



Rethinking the Public Role of Museums

A Report on Year One of the ACME Initiative at the Utah Museum of Fine Arts

Independent research and assessment by:
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Executive Summary

In January 2016, the Utah Museum of Fine Arts (UMFA) at the University of Utah launched the ACME Initiative. Encompassing three programmatic elements operating at the intersections of art, community, museums, and education (ACME), the Initiative is intended to expand traditionally defined roles of art museums within cities and institutions of higher learning. Specifically, the UMFA aims to embrace its position as an important member of civil society with a valuable role to play in the economic, political, social, and cultural life of its surrounding communities, and to advance its mission to inspire critical dialogue by illuminating the role art plays in our everyday lives.

ACME consists of three interconnected efforts:

ACME Lab

A physical space within the Museum dedicated to exhibitions that are experimental, interactive, exploratory, and that promote Museum-community collaboration.

ACME Scholars

A partnership with the University of Utah's Honors College, in which undergraduate students work with the UMFA to better engage, learn from, and collaborate with campus and local communities.

ACME Sessions

A series of public meet-ups where participants can imagine and articulate new models of education and community engagement through hands-on activities and dialogue. ACME Sessions are hosted bimonthly at various branches of the Salt Lake City Public Library and bring together creative, inventive, and cross-disciplinary minds to explore relevant topics and issues within society.

ACME Research Project

The UMFA engaged an external researcher to assess the first year of the ACME Initiative and to synthesize lessons learned from the communities that participated. This research focused exclusively on the ACME Sessions, the first of the three-part initiative to be implemented. Data for the report was collected and compiled from multiple sources, including interviews and focus groups, surveys, notes and videos taken during ACME Sessions, and related documents such as grant applications and PR materials.

Findings

Part 1: Learning from Communities:

ACME Sessions were designed to foster critical conversations among community members from across the city. Overarching themes that emerged from these conversations included:

- The value of opportunities to meet, engage in dialogue, and collaborate with new people, particularly across lines of difference;

- Concerns related to equity, opportunity, and social justice, and the role of the arts and museums in healing and social change; and
- How museums and other institutions can become more welcoming, accessible, participatory, and relevant.

Part 2: Impact & Engagement:

This study inquired into the impact of the ACME Sessions on participants, partners, and the museum itself, as well as the challenges and tensions that arose in the work.

- Session participants were more diverse and inclusive across race, gender identity, ethnicity, age, and neighborhood than the Museum's traditional audience.
- ACME Sessions catalyzed opportunities for attendees to meet and network with new people and build community.
- Hosting the ACME Sessions in public libraries—venues away from the Museum—helped facilitate a welcoming environment and dismantle real and perceived barriers to accessing the Museum.
- ACME Sessions succeeded in serving as catalysts for conversation, but some attendees were left wanting even more in-depth and ongoing opportunities for dialogue and engagement around session topics.
- Partnering organizations conveyed appreciation for the shared distribution of authority across ACME Sessions, with the UMFA serving as facilitator and convener, and partners serving as programmers, allowing for deeper impact on their own work.
- New relationships forged among ACME Session partners, the UMFA, and the Salt Lake City Public Library have helped

increase the overall density of networks among individuals and institutions working in the realms of community, education, and the arts, and have increased the Museum's network of collaborating organizations.

- In some ways ACME is countercultural to the traditional functioning of the Museum, which has wrestled with tensions related to the experimental and decentralized aspects of the Initiative.

Conclusions and Recommendations

While the data are limited in terms of assessing the full impact and experience of ACME Sessions, they offer a range of perspectives and point to potential benefits, which future research could investigate in a more targeted way.

Promising areas of growth and evolution include:

- Broadening partner recruitment and exploring other ways to bring UMFA into partnership with communities
- Supporting collaboration among ACME Session leaders and Session follow-up
- Making thoughtful links between all components of the ACME Initiative, as well as other facets of the Museum

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Introduction

This report tells a story about what it looks like to start a new community engagement initiative in a well-established institution. The following comprises findings based on external, independent research and assessment conducted during the first year (2016-2017) of the ACME Initiative.

