

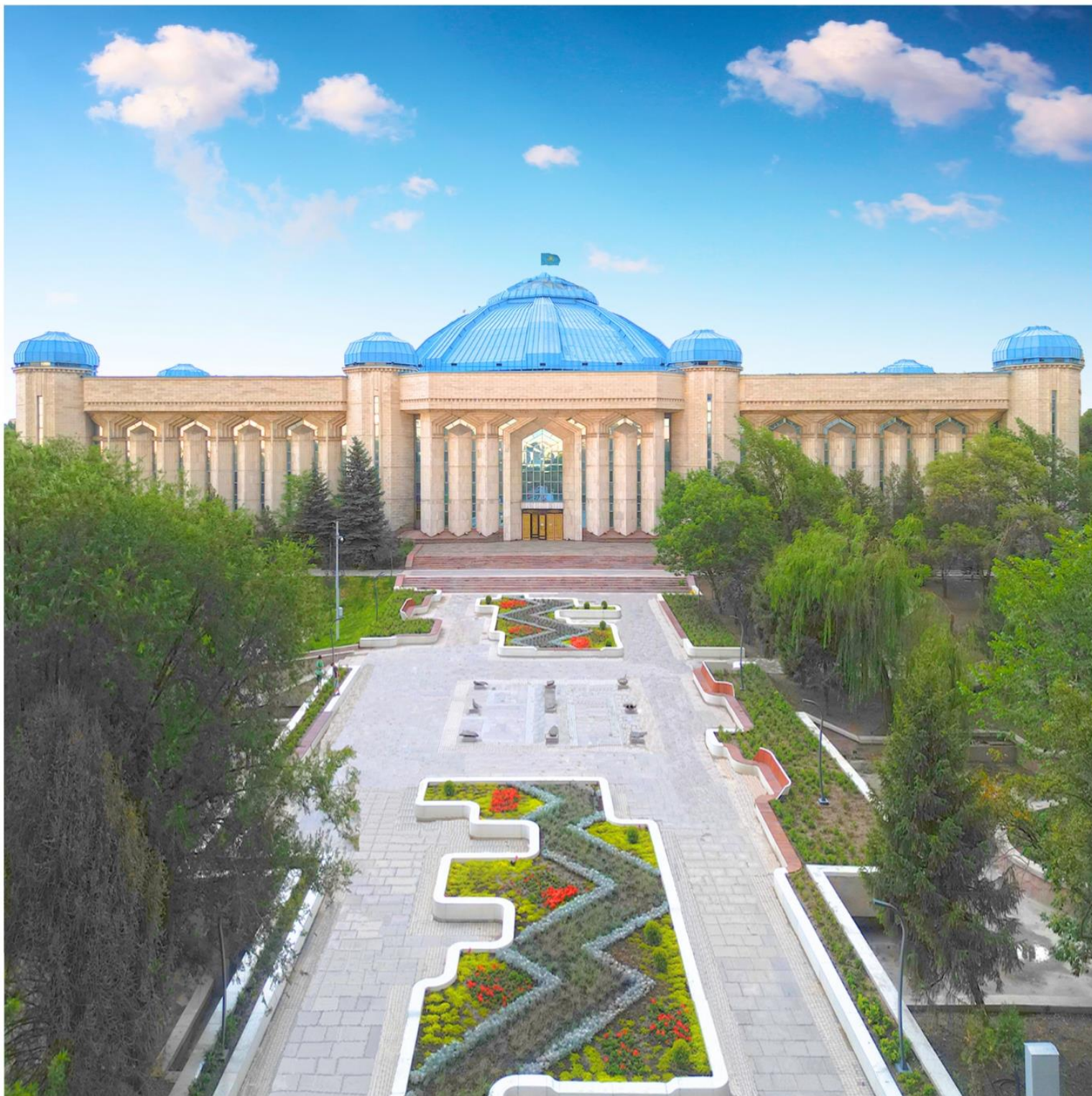
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EVOLVING MUSEUMS IN THE 21ST CENTURY: SHARED IDEAS*Jordana Pomeroy*

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Abstract. This paper explores how museums in North America have adapted to sweeping social, economic, and environmental changes in recent years. Using findings from a survey conducted in 2022 by the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD) and a survey conducted by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), this paper identifies key leadership priorities that may be relevant to museums worldwide. The author, Director of the Currier Museum of Art (CMA), a 100-year-old art museum in New England, lends ideas based on recent institutional strategic planning. The paper is intended to offer ideas based on some practices in North American museums and how such practices might be implemented through strategic planning, leadership recruitment, community wellness programming, and investment in infrastructure. The goal is to create cooperation among museums globally, sharing successful solutions to shared evolving challenges.

