

**Statement of Christine Anagnos
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**for the record of the
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies**

Regarding the Institute of Museum and Library Services

The Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD) requests funding of at least \$42.7 million in Fiscal Year 2021 for the Office of Museum Services (OMS) within the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). We also request that Congress give the agency maximum flexibility in use of funds to respond to the current crisis, which has largely shuttered museums across the nation.

IMLS has had strong bipartisan support throughout its history. Its most recent reauthorization, in 2018, was approved by the House under suspension of the rules and by unanimous consent of the Senate. The agency has done its work quietly and without controversy. OMS has distributed its direct grants across the nation, carefully supporting all types and sizes of museums in every region.

I would like in this statement to focus on the leadership that the agency supports through its National Leadership Grants, and particularly on a grant that has both advanced research on the learning results of school field trips to art museums and provided important new practical tools to the field.

Awarded in Fiscal Year 2015, this three-year grant to the National Art Education Association (NAEA) allowed it to manage, in partnership with AAMD, the first major national study in the United States on the impact on K-12 students of single-visit programs to art museums. The need for the study had been articulated to AAMD members by senior officials of the U.S. Department of Education. NAEA and AAMD quickly joined forces, received a planning grant from the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, and decided to apply to the OMS National Leadership Grants program for a major grant.

Funded by Kress, a core group of museum educators recruited a research firm, RK&A (formerly Randi Korn & Associates), to survey the art museum field to elucidate the current state of museum education practice. It found that most museums reach out to schools that serve disadvantaged students and do not charge program fees. It found as well that most art museums seek to hone observation skills, encourage questioning and investigation, elicit interpretation of visual images, and achieve a personal connection to artworks/objects.

Upon receiving the National Leadership Grant, NAEA and AAMD commissioned RK&A to carry out the actual data collection and processing at six selected museums and associated classrooms.

The research question that the study investigated was: What are the benefits to students of engaging with original works of art within the distinctive physical setting of art museums when students are guided in their experiences by means of inquiry-based pedagogies?

The study qualitatively and quantitatively explored how engaging directly with original works of art can nurture skills and capacities among students. It included groups of children that got a museum visit, which included a docent-guided tour designed to stimulate close observation of and reflection on original works of art; groups of children that got a similar activity, also conducted by museum docents, but in a school classroom using reproductions rather than original works; and a control group that got no art-observation activity. This design allowed the researchers to see whether and how the physical setting of art museums and original works of art provided any advantage in education.

The results confirmed that the students who had the museum experience outperformed the others, asking more complex questions about works of art, being more accepting of multiple interpretations of works, more likely to think about art in terms of its material properties, and experiencing greater emotive recall of the program.

The partners disseminated a final report and held a symposium to share findings. We believe it is resulting in wider research-based understanding of how single visit programs affect various capacities of students. This will in turn affect the practice of museum education, allowing institutions to focus their teaching on the capacities in which it can achieve the most. It will also identify new questions to research.

Of special interest, the project was designed to produce tools that could be used in the field going forward. This process, and its results, were described in a blog published by the American Alliance of Museums, most of which we excerpt below:

People often talk about going “from research to practice,” but in reality, this is fraught with challenges, not just among museums but in any field. One primary challenge is that research institutions operate in a realm of theories, hypotheses, and slow thinking, while museum practitioners operate in a quickly changing world that requires action. How do researchers communicate their findings to practitioners in a way that is timely, resonant, and actionable?

One researcher-practitioner duo faced this conundrum recently upon completion of a study of the effectiveness of single-visit field trips for students. Stephanie Downey, the director of research firm RK&A, worked with Emily Holtrop, Director of Learning and Interpretation at the Cincinnati Art Museum, on a national study of single-visit programs at art museums for the National Art Education Association’s Museum Education division in partnership with the Association of Art Museum Directors. In sharing the study with practicing museum educators, they were surprised to see that, at least for now, the tools of the research have taken on more immediate influence than the results themselves. In this post,

Stephanie and Emily will share how a rather ordinary research tool emerged as a significant influence on museum educator practice.

Stephanie

When a research study is complete, the most broadly shared part is the results, sometimes in the form of a few bullets or a paragraph, and rarely more than an executive summary... So, having resigned to this reality, I was surprised and quietly thrilled to realize that, at least among the research's primary audience, museum educators, something other than results was emerging as the star player of the research—one of the instruments used to collect data, the Program Observation Tool and Teaching Behavior Examples.

At the end of a research study, these data collection tools are usually relegated to the appendix of a report, where only “data nerds” typically look for them. Yet they are absolutely critical to executing research with results you can have confidence in. We researchers have a saying, “garbage in, garbage out,” meaning that the data you collect and how you collect it has *everything* to do with the results that emerge—if your data collection tools are not solid, your results will be flimsy and not hold up under scrutiny. With this in mind, we spent a full year developing and testing all the data collection instruments...

