The Case for Empathy
@ Communicating The Arts
Montreal

Janeen Bryant | @1Facilitateher

#EmpatheticMuseum | @EmpatheticMuse
Empathy:

The action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2013)
The Big Idea

• “The Empathetic Museum” is an extended metaphor highlighting the qualities of an institution that is aligned from the inside out with its community.

• Origins of the empathy metaphor
  www.museumcommons.org
How this session will work

DISORGANIZE
LISTEN
REFLECT
ACT

#empatheticmuseum   @EmpatheticMuse
• www.empatheticmuseumweebly.com
Example.

Superstorm Sandy

**IMLS statement**
NYPL opened doors for warmth, water, charging devices

Museums in the area ??
Other museum associations ??
Association of African American Museums

Statement of condolence to parents of Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice

Urged their members to use collections to help provide context for understanding and healing.
Example.
Close to Home
What is Institutional Empathy?

Authentic alignment of an organization with the experiences, values, and needs of the communities it serves.

But how?
Empathetic Museum Maturity Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Regressive (Lowest Maturity)</th>
<th>Emergent (Low Maturity)</th>
<th>Planned (Medium Maturity)</th>
<th>Proactive (Advanced Maturity)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civic Vision</td>
<td>□ Identifies as independent, stand-alone player</td>
<td>□ Interested in being more relevant, making connections in the community</td>
<td>□ Acknowledges role as anchor institution in community</td>
<td>□ Embraces and internalizes role as an anchor institution in community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Indifferent/unaware of issues within community</td>
<td>□ Willing to reassess mission and vision</td>
<td>□ Ensures mission and vision reflect civic role</td>
<td>□ Key civic player with responsibilities and influence used for growth and social justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Focused on core subject matter only</td>
<td>□ Lacking required resources or clear direction</td>
<td>□ Explores authentic ways to be part of its community and allocates project resources to do so</td>
<td>□ Exercises soft power in the community with dedicated staffing and project resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Body Language</td>
<td>□ Museum culture embodies privilege (race, culture, social, etc.)</td>
<td>□ Token &quot;community coordinator&quot; is hired, or a &quot;diversity function&quot; is added to someone's job to attract &quot;diverse&quot; audiences</td>
<td>□ Enacts formal inclusion policies through staff collaborations with community partners, advisory committees, experts on inclusion, etc.</td>
<td>□ Internalized awareness of privilege communicated by building, leadership, staffing, collections, advertising, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Governors, leaders, employees, exhibits, collections, etc. are predominantly single demographic (usually white) reflecting that of founders</td>
<td>□ Diversity initiatives consist of short-term &quot;outreach&quot; programs or only overlap with &quot;ethnic&quot; holidays</td>
<td>□ Assesses and recognizes board, staff, collections, exhibits, and programs—its entire mission—to reflect its community</td>
<td>□ Workplace culture reflects inclusive environment with participation from staff of diverse culture, thought, and experience at all levels of leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Unaddressed issues of pay (unpaid labor, low wages, wage disparity) and employment equity in hiring practices</td>
<td>□ Some labor practices amended to create more equitable working conditions</td>
<td>□ Hiring practices examined for bias, efforts made to address staff concerns</td>
<td>□ Fully resembles the complex diversity of community’s evolving demographics and values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Token &quot;community coordinator&quot; is hired, or a &quot;diversity function&quot; is added to someone's job to attract &quot;diverse&quot; audiences</td>
<td>□ No substantial change in internal culture in terms of board, staffing, collections, exhibitions, programming</td>
<td>□ Diversity and inclusion are prioritized as the responsibility of all staff</td>
<td>□ Recognizes and supports need for staff self-care to limit burnout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Token &quot;community coordinator&quot; is hired, or a &quot;diversity function&quot; is added to someone's job to attract &quot;diverse&quot; audiences</td>
<td>□ Changes from a place of white privilege to a place where all feel welcome</td>
<td>□ Enacts long-range plan to ensure sustainability of this transformation</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

www.empatheticmuseum.com

#EmpatheticMuseum | @EmpatheticMuse
## 5 characteristics

- Civic Vision
- Institutional Body Language
- Community Resonance
- Timeliness & Sustainability
- Performance Measures

---

### Empathetic Museum Maturity Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Regressive (Lowest Maturity)</th>
<th>Emergent (Low Maturity)</th>
<th>Planned (Medium Maturity)</th>
<th>Proactive (Advanced Maturity)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civic Vision</td>
<td>Identifies as independent, stand-alone player</td>
<td>Interested in being more relevant to civic life in the community</td>
<td>Acknowledges role as anchor institution in community</td>
<td>Embraces and internalizes role as an anchor institution in community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indifferent to awareness of issues within community</td>
<td>Willing to translate mission and vision</td>
<td>Ensures mission and vision reflect civic role</td>
<td>Key civic player with responsibilities and influence used for growth and social justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focused on core subject matter only</td>
<td>Lacking required resources or clear direction</td>
<td>Explores authentic ways to be part of its community and allocates project resources to do so</td>
<td>Exercises soft power in the community with dedicated staffing and project resources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