Materials and methods of the research. This paper draws upon data to present a picture of evolving museum practices in North America, particularly the United States. Core data sets include the AAMD Survey from 2022 conducted by ITHAKA S+R and the Annual Museum-Goers Data Survey conducted by the AAM. These surveys highlight shifts in strategy, leadership, and public engagement across a range of museum sizes and geographies.

In addition to secondary data analysis, the paper integrates insights from the Currier Museum of Art's current strategic planning initiatives (2025). These include internal planning documents, meeting strategic outcomes, community stakeholder surveys, and crisis management planning following a major facilities disruption in December 2024.

The methodology centers around thematic synthesis across six areas: governance and leadership, programming and interpretation, staffing and equity, digital readiness, marketing & communication, and financial strategy. Examples are analyzed not as prescriptive models but as adaptable strategies that can resonate across varied institutional and cultural contexts.

This approach acknowledges that museum ecosystems differ globally, not only in governance and funding structures but also in community expectations, regional history, and operational scale. The analysis is therefore deliberately comparative, aiming to translate practices across settings with sensitivity to local conditions.

Keywords: museum, Currier Museum of Art, COVID-19 pandemic, Museum management, Museum strategy.

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XXI ҒАСЫРДАҒЫ МУЗЕЙЛЕРДІҢ ДАМУЫ: ОРТАҚ ИДЕЯЛАР*Джордана Померой*

Кюрье өнер музейі, Манчестер, Нью-Хэмпшир (АҚШ)

Аңдатпа. Бұл мақалада Солтүстік Америкадағы музейлердің соңғы жылдардағы ауқымды әлеуметтік, экономикалық және экологиялық өзгерістерге қалай бейімделгені қарастырылған. 2022 жылы өнер музейі директорлары қауымдастығы (АӨМД) және Америкалық музей альянсы (АМА) жүргізген сауалнаманың нәтижелерін пайдалана отырып, бұл құжат дүние жүзіндегі музейлерге қатысты болуы мүмкін көшбасшылықтың негізгі басымдықтарын анықтайды. Автор, Кюрье өнер музейінің (КӨМ) директоры, 100 жыл бұрын құрылған Жаңа Англия өнер музейінің соңғы институционалдық стратегиялық жоспарлауға негізделген идеяларын ұсынады. Мақаланың мақсаты – Солтүстік Американың таңдаулы

музей тәжірибесінің тәжірибесіне негізделген идеяларды ұсыну және оларды стратегиялық жоспарлау, көшбасшылықты дамыту, қоғамдық әл-ауқат бағдарламаларын инфрақұрылымдық инвестициялар арқылы жүзеге асыру жолдарын ұсыну. Ондағы мақсат – дүние жүзіндегі музейлер арасындағы ынтымақтастықты дамыту және ортақ, дамып келе жатқан мәселелердің сәтті шешімдерімен бөлісу.

Зерттеу материалдары мен әдістері. Мақала авторы Солтүстік Америкадағы, әсіресе АҚШ-тағы музей тәжірибелерінің дамуын көрсету үшін деректерге сүйенеді. Негізгі дерек көздеріне 2022 жылы ITHAKA S+R компаниясымен жүргізілген AAMD сауалнамасы және жыл сайынғы музей келушілеріне арналған Америкалық музей альянсы (АМА) жүргізген сауалнамаларының деректері жатады. Сауалнама нәтижелері музейлердің стратегиясын, көшбасшылығы және қоғамдық қатысу салаларындағы өзгерістерді олардың орналасқан жеріне қарай көрсетеді.

Деректерді талдаудан бөлек, мақала Кьюрье өнер музейінің 2025 жылға арналған стратегиялық жоспарлау бастамаларынан алынған түсініктерді де қамтиды. Оған ішкі жоспарлау құжаттары, стратегиялық мақсаттарға жету жолдары, қауымдастық өкілдері арасында жүргізілген сауалнамалар және 2024 жылғы желтоқсандағы ірі нысандардағы апаттық жағдайдан кейінгі дағдарысты басқаруға арналған жоспарлар кіреді.

Әдістеме алты бағыт бойынша тақырыптық синтезге негізделген: басқару және көшбасшылық, бағдарламалау және интерпретация, кадрлық саясат пен әділеттілік, цифрлық дайындық, маркетинг пен коммуникация және қаржылық стратегия. Мысалдар нұсқаушы үлгілер ретінде емес, әртүрлі институционалдық және мәдени контексттерде резонанс тудыратын бейімделгіш стратегиялар ретінде талданады.