In January 2016, the Utah Museum of Fine Arts at the University of Utah temporarily closed its doors. For over nineteen months, crews worked to remodel the building and install a state-of-the-art “vapor barrier” in the walls to better protect the Museum’s collection. But this did not mean the Museum stopped its work. In addition to continuing its statewide educational outreach and family programs, the UMFA launched new initiatives to advance its mission in other spaces and communities.

One of these was the ACME Initiative, an effort to “rethink the public role of the Museum.” The Initiative would come to encompass multiple efforts, including the ACME Lab—an experimental space within the Museum—and the ACME Scholars, an undergraduate student leadership program. But it began, during closure, with the ACME Sessions bimonthly events that brought together teams of artists, educators, cultural workers, activists, youth, scholars, and others at public library branches across Salt Lake City.

ACME Sessions were conceived as a way to use the closure as an opportunity to engage with and learn from the UMFA’s surrounding communities outside the Museum walls. Each event had its own character, and each focused on a topic at the intersection of art, community, museums, and education.

This report documents what took place, and what was learned, during year one of the ACME Initiative. It is designed to inform the evolution of the ACME Sessions, the ACME Initiative, and the Museum’s other community engagement and partnership efforts. At the same time, this report seeks to inform larger discussions that are taking place across the museum sector about the evolving missions, roles, and public responsibilities of museums.

The Changing Face of Museums

Museums are in the midst of a massive, decades-long shift in mission and role. Once focused mainly on the preservation and study of artifacts, museums have increasingly emphasized public-facing missions, using their special competencies and resources to advance social goals such as education and community well-being.¹ Museums, many

¹ Weil, S. E. (1999). *From being about something to being for somebody: The ongoing transformation of the American museum*. *Daedalus*, 128(3), 229–258.

have come to recognize, are important members of civil society with valuable roles to play in the economic, political, social, and cultural life of surrounding communities.²

For campus-based museums like the UMFA, this shift has dovetailed with a similar evolution in the role of higher education institutions, which are rededicating themselves to playing key roles in addressing broad social needs and improving quality of life in the broader community.³

Meanwhile, museums have been working to shed exclusionary and elitist sensibilities, and to engage more fully with the diversity of our communities. Art museums, for example, face ongoing calls for increasing the inclusion of artists and curators from groups that are unrepresented or misrepresented in the art world, and to engage communities meaningfully in exhibitions meant to represent them. As the country has become more racially and ethnically diverse, and more economically divided, museum visitors have remained mainly white and middle class.⁴ This, along with other pressures on museum funding and legitimacy, has led museums to seek ways of engaging a more diverse spectrum of communities.

This dynamic context has led to a wide array of efforts by museums to do things differently. Among the leading movements within the museum world are efforts to increase:

1. **Relevance:** Museums, seeing that they are attracting a narrow slice of the U.S. public, are working to become more “relevant” to more communities. While some efforts have been very superficial, making weak links between existing offerings and specific cultural communities, others have sought to rethink how museums function in order to invite new audiences in on their own terms.⁵
2. **Participation:** As many culture watchers have noted, the last couple of decades have seen a shift in how people—especially young people—are engaging with art and media, from being consumers to being co-creators. Museums have sought to engage this trend by becoming more visitor-centered, offering opportunities for audiences to be involved in creation, design, and meaning making.⁶
3. **Partnerships:** In focusing on their public role, many museums have recognized that they cannot do this work alone. Building partnerships with schools, community organizations, governmental institutions, activist and advocacy groups, local leaders, and others opens up opportunities for museums to both address pressing social issues and learn how to become more relevant and valuable for those outside the traditional museum demographics.⁷

²Karp, I., Kreamer, C. M., & Levine, S. (Eds.). (2013). *Museums and communities: The politics of public culture*. Smithsonian Institution.

³Shapiro, T., Linett, P., Farrell, B., & Anderson, W. (2012). *Campus art museums in the 21st century: A conversation*. Cultural Policy Center at the University of Chicago.

⁴Center for the Future of Museums. (2008). *Museums and Society 2034: Trends and Potential Futures*. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums.

