I don't know they are just really excited about the design part.

How do you think that policy changes the rest of the museum who are not necessarily involved in one committee or leading a committee? How do you think that changes the structure of the museum?

Because we work directly with the community sometimes. Sorry, let me back track a little. Since moving into the new building a lot of people, not in the museum, but also outside of the museum as well, said that we've gotten like. Quote unquote more sophisticated with the space. I don't know if you've every seen the old space, but it was a lot smaller and a lot more grassroots seeming. With that you know like a lot of times it would be easier to give favors to people, or groups or something, because its so small and cause we want to keep those community ties that weve gained through CACs and different organizations and stuff, but then moving to the new space a lot of those connections that people expect to have—its harder to keep them or be able to do certain favors like that, because we still want to be seen as a reputable museum. Sometimes we have to juggle those community partnerships that we've had in the past and bring them to the present time, expecially with energy costs and money and stuff and running a bigger facility than we used to have, we have to make sure that we can still have our community involvement but also become a little bit more professional on how we interact with just the general public.

How about say the organizational flow chart, in a tradition museum, you'll have education, exhibits, development, whatever—do you think it effects that structure of the museum?

Its interesting cause a lot of like the exhibits that we have. We'll have CACs for almost every exhibit except for maybe curated art shows, but that's in our art gallery that we have. I'm going to say that almost every single, I;m saying almost because I don't know everyone, but almost every staff member has been on a CAC. With that, and not all of them are on the exhibits team, so it, you have people who have, like your working with them so you have that co-worker dynamic, but then you also have them being on a CAC. So obviously they want how they envision the exhibit to be, the exhibit staff has to work with that also. Its interesting cause then you have that co-worker slash CAC volunteer dynamic so you see the person all the time and you want to make you co-worker happy but then, its kinda like if your friends and coworkers at the same time, not all the time does it mix well? Its kinda that same dynamic if you're a staff member and your on a CAC you want to represent that community as best you can, but then you also have to remember that your still representing the museum. I like it when staff members are on CACs, just because as a museum member they know were we are coming from, but then theyre also able to reach out and get more individual members from within the community, so we're in a good way able to branch out to a lot of people cause we all have different connections to different communities and stuff

like that. Cause a lot of us are artists, or involved in different organizations outside of the museum.

Whould you, as far as your knowledge do you know of any other museums that have this?

The Community based model? Not really. I went to a conference this past October. When we talked about the community based model they were just more interested in how we did it and how it worked versus anyone we could discuss the community based model with. In the sense of developling exhibits it's a lot different for most museums, cause they have the curators or a couple of people deciding on what goes into the space. So for us we go through a lot more dialogue in talking about how an exhibit should be developed with the community versus other museums will have that dialogue with the community, maybe after the exhibit is finished. Whats interesting is now that ive been here so long is that I don't know why you would want to make an exhibit without consulting with a specific community depending on what exhibit it is. I think it is really vital to get that point of view, or how are you going to know its accurate or not. At this conference these people were talking about an exhibit they were doing but they wanted to have dialogue with people but it wasn't until after the exhibit was over. I thought that was interesting, I could understand that now.

How would you describe the support from the other staff who are not in the exhibits for this policy?

I think they are really supportive. A lot of the staff members actually we all have the same major in college. So maybe like like 8-10 of us all started as interns. Then moved up through the Wing Luke ranks and got a full time job. We all understand the community based process and how we work with different communities and so we all have that knowledge of what its like to work here and how we engage ourselves with the asian American community. Also, our staffs pretty young, we have a pretty young staff, too. A lot of us are under 35 years old. For us it's a different dynamic versus some museums where you know most of the staff is a little older, like above 35, versus a bunch of us younger than 35. I think the younger people who work here are able to understand like working the community more and we're all, like i said, a lot of us have the same major. So its easier for us to understand that bottom up theory versus top-down.

Some of the theories behind it your familiar with?

I think its cause a lot of us took the same courses in school. Not just like racism and discrimination, but a lot of other things that. We have a deeper understanding of different communities because of that its easier for us to be able to work with communities and have the community based model as the foundation for our museum. I think that's, because we all have a similar mind set.

How would you describe the process? Is there anything you could add?

First, well get an exhibit either assigned or will be distributed to us, however it comes. If your not familiar with that exact community, we have to find individuals who will want to

be on the CAC so sometimes we have to do a recruiting letter or email where we just send out a letter to whoever you think might be a good fit for it. I've been trying to do that. Some of the topics your just not going to familiar with as others and that's just how it goes. After that we do CAC meetings 6-8 depending on the size of the exhibit. Obviously if the exhibit is in a bigger space your probably going to want to meet more and discuss with them. Then maybe 2-3 months we meet with a designer. Usually a designer is outside of the museum and we contract with them to design our text panels and we also work with a CAC so they get to talk with the CAC and see what they want out of it.

Does the CAC see samples of the design?