Бұл тәсіл музей экожүйелерін жаһандық деңгейде басқару мен қаржыландыру құрылымдарында ғана емес, сонымен қатар қауымдастықтың күтілетін нәтижелерге сәйкес, аймақтық тарихы және шығармашылық ауқымы бойынша да өзгеретінін мойындайды. Сондықтан талдау жергілікті жағдайларды ескере отырып, әртүрлі контексттер бойынша тәжірибелерді бейімдеуге бағытталған арнайы салыстырмалы болып табылады.

Тірек сөздер: музей, Кьюрье өнер музейі, COVID-19 пандемиясы, музей менеджменті, музей стратегиясы.

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РАЗВИТИЕ МУЗЕЕВ В XXI ВЕКЕ: ОБЩИЕ ИДЕИ

Джордана Померой

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Аннотация. В данной статье рассматривается, как музеи Северной Америки адаптировались к масштабным социальным, экономическим и экологическим изменениям последних лет. Используя результаты опроса, проведенного Ассоциацией директоров художественных музеев (АДХМ) в 2022 году, и опроса, проведенного Американским альянсом музеев (ААМ), в данной статье определяются ключевые приоритеты лидерства, которые могут быть актуальны для музеев по всему миру. Автор, директор Музея искусств Кьюрье (МИК), музея искусств в Новой Англии, основанного 100 лет назад, предлагает идеи, основанные на недавнем институциональном стратегическом планировании. Целью данной статьи является предложение идей, основанных на опыте некоторых практик североамериканских музеев, и способов их внедрения посредством стратегического планирования, подбора руководящих кадров, программ по улучшению общественного благосостояния и инвестиций в инфраструктуру. Целью является развитие сотрудничества между музеями по всему миру, обмен успешными решениями общих меняющихся проблем.

Материалы и методы исследования. В данной статье на основе данных представлена картина развития музейной практики в Северной Америке, в частности в

Соединенных Штатах. Основные наборы данных включают опрос AAMD 2022 года, проведенный ИТНАКА S+R, и ежегодный опрос посетителей музеев, проведенный ААМ. Эти опросы выявляют изменения в стратегии, руководстве и вовлечении общественности в музеях разных размеров и географических регионов.

Помимо анализа вторичных данных, в статье представлены выводы из текущих инициатив по стратегическому планированию Музея искусств Кюрье (2025 г.). К ним относятся внутренние плановые документы, достижение стратегических результатов, опросы заинтересованных сторон сообщества и планирование кризисного управления после серьезного сбоя в работе в декабре 2024 года.

Методология основана на тематическом синтезе по шести направлениям: управление и лидерство, программирование и интерпретация, кадровое обеспечение и равноправие, цифровая готовность, маркетинг и коммуникации, а также финансовая стратегия. Примеры анализируются не как предписывающие модели, а как адаптируемые стратегии, которые могут находить отклик в различных институциональных и культурных контекстах.

Этот подход учитывает, что музейные экосистемы различаются в глобальном масштабе не только по структурам управления и финансирования, но и по ожиданиям сообщества, региональной истории и масштабу деятельности. Поэтому анализ носит намеренно сравнительный характер, стремясь к адаптации практики в разных условиях с учетом местных условий.

Ключевые слова: музей, Музей искусств Кюрье, пандемия COVID-19, управление музеем, музейная стратегия.

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Introduction. Museums in Transition.

Museums today are dynamic hubs for community dialogue, learning, and engagement. In 2007, the writer and journalist Adam Gopnik wrote a foresighted article “The Mindful Museum,” in which he identifies museums as places that should be self-aware of their functions and embrace the idea of reinvention. Mindfulness in the context of a museum allows for institutional relevance where we “grasp human time as something that belongs to us, and as something that is outside us, at once social and, in a way, sacred”. [Gopnik, The Walrus, June 12, 2007]. The COVID-19 pandemic, along with our reliance on digital platforms, transformed how museums define their role, exploring new ways to reach audiences. In the U.S. the focus on social and racial equity motivated museum leaders to reassess their institutions’ roles in advancing inclusion. [Sweeney & Dressel, 2022: 5] Inclusion in museums has many complex facets that must be an ongoing aspect of strategic planning and operations. The Art Museum Director Survey [Sweeney & Dressel, 2022] captures this shift. Understanding how change has been managed elsewhere provides a toolkit that could be tailored to Kazakhstan’s specific institutional, economic, and cultural realities.

Results and discussion. Leadership in U.S. Museums.