⁵Simon, N. (2016). *The art of relevance*. Museum 2.0.

⁶Simon, N. (2010). *The participatory museum*. Museum 2.0.

⁷Zien, J. (1995). Strategies for long-term community partnerships. *Journal of Museum Education*, 20(2), 17-21.

UMFA and the ACME Initiative

It was in this context, and informed by these movements, that the UMFA launched its ACME Initiative. Located at the University of Utah, the UMFA plays a dual role as a campus and state art museum. The Museum is woven into the academic and social fabric of the University, while its education and outreach efforts spread across Utah. Its collection of almost 20,000 works represents cultures from around the world and throughout history.

Jorge Rojas, Director of Learning and Engagement, joined the staff of the UMFA not long before the 2016 renovations began. A long-time artist, educator, and community activist, Jorge proposed that the closure offered an opportunity to be more present in the Museum's surrounding communities. As he told it,

"You have an opportunity that hardly anybody ever does. It's time for you to go into cocoon mode. By that, I mean it's time to rethink what you do, how you do it, and who you do it for. Then you will come out as something different at the end of it. I think the best way to do that is by proactively going out and connecting with those communities that you want to engage with. Shift away from being all-knowing, and create opportunities to connect with other people who can help you think about what you are and what you do."

With support from colleagues, and from UMFA Director Gretchen Dietrich, Jorge pieced together a vision for what would come to be called the ACME Initiative. ACME stands for Art, Community, Museum, and Education, the four central themes of the Initiative. At the same time, as Jorge explained, the word *acme* refers to "the peak of something, the highest level of something, something to strive for, something to attain," capturing the aspirational and change-oriented nature of the effort. In addition, the name ACME is a nod to the company that manufactured Wile E. Coyote's gadgets in the old Road Runner cartoon. This reference infuses the initiative with the ideas of experimentation, playfulness, and the risk and reward that come with potential failure.

The ACME Initiative is made up of three interconnected efforts. **The ACME Lab** is a physical space within the Museum dedicated to exhibitions that are experimental, interactive, and exploratory, and that promote museum-community collaboration. **ACME Scholars** is a partnership with the University of Utah's Honors College, in which undergraduate students work with the UMFA to better engage, learn from, and collaborate with campus and local communities. Both ACME Lab and ACME Scholars were launched in the fall of 2017 as the Museum reopened.

This report looks at the first year of ACME, during the Museum's closure, when the main

focus of the Initiative was the ACME Sessions. The Museum described the mission of the sessions this way:

Transporting the UMFA into the community, ACME Sessions are a series of public meet-ups where participants can imagine and articulate new models of education and community engagement through hands-on activities and dialogue. Bimonthly sessions are held at Salt Lake City Public Library branches and bring together Salt Lake City's most creative, inventive, and cross-disciplinary minds to explore relevant topics and issues within society.

Jorge reached out to the Salt Lake City Public Library system to be the main partner in this effort. As Tommy Hamby, Adult Services Coordinator for the library system, explained, library administrators and staff were “totally on board.”

“The mission of the City Library is to be a dynamic civic resource that promotes free and open access to information and encourages the exchange of ideas. So it fit into our mission exactly, because the way ACME was set up was to be an engaged community dialogue and a creative force more than just sitting around talking or being lectured to. It was not only a good opportunity for our community, but good relationship building for the Library and the Museum.”

Each session would be led by a team of community partners, with support from UMFA and Library staff. Session leaders would choose which Library location they wanted to use and would receive funds from the Museum to pay presenters and facilitators. The Museum would offer guidance and resources, but leave room for partners to take the lead. Each session would have its own topic, style, approach, goals, and target audience. Jorge began the process by personally reaching out to potential Session leaders.

Goals of the ACME Sessions

While the basic structure of the ACME Sessions is a simple one—bring together partners around a topic and support them in running a community event—the theory of change behind them is more complex. Those involved in the design and implementation of the session—UMFA staff, partners, facilitators, funders—shared a number of different ideas about how the sessions could impact Salt Lake City communities, session partners, and the Museum itself.