Usually not. Usually what i've done is the CAC is introduced with the graphic designer and that's usually it. The thing is obviously there is going to be people who don't like the design. Theres going to be people who do like the design and if we have people meet with the designer their going to have to go back and forth, its just going to take a lot of, you know it would take a lot of time to do that. So were going to have to meet with the designer once and then they give their ideas and the designer goes and does what they need to do. And so they'll just communicate with us either me Michelle, or Josh from the exhibits team versus communicating with the CAC. The CAC is like the advisors to it but like ultimately we still want to the exhibit to look good and look nice so its up to us to use what we've learned from the CAC and all of their ideas to then work with the designer . That's were the CACs communication with the designer is limited cause we don't want like, oh, I think you should do this, I think you should that, and then you go back and forth and it just takes too long to get something done. After that a lot of our labels that we do, we do in house so then depending on how your timeline is looking at that point closer to the opening, we'll usually do in-house labels like captions, like whatever kinda stuff that's easier. Usually we just have our big text panels sent out. Or like big photos. If it's a big photo, like photo heavy exhibit, then well have those printed too.

Do you think that having this policy changes the exhibits in the museum as a result of it, does it have different concepts and content?

Yeah, i think so. I think usually, like sometimes i might have an idea of what I want an exhibit to be like, but then meeting a CAC it could completely change from what I may have envisioned. Cause a lot of times even if its not intentional a community advisory committee might come up with a great idea that might not have even crossed you mind. Its like a give and take kinda relationship. Its really interesting to see a ca formulate what they want. I think i wasn't leading the CAC but i know like the hawiian exhibit, with that one its interesting because the spelling of hawian or hawai is different depending on who spells it. The CAC itself spelled hawai with a, aphostrophy hawai'i, well that's not how its spelled if you go to Hawaii but the CAC really really wanted it to spelt with that extra symbol in it and so know people are coming in and they saying that's not how you spell it, you spelt it wrong. The CAC was really adamant about that's how you spell it that's how we want it in the whole exhibit so you need to spell it that way. So its just interesting, so for us we might not have realized that but the CAC itself they decided that that's how it should be spelt and that's they want to portray themselves in the exhibit. The CAC really does have a lot of lee-

way in how they want to be presented as well. I mean that's like the best example that I can think of, I know that there have been comments in like the general public who have asked like, oh, i think you spelt that wrong, I think your text panels are wrong but really it was like the CAC that decided that they wanted to have it spelt that way.

How do you think that, how connected the community is with the museum?

I think the communities are pretty well connected but then its also, i talked about like availablitiy and scheduling the problem, is there is a slight problem with the CAC process and that you can only get those who are available to help out with the exhibit. So you might get a limited view of a community, but we want to get as good an overall spectrum of a community but obviously it is limited to peoples schedules and peoples availability and who is willing to work with the museum. You might be able to get a lot of professors or a lot of academics who are involved in the community, maybe not like other individuals like more blue collar workers, because they have to work. And because their availability is different. With the CAC process it can be sometimes limiting of you can get just because of the time sensitive meeting and stuff like that. We do try to reach a wide variety of people within a community.

What about the after math after the process is done and the exhibits are up, do you think there is still a connection, perhaps not with the volunteers specifically, but maybe with the wider community?

I think that the exhibits sometimes do have a lasting impression and its good that the museum tries to continually work with the communities I know that lately we've been trying to work with the Korean American community more. We don't have a lot of Korean American staff here is as much, we have a lot of Chinese American, Japanese American, because of the internment and the immigration of Chinese and a lot of philopeno staff, but the Korean community weve been trying more and more to get the Korean communities involvement. Like geographically it's a little more dispersed, whereas there used to be Chinatown here and the Chinatown international district, a lot of Chinese we also had the Nihonmachi Japantown here. It was more centralized as for as like the residential and living areas but for the Korean American community it's a little dfferent you have it either up north of seattle or south of seattle, but as far as business like a business disctrict more. Its different you don't have that residential community you have more of a business community, trying to get the Korean community involved might be a little harder, you don't have the same way of connecting with the community as much, but with our still presence past exhibit, we're getting more recognition from the community that the museum is here.

Do you have other experience at museums?

No. Probably not.

Are you from the area?

Yeah. I grew up in Port orchard which is across the water from seattle.

Were you familiar with the museum before interning and working?

Yeah. When i was sixteen i met a woman who worked here. Because im adopted i was never really connected with the asian American community, probably until then, cause i lived in kinda a small town. When i met her she was also adopted, so we instantly clicked so that was my kinda bridge into the asian American community. From that i instantly became involved with the museum through her as like my mentor. Once i started college, i knew that I was going to volunteer or intern here. It was kinda it was predestined for me to stay here this long. A lot of people have known me since i was sixteen, so it would have almost been like eight or nine years now.

So your doing oral histories, so could you compare the two, is there anyway to compare the two is it similar?