The purpose of the Program Observation Tool was to help us contextualize whatever we learned from our data on students in the programs. For instance, if our hypothesis was that students' creative thinking would be enhanced from a single-visit program, it would help us understand *why* that was. By observing the strategies employed by the paid and volunteer educators running the program, we could see if there was alignment between what they did and the outcome for students...

The Program Observation Tool, and particularly the Teaching Behavior Examples we developed to help observers make sense of what they saw, turned out to be illuminating for the museum educators we worked with on the study too. While they all live and breathe these programs, seeing what they do laid out in concrete terms brought the core of their practice to the surface. The examples gave them solid descriptions to use when talking about their techniques, which they often develop intuitively...

Below, Emily will share with you how she has used the tool with her Cincinnati Art Museum Docent Corps.

Emily

Serving as the project director for the NAEA/AAMD Impact Study has been a wonderful supplement to my role as director of learning and interpretation at the Cincinnati Art Museum (CAM). With the framework set out by the study's

research question, I can look critically at the work we do with students at the CAM: Are we developing our students' capacities in the way we describe in our research question? Are we encouraging them to use their creative and critical thinking skills? Are we boosting human connections and sensorial responses? Are we using the best tool in our docent observations to answer these questions? The answer to the last question, we determined, was most likely not. Luckily, I had the answer to our need in my hands with the RK&A Program Observation Tool and Teaching Behavior Examples.

Our long-running volunteer docent body, the CAM Docent Corps, consists of eager learners who embrace every museum education pedagogy placed in their toolbox. As part of the museum's rigorous development program, the docents participate in monthly training sessions designed to teach them not just the "what" but the "how" of connecting our collection and our visitors. To learn the "what," they listen to curators lecture on our permanent collection and special exhibitions. To learn the "how," they participate in workshops led by museum educators on topics ranging from touring tools to connecting current social and cultural issues to art with visitors. We strive for the methods they're trained in to be inquiry-based and interactive.

The docents also participate in a rotating three-year observation program, where Learning & Interpretation staff shadow programs, give feedback in extended discussions, and then complete detailed evaluations of the docents. These evaluations help staff identify trends across the corps and plan future trainings on areas that need improvement.

In completing the evaluations, our team has felt for some time that we needed a new observation tool to capture more meaningful feedback. Our previous tool, while useful for obtaining the general tone of the tour, did not allow for in-depth exploration into all aspects of the program that we needed. It did not allow us to be as focused as we needed to be to glean the results desired. So we were very lucky to find the Program Observation Tool from the NAEA/AAMD Impact Study.

Hoping our docents would embrace the new tool as part of their ongoing docent development, we asked a small team from the corps to help us plan a gallery workshop for their fellow volunteer museum educators. The workshop summarized the study's findings and introduced the tools with practice exercises. The group broke into "participants," who engaged in open dialogue on a work of art, and "observers," who used the Observation Tool to evaluate them.

We then had a lively discussion about the tool and what we had witnessed. One area of concern for the docents was that L&I staff expected them to do *everything* listed in the inventory of techniques. We assured them that we did not, and that the Observation Tool and Teaching Behavior Examples should be seen as a guide of what can be accomplished and not what absolutely needs to be.

The full blog is available at: <https://www.aam-us.org/2019/07/24/taking-a-museum-education-study-from-research-to-practice/>

Many art museums also conduct multi-visit programs in which students visit throughout the school year, in some cases every year from elementary school through high school. Clearly, the benefits of such intensive and long-term engagement differ from those conveyed in a single visit program that may essentially be designed to awaken an interest or spark curiosity that can be satisfied by subsequent visits. Nevertheless, the NAEA-AAMD study allows both schools and museums to have a better idea of what they can and should expect from single visit programs.

The project built upon an earlier study conducted by researchers from the University of Arkansas at the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, AR, which found that students who attended a half-day field trip saw measurable improvement in several capacities. For students from rural or high-poverty regions, the increase was even more significant. It took the support of OMS to conduct a similar study on a national scale at a cost of over half a million dollars.

Much more information about this important project is available online at

<https://www.arteducators.org/research/articles/377-naea-aamd-research-study-impact-of-art-museum-programs-on-k-12-students>

ABOUT AAMD

The purpose of the Association of Art Museum Directors is to support its members in increasing the contribution of art museums to society. The AAMD accomplishes this mission by establishing and maintaining the highest standards of professional practice, serving as forum for the exchange of information and ideas, acting as an advocate for its member art museums, and being a leader in shaping public discourse about the arts community and the role of art in society.

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