As Museum staff explained, the ACME Sessions were meant to directly advance the UMFA's mission “to inspire critical dialogue and illuminate the role of art in our lives.” They were also an effort to fulfill the Museum's responsibility to be of value to *all* communities, including communities who have historically been denied access to educational and

cultural resources due to factors such as poverty, race, ethnicity, ability, or gender identity.

In terms of community impact, the sessions were an effort to spark community conversations around issues relevant to residents through the lens of art and creativity. The UMFA took on the role of “convener”—of people, organizations, and ideas—and by fostering dialogue sought to catalyze new connections, conversations, and actions. The sessions were also a chance to educate about and explore how the arts can be relevant to addressing important social issues, building communities, and enriching people’s lives.

In terms of partners, the Museum aimed to provide a platform and resources for the artists, creative individuals, and nonprofit and community groups who led the sessions to advance their own missions. It was a way to “forge new community connections,” find more impactful ways of collaborating with partners, and raise awareness of the many cultural resources that partners offered.

In terms of the Museum itself, the sessions were an opportunity to learn from and with local communities. The Museum hoped to learn more about the interests, concerns, passions, and strengths of communities, and about what roles the Museum might play in supporting community priorities. The sessions were an opportunity for experimentation, a way to disrupt the Museum’s normal way of doing things and to foster innovation. The UMFA also looked to the sessions to help change how people view the Museum—creating a sense of welcoming and positive associations for people who find art museums to be alienating or inaccessible—and to maintain the Museum’s presence in the community while it was closed.

ACME Sessions: Year 1

Session 1: Museums, What Are They Good For?

The first ACME Session, which took place at the Main Library in downtown Salt Lake City, brought together the directors of the UMFA, the Natural History Museum of Utah, the Leonardo, and the Utah Museum of Contemporary Art. Jorge facilitated the session, which featured presentations from each director on their institution’s efforts to be more inclusive, more engaging of diverse communities, and more impactful on social concerns. These were followed by small group discussions with each director.

Session 2: What’s Hip-Hop Got To Do With Education?

The second session took place at the Glendale Branch Library. It explored how learning takes place in hip-hop culture, and how hip-hop art and culture can inform educational practices in our K-12 schools. Facilitators included individuals from the B-Boy Federation dance group; Truth Cypher, a local group of writers and storytellers; Mestizo Institute of Culture and Arts; Artes de México en Utah; and University Neighborhood Partners at the University of Utah.

Session 3: Take It Or Make It: How To Build a Creative Community

The third session, held at the Marmalade Branch Library, targeted “art makers, educators, creative collaborators—anyone committed to ensuring community-wide access to art.” The session engaged participants in art making and explored how to increase arts opportunities “reflecting our diverse heritage, traditions, and history.” The session was facilitated by local artists and arts educators, including individuals from Framework Arts, a local arts education nonprofit, the Salt Lake City Arts Council, and the University of Utah.

Session 4: Got Vision? How Can Art And Imagination Strengthen Community?

The fourth session, back at the Glendale Branch Library, was an explicitly family-oriented event. It was facilitated by a team of community artists and educators, some affiliated with the University of Utah’s College of Fine Arts, and was designed to engage participants in art making and to explore Glendale community members’ interest in free local arts programming.

Session 5: Understanding Transgender: Identity, Art, & Politics

The fifth ACME Session, held at the Main Branch Library, focused on transgender identity, experience, and artistic portrayals. Session leaders all hailed from the University of Utah, including representatives of the LGBT Resource Center, the Gender Studies Program, the Department of Writing and Rhetoric Studies, and the UMFA. Presentations, small group discussions, and an art activity challenged participants to explore their own experiences of gender, as well as the broader social and political context.

Session 6: Community Dance Mash-up

The sixth session, held at the Marmalade Library, offered an interactive dance program that melded diverse dance forms as an entry point into discussing the cultural importance of dance and promoting cross-cultural understanding. The session was led by dance educators from the Repertory Dance Theater, Tablado Dance Company, ChitraKaavya Dance Academy, Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company, and the Tanner Dance Program, as well as a group from the Lil’ Feathers Title 6 Parent Committee.