It is. Youdo hyou do have to when you first start the CAC process you do have to, obviously some of the people you might not know, so it is that tentative phase where you have to like gain their trust. Sometimes people you know they are like oh, what is this, cause they are totally not familiar with the CAC process so they don't know why they are even there. Again how many museums have the community-based model and stuff like that. So with an oral history you do have to work with someone doing an a oral history sometimes just trying to feel them out and make sure that they are comfortable. You have to make the parties comfortable and make sure that they are willing to participate then throughout an oral history you kinda understand, and obviously you might have a set of guidelines to ask questions to go through sometimes. And you want to get those like you have a sheet there. Of the questions that you want to get answered and so it also might veer off into a different topic and so you would n't necessarily want to stop them. You wanna like get the information that they are willing to give and same with a CAC obviously there might be certain things that you want to cover, themes, messages, what kind of video, audio components that you want and also there might be something that's different and off of your guidelines that you want but it might be a really good thing to stick with and go with that. I mena that's what makes the community based model so interesting because we are able to tap into resources that maybe some people aren't able to. Then also with thte CAC some people obviously have different abilities some people love doing oral histories some people might want to be interviewed and interview people and other people might decide that no way, i do not want to do that and so they might be interested more in requiting people for programming activites once the exhibit opens. So there is different ways you can manage the CAC and how they can be utilized with in it and with an oral history you have to think about like how is this story going to help with an exhibit and going into an exhibit kinda thing versus like quotes or stories or if they mentioned that their involved in something then you can like talk about it later or you can like tap into that, if it might help with a different exhibit or help some student with a project that they are working on. I've never compared the two actually ever, so that was interesting for me to go through it.

What kinda preparation do you do between meetings?

Well usually, like right now i go through the notes from the previous meeting and I taylor them to how I want the next meeting to run. We brainstormed a bunch of ideas of what we want the exhibit to have. So im trying to pare those down into categories so then I can come back and say oh, so we met last time, this is what i say and then i list out the different categories and them Im probably going to ask them is there anything else you'd like to add or anything you want to take away. Then that way they can see all of their ideas placed if front of them in an organized way so then they can see things how im seeing things so then its like easier for them to understand like my thought process of how they told me all the information and I think that's like what me as the facilitator of the CAC does. You have to be able to take everyones ideas and make sure that whats coming across to you through them is what how they will be able to understand you at the same time. If there is like any confliction within that then it becomes harder and the CAC might not want to work with you as much if your not like understanding them or how their points are coming across.

Does that become a problem?

I've never experienced that but I think that. Its always possible that something like that would happen. Just not every single CAC member is going to be happy with an exhibit. You cant please everybody and sometimes mybe the direction of what its presented as is maybe not what a CAC member wants, but then that's maybe the should speak up more or then maybe next time, or they can get involved in another exhibit were they feel like really passionate about.

February 22, 2009

What CAC meeting were you involved with?

I was involved with the multi racial exhibit. I think it is called your Place or Mine. We went through a lot of iterations about what to even call it. I thought that was really clever, actually. And one of the museum people came up with the title.

And this was just this past summer?

Yes.

Was that your first involvement with the museum?

No, I had been, kinda, peripherally involved for years. When I was with Red and Black Bookstore collective, the feminist bookstore, and also through my work at Elliot Bay Book Company, weve occasionally coproduced speakers. We've brought speakers to Wing Luke. The museum has also asked us to come sell books at some of their speakers. This is my first experience working on an exhibit, though. And first experience with a CAC. With the reopening—I'm on the docent list. But I haven't been able to do very much with that. So, I was glad to be able to participate with the CAC.

So how would you describe the CAC process?

It was—I had, really, no idea how we would be able to go from our rambling discussions to an actual exhibit. So, I was really impressed. There was a nice variety of ages and experiences and types of people involved. I knew about half of them ahead of time, just from being out in the community, and half I hadn't met before. So, and i came in not at the beginning, I think it was Marie Roots, oh, we should call Karen. So, I came in kinda in the middle. I had actually a little treasure trove, a little archive of stuff related to multi-racial topics. Partly, because I'm a pack rat and partly because some years ago I was working on a doctorate. I had collected a bunch of stuff and it was on the issue of multiracial identity. So, I didn't want to throw it away. I didn't know what to do with it so it was kinda sitting there waiting. This was my opportunity to offer it to the museum actually, so I don't know how much of it they will keep, but quite a few of the objects ended up in the exhibit.   There are things related specifically to multiracial performances of some famous people. Very much related to Seattle and there are some national stuff, but it is mostly stuff like a Time magazine article. And then there is a lot of stuff that didn't end up in the exhibit also.

So is there some stuff that the museum has that is not in the exhibit that you are donating?

Yes. And I don't know if they will keep it or not keep. Basically I signed release forms and I said if you want to keep it you can but if you don't want to keep it then I'd like it returned to me.

So you said you came in middle of the process, were you at the first CAC meeting?

No, I was not. I came in maybe the second one?

You attended how many meetings?

I think three? And then we had email communications as well. And I was really excited to be a part of this one because this is an issue that I'm really very invested in, is multiracial history and multiracial people and I feel like its something that has been really—weve been kinda cast out of the community, I think, for many years. I'm fifty and so, now things are so different. So there's an opening for that history to be heard. Kinda like I was waiting for that time.

So, it came at the right time?

Yeah, it came at the right time.

What would you describe as the challenges of the process?

