



MANAGING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ART MUSEUMS AND CORPORATE SPONSORS

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For five decades, spurred by a commitment to social responsibility, enlightened charitable tax laws and the opportunity to cultivate audiences, American business has supported the nation's art museums. Throughout the 19th century, leading businessmen and women were instrumental in founding our foremost civic institutions, and the tradition continues today as businesses and businesspeople invest substantially in their communities' cultural and educational resources. Each year, corporations provide more than \$1 billion to art museums – more than five times the combined annual budgets of the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Through annual grants, special project support and sponsorship, corporations aid art museums' general operating costs, capital improvements and expansions, educational and outreach activities, membership programs, fundraising benefits and special events, art acquisitions, conservation initiatives and publications, as well as temporary exhibitions and other major public programs. Many corporations also provide in-kind support including volunteers, professional advice, advertising and marketing support, products and services – all to enable museums to fulfill their public mission. These business investments of money, time and resources generate an incomparable return that directly benefits the American people. Through corporate support, art museums are able to enhance the scope and depth of their public programming, foster urban revitalization and growth, and improve the quality of life of their communities.

At the same time as museums have experienced unprecedented growth as cultural, educational and civic centers – serving more than one billion people annually – American businesses have increasingly viewed art museums as venues for sponsorship both to serve the public interest and to address corporate relations and marketing goals. This circumstance provides obvious opportunities to art museums that seek to expand and diversify their base of financial support and to reach new audiences. At the same time, it presents challenges to ensure

that the museum's artistic integrity and educational mission is not compromised by external commercial interests.

In managing their relationships with corporate sponsors, art museum directors face an additional challenge. Some corporations may engage in unfavorable or unethical business practices, or may market controversial products or services. Others may seek to showcase products or services within the museum context or attempt to exert undue influence over the content of museum programming. The museum director and his/her board of trustees have the responsibility to determine whether sponsorship of museum programs by such businesses is consistent with their institution's interests and to act accordingly in accepting and managing – or rejecting – such sponsorship.

Art museums and corporations have built an extraordinary record of collaboration for the public good. To optimize the public benefit of corporate sponsorship of the arts, and to maintain the public trust, museum directors – in consultation with trustees and staff – weigh the following considerations:

- Are the corporation's reputation, values, products and services consistent with the museum's and its community's standards of quality and integrity?
- Is the corporation's approach to sponsorship responsible and respectful of the museum's mission and program?
- Does the corporation understand the limitations on commercial promotion available through sponsorship of the museum?
- Is the source of corporate funding philanthropic or business-driven, and does this distinction set expectations or place demands on the museum that are acceptable?
- Does the corporation have a history and context of civic philanthropy and positive community involvement?
- Does the corporation have a history and context of supporting arts and education?
- Is the corporation's record of support positive and constructive?
- If there is no previous record of support, does the corporation demonstrate a seriousness of purpose and the potential for making a long-term commitment to supporting arts and education?
- Are the corporation's motives in supporting the arts transparent and acceptable to the museum? Is there a real or perceived conflict of interest in accepting this support?

- Are the requests for recognition beyond what the museum would normally offer to donors?
- Does the corporation bring resources – additional program support, in-kind services, marketing expertise, etc. – to the sponsorship that benefit of the museum?
- Does the corporation seek input and/or influence on the content of the sponsored program?
- Are there risks associated with the sponsorship, and are those risks acceptable to the museum?
- Is the corporation's sponsorship – in terms of public perception and the image and practice of the museum – ultimately a benefit that supports the museum's fulfillment of its mission?
- Is the sponsorship consistent with applicable legal restrictions and requirements, whether general or specific to the museum?

Each of the 184 institutions represented by the membership of the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD) answers these questions according to the unique mandate of its mission and the interests of its community. All museums operate with a system of checks and balances by which museum directors, trustees and staff evaluate and decide upon the terms of their engagement with corporations and business interests. Underlying these operational processes is a set of core values to which the members of AAMD subscribe and which guide all aspects of their work as museum professionals. These core values are:

Mission: The mission of all art museums is to serve the public through art and education. Fulfillment of this mission is the primary goal of every AAMD member and the touchstone by which all decisions are made concerning museum programs and operations.

Individuality: Each museum has a unique identity, and its collections and programs serve the distinctive interests of its community. Museum directors have the responsibility and the freedom to exercise sound professional judgment in ensuring that their museums are responsive to local interests while adhering to the national standards of quality for which AAMD's members are recognized.

Accountability: Museum directors are responsible to their trustees, staff, donors and community for ensuring that museums fulfill their public service mission and reinforce the leadership position of museums as cultural and educational resources.

Integrity: Museum directors are responsible to their trustees, staff, donors and community for ensuring that museums meet the highest standards of curatorial, professional and ethical integrity.

Transparency: Museum directors manage their institutions – and, to the extent possible, the involvement in their museums by outside individuals and organizations – to promote clarity of purpose in action and openness in internal and external communications.

The AAMD promulgates fundamental standards by which art museums should be governed and managed. These principles are found in the publication, *Professional Practices in Art Museums*, which has been revised at ten-year intervals since 1971. The AAMD's commitment to these core values and the success of its members in managing their institutions' relationships with corporations and for-profit business entities have ensured that America's art museums are among the most trusted and respected public institutions in the world – resources for education and enjoyment that provide lasting benefits to the people of the world.