Session 7: Envisioning Our Futures Community Dinner

The final session under study here took place at the Glendale Branch Library. The Session was run by youth and staff from Salt Lake City youth media organization SpyHop, as part of a national effort called the 50 State Dinner Party Project. Participants engaged in conversations and creative activities, exploring the question, “What are our desired futures?” with the goal of catalyzing “creative, collective action.”

The Research Project | Methodology

This report shares findings from a two-part research project funded by the UMFA. The first part looks at the ACME Sessions themselves as a form of community research—a collaborative process of learning with and from local communities about their desires, priorities, commitments, values, and current efforts. Findings from this part of the study are outlined in the section *Learning from Communities*. The research questions for this part of the study are:

- What are the themes or “big ideas” that emerged from the sessions?
- What did the sessions illuminate about the principles, approaches, goals, possibilities, and challenges of arts-based community engagement and education?

The second part of the study is a formative evaluation of the ACME Sessions as a community engagement initiative. Findings from this part of the study are included in the section, *Evaluating the ACME Initiative*. The research questions for this part of the study are:

- What was achieved through the ACME Sessions?
- In what ways did the initiative meet or fall short of its stated goals?
- How did the initiative evolve over time and why?
- What were the key tensions or challenges to implementation?

Data for these two studies included:

- Interviews and focus groups with fifteen session leaders, four participants who attended multiple sessions, two partners who supported the initiative as a whole, and ten UMFA staff members;
- A survey sent to session participants;
- Notes and videos taken during sessions by UMFA staff members; and
- Documents related to the ACME Sessions, including grant applications and PR materials.

The survey was sent to 74 people whose contact information was collected by the Museum at the sessions. The survey had a 20% response rate. Survey findings are not meant to be representative of all participants. They do, however, include participants from all seven sessions. While this data is limited in terms of assessing the full impact and experience of ACME Sessions, it offers a range of perspectives and points to potential benefits of the sessions, which could be looked into in a more targeted way through future research. In order to avoid the impression of representative sampling, exact numbers and percentages are avoided throughout most of the report.

Learning from Communities

The ACME Sessions were launched with the hope of learning with and from the Museum's surrounding communities. What do communities care about? What do they want for the future? What are their concerns? What role can the Museum play in addressing them? Sessions were designed to ask questions like this and to elicit dialogue through multiple media.

This section offers a synthesis of overarching themes from session discussions and activities. Because sessions differed widely in terms of styles, agendas, goals, and art forms, this high-level synthesis cannot do justice here to all the nuanced interactions that took place. However, it can give a sense of the "big issues" that arose repeatedly and how these might inform the Museum's activities inside and outside of Museum walls.



Figure 1: Word Cloud based on notes from all seven Sessions

Bridging & Building Communities

One theme that arose in discussions across almost all sessions was that there is value and joy in opportunities to meet, dialogue, and collaborate with new people, particularly across lines of difference. For many, this was one of the main values of attending an ACME Session. As one participant put it, "It's nice to work with a total stranger and it's fun to work together to make something!" Many adults, for example, expressed enjoyment about being part of a multigenerational session that included young people. As one participant explained:

"To be in a place like this where there are kids and there is food and to sit down and talk to them...It's easy to just see chaos on TV or social media, but when you sit down with one individual and talk to them, you meet a little boy who wants to be a lawyer to crush racism and sexism. That human kindness is there. If you can sit down across from a person and just talk to them, you're going to find connections."

Chances to learn from one another and collaborate like this, people said, can be rare. There are so many forces that divide us—from systemic discrimination and oppression, to the siloed structures of institutions, to our own assumptions and fears. Spaces that are welcoming and feel safe to some can be alienating and silencing for others. **Too often we don't see ourselves in others or recognize the talents and power others bring to the table.** For example, in the session *Understanding Transgender*, one of the leaders explained that as a society we have decided that the transgender experience is “impossible to relate to... we're all un-understandable, un-identifiable, and a little perverse.”