Well I didn't know anything about museum design at all. That's not why I was there, so I, it would have been nice to be there from the beginning I guess. In some ways I wasn't sure what they were looking for. I think that comes out more in the process. Having gone through, kinda, beginning to end to see how it happens. I'm still not real clear as to how ideas get transformed into, you know, that physical thing that is there. Maybe that is part of the alchemy, as part of what the museum people do. Also, you have these huge number of ideas and a little space and that's I think part of the challenge, too. Is to kinda winnow it done into, kinda, the themes. I think that's part of what they do. Then they took the themes back to us in the meetings, to say does this representative. Are we leaving anything out. I'm really satisfied with the way it turned out. It could have turned out any number of ways, but I'm really happy with how it, what they made of what we were doing.

What guidance or structure advice did the staff provide during the meetings?

When we were all going a little wild with ideas, they were trying to, especially as time went on, they tried to winnow it down to identify the themes—to shape a little bit of what we were doing. For our community, I think one of the issues is leaving people out, because for us, so many of us, that's kinda like our big issue. So, I think maybe it was more challenging because we wanted to include everything. I think that always true to some degree but even more so. I think in maybe some exhibits theyre maybe more of a tendency to go with the more successful people, mainstream, lets not talk about anything that's difficult. Where as, we wanna talk about the stuff that's difficult because that's what gave birth to us, in a lot of

ways. Then there is so much stuff that we don't wanna leave out that that was probably challenging for them. Them being the museum people.

Did the process result in any change or discovery for you in the role of the museum?

Yea, I had no idea that's how they put their idea that's how they put exhibits together. I had know clue. It gave me a new respect and more of a connection to the museum. Having been part of the process and having donated some stuff to the museum and also looking at— here we had bombarded them all this stuff and they still managed to come up with something representative. Of course, its not going to represent everyones experience or whatever. But it is a representative little slice. I thought it was very elegantly done.

Who did the process define the community you represent and was there any new discovery, in your own thoughts about it?

Well, how did it define the community?

What I mean to say is did the process, the dialogue with the volunteers and the staff result in anything new or reflective on your part, on the subject?

Um, that's interesting? I guess I had not been really thinking about this issue over the past few years. And it reignited me, it brought me back to looking at where are we at this point. I was also really, I don't know why i was surprised, but I was pleased to see the inclusion of, there was one CAC member who has a transgendered sibling. The inclusion of this person's experience in our thing, I thought was really progress and really a positive thing. Also, making sure that lesbian, gay, bi, trans people were included, too. I have to think about that email question.

What were your feelings at the time?

I felt like there was progress. For me finding out how many people multiracial people, really are involved in the museum on a day-to-day basis was a positive thing. Really felt very Seattle to me and really felt right, I feel very good about that. It reenhanced my positive feelings toward the museum. I think ther is a way in which a project like this, with so many different competing groups and the dominance of Chinese and Japanese decent people—a lot of people's histories can get lost. I like the museum's ongoing commitment to trying to bring together the diversity and there is a lot of hard feelings between groups and the issue of multiraciality, there is hard feelings about that, too. A lot of denial of that.

Do you think this exhibit maybe found a conclusion, but built on some of the resolution, if we can take it that far?

I think so. I think its representative of some progress, some people still don't want to hear about it. Or it's the bringing together of two cultures its so lovely and we want to talk about how its lovely and not so lovely. We were able to do that with the CAC and that's positive. I think for one thing, its really easy to leave out the local Indians intermarrying

with the Indo-Pinos for example. It seems like they get left out a lot. They were part of this and its really a big part of the cities history. Two of our most dominate activists in the 60s, civil rights activists, were Indo-Pino. One identified more with the Asian-American side and the other more with the Indian side. But they were both both. So that we could talk about that and figure out how to incorporate that history. Maybe its not so obvious to people just walking into the exhibit, maybe what would be nice is more contextual information, I guess so you could understand a little bit more of what stuff like that, which to me means a lot if I see something, but for someone just walking in with no connection to the community, or new to these issues or new to Seattle might not pick it up.

Was the interpretation of the community expressed in the exhibit?

Well, I think that remains to be seen a little bit. If I had to say, something that I would have liked to have seen a little bit more, interpretation. Especially for people who might not be so familiar. They had a little brochure, so sort of some public talks, or something would have been pretty good.   There was a reception. Some more written materials and some more public talks.

Were there any?

There was a brochure with a book list. A reception. I don't think there was a public talk.

What did the process challenge about your outlook of the community?

There is always such a challenge between representing the negative in a museum that to some degree is supposed to be hopefully confirming of experience. You don't what to give short shift, but you don't what to recreate the sixties idea that you don't want to have mixed marriages, because the people are going to mixed up, or mentally ill, or have gender confusion, or what ever historically. That's always s the challenge and also dealing with, what narrative should be dominate and looking at how the choosing of the physical things that do into the exhibit and how they do and don't reflect what—something about the community—what am I trying to say? I think and now I'm trying to remember some of the things that are in the exhibit. I think some things were really brilliantly choosen and they seem that way to me because of my connection to the CAC that donated things and to the issue in general. And there is a way in which things can be over interpreted, too, so there's that.