Museum leadership in the U.S. takes many forms but assumes a typical hierarchy, with the Director at the top, supported by senior departmental staff and overseen by a fiduciary board. The board has financial oversight of the museum, monitoring the institution’s investments, approving budgets, and garnering financial contributions. Some museums divide directorial responsibility between a Director and Chief Executive Officer, with the former leading the artistic vision of the museum and the latter steering the museum’s economic sustainability. Large-budget museums often work with executive search firms to appoint directors. These recruiters are customarily paid a percentage of the selected director’s first year salary for identifying leaders with experience in fundraising, change management, DEAI (diversity, equity, accessibility, inclusion), and community engagement. Recruiting processes can take more than a year and involve multiple interviews with trustees, museum leaders, and community members. Recruiters work with a museum’s search committee to develop a position summary and candidate profile defining key priorities and desired outcomes for a new leader, an array of expertise in different areas of leadership, demonstrated track

records of fundraising and successful management, and subject matter expertise. Small to mid-size museums recruit through channels such as the AAM's online and offline publications. [Wilkening, 2024]. In recent years, museums have expanded opportunities to advance underrepresented groups, as well as that whose background and community knowledge lend value to the institution. Burnout and appropriate compensation challenge U.S. institutions, as do the high demands placed on museum directors for operational fundraising and public relations. [Sweeney & Dressel, 2022: 10]

Building Digital Capacity

Post-Covid, U.S. museums emphasize adaptability and digital readiness. Digital engagement was a lifeline during the pandemic. U.S. museums broadened access through virtual tours, online exhibitions, and open educational resources. By prioritizing mobile platforms, training staff in media production, and partnering with educational networks, U.S. museums have expanded their reach globally. For its new app, the CMA turned to Bloomberg Philanthropies which aims to broaden access to art and cultural institutions worldwide. Bloomberg offers online training and guidance, in addition to marketing support, as part of its philanthropic efforts to create a global art and culture network (figure 1).



(Figure 1). Using the Bloomberg App. (Photograph by Jordana Pomeroy)

Equity as a Strategic Commitment

Equity in art museums extends far beyond hiring practices or the diversification of collections. To be equitable, a museum must reflect its community by thinking laterally across staffing, governance, programming, visitor experience, and community partnerships. In recent years, many U.S. art museums have begun to implement DEAI as a core strategic priority. Rather than relegating equity to a single department or role, they are integrating it into hiring and retention policies, board recruitment, exhibition planning, label writing, and audience outreach. For example, transparent pay structures and salary bands promote internal equity but also draw attention. Museum boards, historically unrepresentative of their public, are increasingly setting term limits, revising nominating processes, and actively recruiting trustees who reflect a wider range of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. Some museums have exhibited an openness to reinterpret collections through multiple lenses. This might involve multilingual interpretative materials or partnering with artists and scholars whose perspectives challenge traditional narratives. Canada's Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) has distinguished itself among peer institutions by shifting from a Eurocentric focus to one that charts "a new path for how museums in Canada can engage even more meaningfully with Indigenous communities." [Royal Ontario Museum, 2019: 11].

Rethinking Public Engagement

A survey conducted in 2024 under the umbrella of the AAM paints a complex picture of how museum visitors perceive the connection between museums and community. While professionals frequently emphasize community impact, most visitors do not explicitly associate museums with their local community experience. [Wilkening, Museums and Community Perceptions and Engagement, 2024]. Only 18% of respondents said they went to a museum to feel connected to the community. 17% of respondents chose community connection as part of an ideal museum visit. Those who did see a museum as reflective of their interests, identity or concerns were motivated to engage with them. Some visitors praised institutions for their community contributions while others emphasized museums as spaces of escape, removed from the demands of everyday life. The CMA has two residents from the 1950's designed by American architect Frank Lloyd Wright, which are nestled in a residential neighborhood near the museum. These houses are open to visitors and serve as examples of immersive architectural experiences that connect design, history and place (figure 2).



(Figure 2). Garden room, Dr. and Mrs. Zimmerman House, Manchester, New Hampshire, 1951.
(Photograph by Jordana Pomeroy)

Such divergent expectations underscore the need to clearly communicate the goals and social impact of programming, especially when it addresses contemporary community concerns. Respondents called for exhibitions on topical issues, pointing to a desire for institutional relevance alongside intellectual or aesthetic enrichment.

Those who saw museums as vital community hubs were significantly more enthusiastic overall. Their engagement extended beyond simple visitation into deeper forms of participation and advocacy. They were also more likely to support imaginative learning initiatives and value inclusive narratives - patterns that strengthen a museum's civic and educational presence. [Wilkening, Museums and Community Perceptions and Engagement, 2024].