During sessions, participants called for an increase in empathy and selflessness, and a greater understanding of the perspectives of others. As one of the younger participants explained:

“I feel like for a long time there will still be people fighting and angry, but if people think about their actions and others, they could change it. If I say something and didn't even mean it, it still might mean something to someone else. I feel like, for everybody, not just your generation or my generation, for the next four to eight years people are going to be mad at everybody and separated because people are mostly like ‘good’ or ‘bad.’ But if you just listen you might understand what they're saying.”

Engagement with the arts, some leaders and participants noted, can serve as a model for compassion, empathy, and community building in ways that are somewhat counter-cultural. This was a central topic in the session *Community Dance Mashup*, where one person explained, “Dance is like medicine in an age when ‘the other’ can be scary.” Another session leader involved with a Navajo dance demonstration explained, “At a Pow Wow everyone is together, from different families and different communities, but we all respect each other.” Still others noted that sharing arts across cultures can allow people to see connections where they thought there was only difference—for example, one participant noted that the dances from Spain and India being demonstrated at the session were similar enough to be “sisters.”

Alongside the joy of finding new connections across difference, session leaders and participants explained, there must also be a willingness to engage in critical dialogue about difficult and contested topics. This was a major topic in the session *Understanding Transgender*, where people challenged one another not to gloss over questions of power, identity, oppression, and history. As one person put it, “We have to get over the myth that these topics are comfortable to discuss. They are never comfortable.

Comfortability is never the goal.” Participants and leaders across sessions called for critical education and dialogue, noting the importance of addressing the intersectionality of oppressions, respecting diverse perspectives, being unafraid of “taboo” areas, bringing a brave and critical focus on the truth, and helping develop critical thinkers who can question their own assumptions and those of others.

Some participants discussed ways of increasing dialogue and community building in other spaces, such as classrooms or as part of political action. One participant said this is an arena where museums have an important role to play: “Museums are about ideas, experiences, and learning about our potential as humans living in a community together!”

Access, Equity, & Justice

Themes related to access, equity, and social justice emerged very strongly in the ACME Sessions. When participants were asked to share their hopes and dreams for themselves and their communities—a major focus of the *Got Vision?* and *Envisioning our Futures* sessions—they spoke of a range of individual and community needs, including:

- Equal life opportunities for all;
- Recognition for the experiences and perspectives of oppressed groups;
- Access to healthcare and education;
- Access to the arts;
- Gender equity in pay;
- Solutions for homelessness; and
- Environmental stewardship.

Many participants took the opportunity to share personal experiences of pain and oppression in their lives, and in the lives of those around them. They spoke of hate crimes, gender and sexual violence, and discrimination related to race, gender, sexuality, ability, class, etc.



Participants pointed to a range of ways that arts practices can play a role in addressing pain and violence and advancing social justice. One participant suggested that, “We need a place for people to express anger and everyday pain that will offer belief and hope.” The arts, some noted, often arise from experiences of pain. As one person put it, “The art form of dance from so many different cultures comes very much from pain—the telling of sorrowful stories.” Another participant expressed an interest in making “art and films that help people or help a cause.” Still others spoke about the sense of capacity and power that comes from taking action on issues you care about, and how that energy can infuse other parts of people’s lives.

Participants also expressed desires for access to opportunities to advance their own learning, professional development, and self-actualization. As one person explained:

“My hopes for myself are I want to be able to do what I like and have the opportunity to gain the knowledge I want. I want to be able to go down my own path and make my own decisions without having to fear for my own safety and my own well-being.”

At one session, participants discussed how museums and other large arts institutions could play a role in this by opening up more internship and professional development opportunities for local residents, who often don’t have access to such opportunities.

Transforming Arts Institutions

At times, dialogue turned toward museums and other arts institutions, including but not limited to the UMFA. Participants had a lot to say about what makes an arts institution accessible (or inaccessible) to their communities.

Some issues were structural. For example, participants discussed the need to have lactation rooms and changing tables for parents, and to ensure that everything is accessible to individuals with disabilities. Participants shared the importance of clear, multilingual, and welcoming signage, as well as rules that allow people to use a bathroom that aligns with their gender identity. There was a clear message that both cost and transportation are key barriers for potential visitors, and that institutions need to think about solutions, such as offering free programming and partnering with local mass transit.