Obviously, I think your experience with it would be quite different from someone who wasn't in the CAC.

Right.

So in the end do you think, you mentioned how you are amazed at the discussion was, perhaps random, was nailed down to the exhibit. Do you feel that it reflects the discussion that was going on?

I do. It was so wide ranging and that was perhaps just a slice. I suspect that not everybody feels that way. In the CAC. Just from comments people made during opening day.

So you said it's a slice?

It's a slice and its representative, but there is no way that it could be representative of everything. In a way if you tried to do that it would be a disservice. Better to have a slice a that's representative of certain things about the experiences especially if you are going to do a fairly limited exhibit. Better to do that than throw everything at everybody and then draw your own conclusions. I don 't think that that's useful.

What are the specific things in the exhibit, that you really like or dislike?

I liked, theres a wedding dress and the cowboy boots. The story that went with it. Those are Sholyn's moms. Also, theres a couple of photographs that are related to. Two black and white photographs that are related to somebody hows family had quite a bit of difficulty with the multiracial. That i thought was really moving. Its hard for me to be objective because there are several things that I donated in that. I liked having my—something that I had written is represented in text. I like seeing that. Also, I don't know why this was important to me, and now this seems less important, but theres a 45 that's in there by the Fastbacks. They were a a punk rock band that was around from like 79 to 2002 and their bass player was Hopa—Japanese and Italanian. Her sister's a filmmaker. she never made a big deal about her mom's being Japanese or what ever. But she's just very much important to me for a couple of reasons. One is visibility, as an old punk rocker, myself also in a band myself, our visibility and our representation and also a representation of somebody who did music for a really long time. She did other stuff too. It was never their day job to do that, but maybe in the beginning. To have that represented. And not just heads of state. This is somebody who is kinda famous like in the grudge scene and pre-grudge. I like that there is a 45 with her picture on it in there.

Do you remember discussing these objects during the meetings?

We didn't really. We didn't really talk about that. We talked about the themes and then Michelle at a certain point said that they didn't have a lot in their holdings. So, if we wanted to share, that we should let her know. So I wrote this letter and I brought this big bag of stuff by. There were a lot of books, other people donated books, too, mostly kids books. We didn't really talk about the objects at all. Except for that Time magazine article. The Time magazine article it was like at a certain point multiracial people were discovered. There is this computer generated images and it was like this hot woman with the Café Ole skin and there were these slobbery editorials saying "she's really hot," and all of that. Which is always the discourse around multiracial people.

This wasn't too long ago was it?

Yeah, 2000. So Ethel was writing and doing art at that time. Several of use were doing projects on Multiraciallity at that time so this happened at the same time. We were all

talking about that, so of course its in there. Somebodies issue, because we all saved it. It was this somewhat mixed bag of gee nice visibility and god its so swarmy, whats wrong with people. So that was emblematic for a lot of us. I think that's one of the reasons why it showed up in there. We didn't talk that much about what we would be able to bring in we just brought it in. And that was more toward the end.

One thing I did want to say was. What we talked about a lot was the title of the exhibit. That was a long and important discussion. A lot of it was along the sub-title.

Why was that such a discussion?

I don't know.

Was it something that was contested in the group?

A bit. We wanted. It really brackets the face that is being shown and it provides context and it brings people's interests. We didn't want it to be too swarmy, because that's how we're presented all the time. We didn't want to close the door on that because that's how were represented all the time. So it was in a way maybe there was more investment; we wanted to reclaim our own naming.

How many people were involved?

About 9. People came and went. We had the email list. That includes some museum staff.

April 21, 2009

What was your involvement with the museum before the CAC?

I had virtually no involvement with the museum before.

How were you brought into it then?

I think that my name came up on some sort of list search. I sort of fit the criteria, if you will.

So what was your involvement in the community, or did you have heavy involvement as an activist?

I think, yeah. And I think that's what connected me. I'm assuming that it is a couple of things. First of all, by virtue of what I represent, since this was a CAC about the LGBTQ asian community. I was known to be of that. I think that was the first and then second of all, I've been sort of active mostly in sort of LGBTQ politics.

How many meetings have their been now?

About five.

How is the process going?

Very well. This is the first time I've ever participated in anything like it. I'm wholly impressed by the process.

Do you feel like the process is describing the community accurately?

I think it will seek to describe the community in a way that represents the people that are there. As opposed to the concept of the curator staff curated. Where you have one or two people that kinda try to determine all the things that you bring into it. I think that this process, you know the upside of this is that you really do get people of the community involved in it. On some aspect the risk is that your going to get the perspective of only those who actually do get involved.

What have you learned about the museum during your involvement?

I think first and foremost I've learned about the community process. I think also you for me its almost—you know I have been familiar with the museum, so its not like i was completely unfamiliar with the museum. So I think that's its given me the opportunity to get a sense of

the general mission of the organization and what their intent is and what the want to represent for the community.

Where you familiar with the community process or had you known of its reputation?

No not at all.
What is the goal of it is? The CAC process in general.

My assumption is its really about—the goal is really this process by which the individuals of the community are actively participation in the whole exhibition process. Participation is one. Again that it is a activist museum. As opposed to being a passive museum. From that flows a lot of different things. It is really a different way at who you operate exhibits.