---

### Key Features

- Museum culture embodies privilege (racial, cultural, social, etc.)
- Diversity initiatives consist of short-term "outreach" programs or only overlap with "return" holidays
- Some labor practices aimed to create more equitable working conditions
- No substantial change in internal culture in terms of board, staffing, collections, exhibitions, programming
- Instant community collaboration through staff, collaborations with community partners, advisory committees, experts on inclusion, etc.
- Internalized awareness of privilege communicated by building, leadership, staffing, collections, advertising, etc.
- Workplace culture reflects inclusive environment with participation from staff of diverse culture, thought, and experience at all levels of leadership
- Fully embraces the complex diversity of community’s evolving demographics and values
- Recognizes and supports need for staff self-care to limit burnout
- Instant long-range plan to ensure sustainability of this transformation

---

---

Empathetic Museum Contributors: Gerda van Assouw, Dorothy Marks, James Bryant, Matt Erickson, Rainey Taido, Glen Frankel, Jen Collins, Jennie Engstrom, Alex van Groningen, and many others who have generously shared their ideas and expertise. Special thanks and thanks to Jen Collins for contributing and incorporating the Maturity Model framework.

---

Empatheticmuseum.com/maturity-model

#EmpatheticMuseum | @EmpatheticMuse
1. Civic Vision
How the museum expresses empathy externally through its civic role.

Example.
Eastern State Penitentiary

Exhibit → Program → Overhaul

See:

- *Beyond Neutrality*, Sean Kelley’s post in CFM
- *Honoring Experience*, Janeen Bryant’s post on EmpatheticMuseum.com
2. Institutional Body Language
How the museum embodies empathy through staffing, policies, workplace culture and structure, etc.

Example. Harvard

Harvard University just got a $10 million grant to study Black poverty in Boston area. The dining hall staff are on strike for living wages.
3. Community Resonance
How the museum values, relates to, and serves its diverse communities.

Example.
Museums of Historic Hopkinsville

Fresh eyes → Community outreach & engagement → Exhibition & Programming redesign
4. Timeliness & Sustainability
How, why, and when the museum responds to community issues and events in a sustainable way.

Examples.
Superstorm Sandy
Ferguson

5. Performance Measures
How the museum measures success in empathetic practice.

Example.
Minnesota Historical Society – internal measurements of diversity and inclusion (D&I)
The Hard Work of Change

• Don’t want to minimize the work required

• Rubric runs risk of oversimplifying
  • Identify where you are on the rubric
  • Set priorities
  • Get buy-in
  • Implement change
  • Evaluate progress

• Museum-time: Takes time to get buy-in & manage the internal process of change

#EmpatheticMuseum | @EmpatheticMuse
The Limits of Language

• Pushing up on limit of language & new vocabulary

• Get comfortable with discomfort – Don’t let it stop you.

• Is the Rubric focused on White-dominant museums?
  - Not entirely; Focus is lack of cultural competency
  - Framework is flexible; able to be applied across institutions of varying sizes, missions, locales.
Applying the Rubric

1. Is there another way to look at or define this challenge?

2. Have you dealt with a similar challenge before? If so, what were the steps you took and what was the outcome?

3. What steps, strategies or leadership styles and approaches would you recommend?
Opportunities for Clarity

1. Personal Perspective, reflect for a minute.

2. What motivates you to do your work with empathy?

3. What is your background, and what’s your pivotal moment that turns you towards empathy?
Resources:

The Case for Empathy, The Curator

The Empathetic Museum Maturity Model
http://empatheticmuseum.com/maturity-model

Project Implicit (harvard-based)
https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html

Beyond Neutrality
http://futureofmuseums.blogspot.com/2016/08/beyond-neutrality.html

Honoring Experience
http://empatheticmuseum.weebly.com/updates/honoring-experience

MASS Action Resources & Toolkit
https://www.museumaction.org/resources/
What to Do with Our Article

If you are an Educator

you may find this portion of the article helpful:

P. 5 While some may equate “empathy” with ineffective or complacent responses (Lau et al. 2017) we reject empathy as weakness. Rather we foster a definition that holds individuals and institutions accountable for building awareness of and holding space for the deep-seated needs and experiences of their surrounding communities.

What to Do with Our Article

If you are a Development Officer

you may find this portion of the article helpful:

Pp 6-7: Analogous to personal body language, institutional body language (Jennings 2013) refers to the powerful messages museums convey through unspoken and unwritten manifestations of their being: the design of their building, the content of their advertising, the behavior of front line staff to visitors,...In the context of diversity and inclusion, museums’ body language often conveys the message that the museum is for the white, the wealthy, and the powerful (Dawson 2014; Gurian 2019).

What to Do with Our Article

If you are a Museum Trustee

you may find this portion of the article helpful:

P. 5. Museum neutrality is mostly invoked as a reason not to take on controversial exhibitions or topics. ...Museums have other concerns – fear of donor opinion, fear of controversy, the idea that “this is not our issue” (Wittman et al. 2015). For the Empathetic Museum group, this indifference is the ultimate example of a lack of empathy on an institutional level. Whether conscious or not, it says to African Americans and all people of color: We want you to visit, but your deepest concerns are not our own.

The Empathetic Museum: A New Institutional Identity
For more information about the Rubric or Workshops:

EmpatheticMuseum@gmail.com

www.EmpatheticMuseum.com