Museums and Public Well-Being

In the American context, "wellness" refers to a holistic approach to emotional well-being. Wellness programs - common in workplaces, museums, and community organizations - offer activities like meditation, art therapy, fitness, and stress management to promote prevention, resilience, and self-care. Rooted in the idea that quality of mental health improves the quality of life overall, museums are increasingly taking the lead in developing programs around data showing how art complements medical treatment. In 2018, Canadian physicians began prescribing visits to

patients who suffered from physical and mental health problems. The pioneering program represented a collaboration between Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA) and a medical association for Francophone physicians (figure 3). [Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, MMFA-MFdc Museum Prescriptions, 2018].



(Figure 3). Université de Montréal medical students in training at the MMFA.
(Photograph by Michael Patten)

The CMA demonstrates how wellness programming can deepen community trust. Programs such as supporting individuals affected by memory loss, cancer, addiction, and disability recast museums as civic resources.

The CMA has been an innovator in using art to support health, wellness, and social inclusion. Drawing from its longstanding commitment to community engagement, the museum has developed a comprehensive set of programs around the idea of wellness that address the needs of people facing physical, emotional, or social challenges. These initiatives reflect a pioneering museum model where cultural participation and public well-being are deeply intertwined (figure 4).



(Figure 4). Drawing classes in the galleries of the CMA. (Photograph by Jordana Pomeroy)

The Currier's Wellness Programs include:

- Art for Vets for war veterans experiencing forms of post-traumatic stress disorder;
- Art of Hope for individuals and families impacted by substance use disorder;
- Expressions Through Art for people affected by cancer and their care partners;
- Memory Café for individuals experiencing memory loss and their loved ones;
- Making Art Accessible and Accessible Open Studio for adults with developmental disabilities.

These programs are year-round, run by instructors who emphasize art's therapeutic power to reduce isolation and promote emotional well-being.

Strategic Planning as an Ongoing Practice

The CMA's planning process, which incorporates staff, trustees, and external consultants, illustrates the benefits of strategic planning. By using community surveys and defining success in public-facing terms such as access, engagement, and financial resilience, the CMA has created a plan that will guide all work of the museum for the next 3-5 years.

In December 2024, the CMA confronted an unexpected flood which necessitated both physical and financial reassessments. This disruption catalyzed deeper analysis into budget structures and endowment sustainability, an exercise that clarified the museum's long-term resource needs and operational vulnerabilities. In response, the museum developed a multi-phase financial stabilization and strategic planning initiative, which includes:

Establishing reserve funds to mitigate infrastructure risk.

Launching a campaign based on naming parts of the museum and endowing key staff positions.

Implementing a zero-based budget review, a process in which every expense must be justified anew each year

This initiative was further developed and broadened during a strategic retreat in May 2025. Facilitated by an external consultant, the retreat brought together trustees and senior staff to draft new mission and vision statements for the museum. Participants engaged in structured exercises to align the museum's strategic priorities around its identity, asking the questions "whom do we serve" and "who knows about the work we do?" Surveys from staff, trustees, and 50 community stakeholders shaped the process. Institutions can benefit from comparable planning frameworks that integrate community voice, clarify institutional identity, and align financial and programmatic priorities. These approaches support the development of organic strategic plans that evolve with context, rather than remaining static or prescriptive.

Conclusion. North American museums are adapting to a rapidly shifting world to stay relevant and operational. While institutional contexts vary widely around the world, many of the principles outlined in this paper are broadly applicable.

Key ideas include:

Strategic planning is most effective when it is iterative, community-informed, and aligned with mission clarity. Institutions benefit from planning frameworks that adapt to changing realities rather than remain static or ceremonial.

Leadership recruitment must go beyond subject-matter expertise to include fundraising acumen, community engagement, and change management. These are increasingly essential leadership traits in museums worldwide.

Equity principles have moved from the margins to the center of museum strategy. Museums that reflect the identities and needs of their communities build trust and long-term relevance.

Attention to the digital infrastructure is no longer optional. Modest investments in websites, apps, and social media yield exponential impact.

Wellness programs demonstrate how museums can contribute to public health, emotional resilience, and social cohesion. These initiatives expand the civic role of the museum.

Finally, financial resilience is paramount. The CMA's post-crisis response (figure 5) offers a useful model for institutional sustainability.

Museum professionals globally may adapt strategies outlined in this article. The international exchange of ideas, experiences, and creative approaches can help museums thrive and better serve their missions.



(Figure 5). Mark di Suvero (b. 1933), *Origins*, 2004 in the CMA's entrance court.
(Photograph by Jordana Pomeroy)

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