As far as the process of the development of the exhibit goes, what do you think the facilitator brings to it and what is their role?

Well, in order for this to be successful it is all about the facilitation, on so many levels. It really is about that process and what the facilitators bring to it. I think that their role is to educate the CAC about just what the purpose in the curation process is in the museum. First and foremost they are educating us about it means to operate the museum. The second thing is obviously to get us in an end product. The role is clearly about having a very specific product at the end time. The third piece around that is a combination of facilitation and direction. A very skillful combination of facilitation and direction. On the one hand they have to be very direct about how they are going to guide us. Very specific steps. This is what ive been most impressed with, is that each and every week its very clear about the fact that their process is going to take us to the next level. So at the very end well have a product. So, first of all that's the direction part, they have to be very clear about how they are going to move us forward to get an actual product. The facilitation part is bringing a group of folks together that have sort of a common bond but other wise we come from very different places. Really it's a facilitation of, it would be the same skill if we were a group of people who had drug and alcohol issues and we were coming together to sort of try to figure out how we were going to support each other in our sobriety. Its all of the same facilitation skills for any person who is bring a group of folks together who have some sort of common goal in mind. And part of that is that very clear piece of understanding of where they need to get us. Along with the fact that they do not want to drive it themselves, so it's a very careful line of moving us forward without driving the agenda or putting their own pieces into it.

Do you think the museum has a role in building the community?

If you had asked me that seven months ago I would have said, well sure the role is about educating and making sure that the community has access to their history and culture and art. But now i would answer that question very different and that the role is really about a full engagement of the community in its actual existence and ongoing existence. That brings a whole other element that other museums don't really have.

I believe your right as far as my experience the WLAM is very rare in the community process
….

Building community was one of the goals and it was sort of questioned at the CAC meeting? Is it fair to question that, or do you think that it is understandable how that might be questioned?

Sure, I understand the confusion. I think that you theoretically could walk away from the this process with a very narrow sense of what it is that you are there to accomplish and that is something very specific about who you are personally and how that would sort of help the curating of a specific exhibit. And be able to walk away from that with piece of it. Obviously just that piece of it there is building community in there. But, my assumption is that their goal is something much bigger than that, that I would walk away from this experience with not only that it is about helping to build this specific exhibit and the community that it might represent, but that I'm also going to walk away with a much broader sense of the museum in general and that all the various community that it serves and that I will walk away from that hoping. Well, they would hope that I would walk away from that looking at other ways that I might be able to contribute. I walk in there with many different identities, so that there might be other exhibits that I could participate in. Go through the same process with a different exhibit. I hope also that i walk away from that with an ownership of the museum. That I might feel responsible for its ongoing upkeep and maintenance. So that I become and ongoing contributor so that I go out and tell my friends and family about its place in the community.

Do you feel that you will do this?

I definitely feel that should do that. And I feel that I will do that. I think that I will do because now I understand the museum even better so when I speak about the museum its not I'm not going to speak about it in terms of yeah you can go there and see a great exhibit. Now I'm going to speak about it in terms of how its curated. That to me is fully 50% of what you actually end up doing.

How is your understanding and outlook of the community that the exhibit is about has it helped?

I don't know. A little bit. I guess I say that having been involved in various aspects of it the LGBTQ community, I was fairly familiar with most things. Obviously, any time you engage in anything your going to have some learing. That s a good thing. I think that my learning there was probably. That was a piece of that probably wasn't a greater part of my learning. Cause I had been a part of LGBTQ, I hadn't been involved with these folks, but I had been involved.

How may of these people had you known before had?

I think I knew about 4 or 5 before, none of them very well. But I had worked with them in other settings.

What do you think are the challenges of the process?

Keeping people engeaged in the process. Over a period of time i think that we have lost the perspective of a couple of folks that were there in the beginning. We haven't seen now for a few meetings. Who I thought brought something very different to the table in terms of a level of diversity and different perspectives. So that is defiantly one thing. You are not guaranteed any consistency from beginning to end. I think that one of the risks that you always run when you do something like this to have something that ultimately has no focus to it. And no sort of singular visual tie. Because you have so many different people wanting something a little bit different that in order to please the group you may end up with something that is not fully cohesive. I think that probably in hind site, I'm not sure if that was a stated goal from the beginning. I don't know if that is a goal. Maybe the goal is not have something visual that is sort of binding, but on some level if you end up with something that is about every body that is there you lose some power in both the message and the aesthetic. When you have a curator you do have an understanding of what needs to happen in order to create a good flow and an aesthetic to it and i think we risk that having a group with varied levels of in how they perseve things. My greatest fear in this process, for me part of what people are needing to understand, and I myself need to sort of gain an understanding of is that ultimately museums are truly equal parts are what you are trying to display and also sort of the aesthetic of it. That is truly what makes museums museums you are tying a message and an aesthetic together. Otherwise it has the potential of coming across as a bunch of people that put together a poster board. You can get a lot of information from it but is it enticing. And the answer probably would be no.

Do you have another meeting to attend?

