



Association of Art Museum Directors

120 East 56th Street
Suite 520
New York, NY 10022
Tel: 212.754.8084
Fax: 212.754.8087

October Newsletter
Message from the Executive Director

I have been thinking about life cycles recently: the life cycle of the art museum director, of North American art museums, and of AAMD. Consider these facts: two-thirds of AAMD members are over the age of 55 and could retire within ten years; after decades of growth, art museums have faced unprecedented financial challenges this year; and AAMD is 93 years old. Are we heading into an inevitable waning of the middle aged?

Not at all. But it is helpful to consider the critical issues facing these groups using a life cycle model. The aging of the AAMD membership raises the question of how the field is renewing itself. What can be done to cultivate and prepare new generations of directors? What new skills do art museum directors need and how can they best learn them? As society and art museums change, we need to anticipate future needs, ensuring a vigorous regeneration of the profession.

The real question facing North American art museums is how to sustain themselves after a period of enormous growth in collections, buildings, audiences, and costs. As a group, these institutions might be considered to be in their prime, with enormous energy, skills, and success. Our collective challenge is to fend off any sense that in middle age there is a loss of creativity and relevance, even as we continue our successful engagement with diverse audiences and supporters.

Founded in 1916, AAMD is 93 years old. My sense, however, is that we are more like an adolescent entering adulthood: still struggling with our identity and still focused mostly on ourselves and our peers. Increasingly, we are ready to enter the larger world, where our talents and imagination can make a difference.

Business managers will tell you that the two things essential to preserving highly functional organizations are creativity and sustainability. Our field, and our association, has the former in abundance. What we must focus on now, rigorously and with equal creativity, is sustainability—of our profession, our museums, our public service, and our association. For the 21st century, this is both our challenge and our opportunity.

Janet Landay