I think we have one more.

Do you have a sense of the aesthetic?

You know I think that was something that I wasn't aware of is that there are people definitely people involved in this process who have been involved with the museum before and have sort of that artist eye. So I think that, I'm assuming that is one way that they deal with that is that they ensure that there are participants who in fact have some level of the aesthetic as a part of who they are. As a part of their career and all of the things. So now I've come to understand is an important aspect. Is to sort of bring people together that don't really have the aesthetic, but you know i have a lot of history and i have a lot of knowledge of the community---those types of things. Bringing that together with the people who get the visual piece.

Appendix M: Partial Transcription of Tom Im Interview

(NOTE: My questions are not included.)

April 29, 2009

Our organization worked the WLAM on a project called pathways to pride, and this was 2001. This was a project that was initiated by the WL and they partnered up with myself via my organization. I did the outreach as well as coordinated the permitting process. The initial idea behind this was to create some large visible public art pieces in the neighborhood. I think because of funding we reduced it down to. We actually RFQ and we hired a team and because the money was more of skinnier than we thought we actually did a wayfinding project. If you look around town you find four wayfinding signs plus a monumental art piece in the H Park. And sort of kicks off the project. So that's the one project I worked with the WL directly. I've also interacted with the wing luke on a variety of planning process that our organization initiates we contact people from the wing luke for people to participate in those process and so that's another thing we interact with the WL. So I've personally been asked by them when they were doing their capital campaign for their new museum space they asked me to sit on a couple of committee to talk about the needs of the community and how that can be integrated into the museum. So we talked about, for example the museum needs a new community room/theater where the museum could do events at the theater space. Hopefully that will bring out people at night were the community could see movies, or some type of lecture services. I think that was impetus of them, creating that space and that wasn't a directly from me, it came from a collective voice stating that there was a need for it.

It was a process in which they got input from a variety of voices in the neighborhood.

How many meetings, i cant really speak of how many meetings cause I was in a variety of groups. So I was in a smaller collective of individuals. As I recall there was maybe 5 to 6 of those meetings that I attended and there might have been more that I missed.

Well i think the museum is connected to the community through their interpersonal relationships with other agencies. That's just one example, so their staff is connected with other people, other agencies so whenever I need someone to represent the community from the museum's perspective I can call upon 2 or 3 people to come to meetings. That's one example, and that's pretty much the example of other community driven process or meetings. They do have individuals that are probably more, yeah, I would say more connected—I can't really speak of other museums, but they have individuals that are had informal relations with other staff and other community organizations, that's more on an informal basis. On more formal institutional basis they have programs within their museums where the actually have for example, i guess it's a tour guide a guided tour of the neighbor hood where they actually bring people into the museum who is interested in touring the neighborhood and they actually have individuals taking tour through the neighborhood and speaking whats happening in the neighborhood. They've had a few rooms that have dedicated, as I remember, in their old space im not too sure on their new space, I think its in

their new space, but I think there is one room that speaks of their neighborhood history. I think one of the reasons that they've actually stayed in this community is that the previous executive director Ron Chew, he really wanted to stay in this community and he wanted to build a museum from one of the old historical buildings and he had that vision of both having the museum stay there and having an old dilapidated building. If you look at our neighborhood, if you actually came to our neighborhood seven years ago you would be able to count about eight dilapidated buildings, sub-standard or vacant buildings in our neighborhood and that was a really community policing problem for our neighborhood. Public safety problem. He actually took one of, actually the museum took one of those buildings off-line. Rehabilitated it and put it back into good shape for our community. We've reduced that number from eight to five. So it's a real tribute to the museum in that sense. I think that was part of what the museum wanted to do and that is contributing to the community in that sense. They've really listened to voices about how they want to shape the museum into a better space for them and it's a real anchor for the community. But you know i guess in some the museum has been real good players when it comes to interacting with the community.

I think the museum is really in, for some people its an icon for the neighborhood. I think it's a it brings kids and students and individuals that want to visit the neighborhood, otherwise and it pulls these individuals into the community. So I think it has a real important role in playing helping to revitalize this neighborhood. There is of course those individuals that don't know of the, those individuals that come to this community that will never visit the museum, or that are not aware of the museum. But its location on King street, sort of being at the headways of the eastern part of the Chinatown neighborhood, i think it has an important location. And because of what they have physical done with that space it's a real landmark for our neighborhood. When you are coming from that part of the community. So i think it has a lot of, it plays several important roles for our neighborhood. In that sense.

Yeah, i could just sort of give you my guess. You know the residual population is actually really a lot more diverse that people think it is. A lot of people have assumption that it is primarily asian and I would say a majority of individuals who live in this neighborhood are asian and so that makes up at least the residential population identify this neighborhood are asian, but there is like east Africans that live here, east Europeans, there is a large African American and caucasion population that lives here and a lot of the residents are low income residents that live here because of economic conditions. And the social serves that are prevalent in this neighborhood. So I would say with some residents they do identify with the wing luke but i would guess that the differences that really identify because of ethnic reasons would be more demographically younger individuals and that I mean people under 50 or 60 and younger than who live. And I would say people who don't necessarily live in the neighborhood but who live outside of the community but come to this neighborhood because its known as the asian cultural hub of all of the pugent sound and they would come here and some of them find that the museum sort of centers and speaks of the culture in some ways. There are individuals that sort of i would assume sees the museum as a cultural hub because it speaks of from south asian to east asian cultures, you know a lot of people see it as sort of an important institution to representing a variety of cultures that live outside the

neighborhood if its Korean or Japanese or Chinese or south asian. So you know that's probably my best guess on how people perceive the museum in the context of sort of racial and ethnic identity.

I think you know community development is a rather broad term it probably could cover a lot of things and you know my perception is that community development ranges from developing linkages from within the community that helps promote livability goals such as improving the quality of life of individuals that either live or work or play. And also community development is also supporting the underserved in the city and supporting either their basic needs or their livability means. And part of what I think the museum serves is sort of the, for certain people it serves another important linkage with is sort of preserving their cultural capital or enhancing their cultural capital within the community which I think is sort of an aspect of community development but i don't think it emcompasess what I think a community needs and making a more livable neighborhood. I think it shares part of the mission of community development work but its not the whole bag of needs that needs to be addressed.

Do you mean that you know with these community groups that they've formed that it helps shape the idea of what the museum needed a program within their building that addressed community needs and was that part of community development tool or device and asking those questions. I would say you know, i think that process that they undertook maybe it was more a validation and maybe they had the idea that this was the type of programs that they wanted in the museum and we just need validation. I don't know, that's sort of beyond what I can see. You know at least on a very surface level at least them the museum going though this process of asking these questions from a variety of community stakeholders such as myself and other individuals either it would be a validation or being a useful tool to provide them with information in regards to how their spaces need to be developed to provide support to neighborhood needs I think they succeeded on some levels. Well see how it progresses you know we don't know how these spaces will interact with the neighborhood. So far it seems like it interacts pretty well. We've had a few events in those spaces but we wont know until maybe a few years down the line if its truly open to the public to use for those purposes. I assume it will be they do have that theater space they do have that community space where there has been a few events. My assumption is that it is going to be continued for those uses and provide either a space were the neighborhood can congregate to talk about issues or a celebratory space, or an education and cultural learning space. I think if that is how those spaces are used as a means to accomplish those goals it has succeded at least it is what we had intended thoses spaces to be used for.

I think, truthfully, you know physically i personally think they look rather striking, you know i think the material they used is rather, it was good materials. Stainless steel. But there is a question of how many people really review it when they walk through the neighborhood. You know i've seen and this is just my casual observation. I see a few people actually look at these signs but it doesn't really been used to help circulate people i think there are wayfinding map elements but i don't think people utilize it for that they see the narrative in it but I don't think it pushes people form one sign to the next i don't think its really a clear way to move people. Which maybe i don't know if that was part of the

intention, i think maybe that was part of the intention, probably not, but i don't think that was the actually result. And also i think we were hoping that more people would actually gaze at these signs and sort of move people along and i don't think that was a result of the project.

I think the intent and the result there is a bit of a chasm between the two.   I think the intent was to have something eye catching or eye popping. It is very similar to something maybe like in boston. Something road where you follow this pathway where you see all this monuments and follow it. It's the idea that it helps people move from one important historical site to another or one important building to the next. I think that was the general intention behind it it would also help you know a variety of guides tour guides to go from one location to the next and sort of be the signal that this is an important location lets look at the sign lets discus what right here. So the intent versus the result there is definitely a breakdown. But i think it is still i see people still stop and read the content, it serves some purpose so.

That we've gotten the museum involved in. It ranges from. They attend our community forum meetings it ranges from like a variety of development projects happen in the neighborhood various plans and planning efforts, to like we've gotten a number of people involved with like a green street project that we are working on for example, i mean this is one of a few projects that we are working on. So weve had people in our committee to talk, there is a public art element in there and they've sat on our public arts board to help select the pubic artists that we eventually used for this project and the same thing with our signage project you know they are helping us with our signage project. And right now we are borrowing images from the museum so we could actually utilize in one of our public art projects so. So you know they've always had a very open door police in helping oth\er neighbor hood organizations work with their projects.

You know i with my years of working with the museum they've always been really good players. By that i mean they've always participated when we've asked them and they usually have an even keel perspective on, you know if there is a policy issue or controversial issue, they usually have a response that is healthy for, its usually in a way that is not totally self interested. They is groups here that make their judgment based totally on self interest, but I think that they make judgments they make calls. I think that they are either neutral on some positions or I think they take position that are usually i believe positive for the neighborhood not necessarily based on self interest. They always participate I always think of the museum as being sort of a good participant when it comes to actively progressing the livability and the health of the community. I don' think its changed over the years i think they always had a good persepective on good development policies for the neighborhood.

I think there is a couple of people that work with the museum. Our previous eds ahave worked with the museum and our development director has worked with the museum.

Particpating Community
Members

Community
Advisory
Committee

Community Chair/ Facilitator

Additional Research Materials

Museum Staff

Additional Contract Services

Community-Based Exhibition Model