Other issues had more to do with the people working in arts institutions, and how they could engage visitors in more welcoming ways, e.g., smiling, being open to questions, being bilingual. One discussion centered around museum guards, who people sometimes found “intimidating” or “threatening.” Participants asked how guards could be presented in less intimidating ways and how they could be seen more as resources for visitors—perhaps being trained to impart knowledge to visitors similar to the way docents do.

These interpersonal issues were linked to a larger issue: museums and other institutions (like libraries) often extend a feeling of top-down authority and expertise. Participants explained that visitors can be afraid to ask questions or admit they do not know things. Visitors may be unsure how to behave appropriately or wonder if they are dressed correctly. Institutions have built up a set of norms and practices that seem normal to some but intimidating to many others. As an example, one participant asked, “How do we arrive at these conclusions that we have to be quiet in a museum or in a library?” More fundamentally, museums are not isolated from larger cultural forces and systems that foster marginalization and dis-belonging.

Ideas for how to shift these dynamics in museums and other arts organizations and institutions included:

Participation

Opportunities for people to participate, create, dialogue, and collaborate; more hands-on programming, accessible to people of all abilities; art you can take with you; encouragement for those who are hesitant or tentative about jumping in; a bigger role for the public in exhibition design and interpretation.

Recognizing Multiple Forms of Expertise

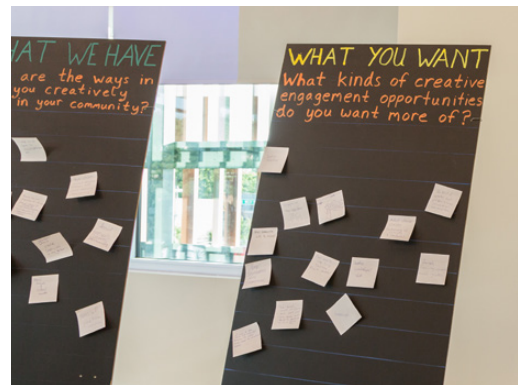
Getting out of the “old model” in which the museum is the expert delivering knowledge; changing the idea of what knowledge is; two-way or distributed teaching and learning.

Relevance & Voice

Be more nimble in order to engage in timely programming; quick response teams working with artists “on the fly” to address changing contexts; community advisory committees informing the Museum of public interests; center voices of marginalized groups, e.g., communities of color, low wealth communities, indigenous communities; ask more questions and listen to people’s ideas and perspectives.

Initiatives Outside Museum Walls

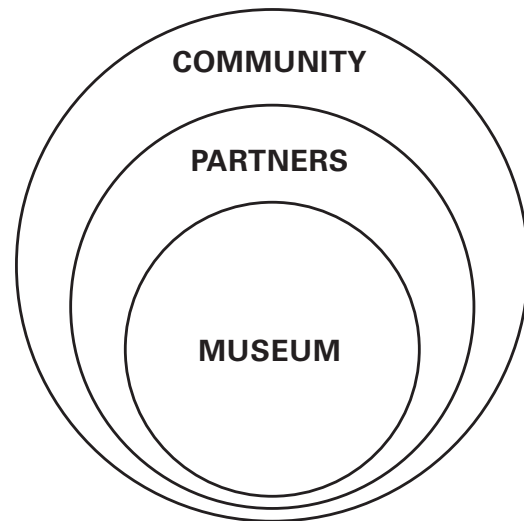
Meet people where they already are, at parks, festivals, libraries, etc.; more arts opportunities near where people live; a “food truck” model of mobile arts education delivery; connect online and through social media; engage with arts that are already taking place in communities; work with partners; share tools with educators to integrate relevant arts and cultural forms into their classrooms.



Evaluating the ACME Initiative

In order to evaluate the ACME Sessions in terms of their multiple goals, the following analysis is broken up into three spheres of engagement and impact. Each section lays out evidence for impact in that sphere, along with major themes and tensions that arose from analysis.

- The first section focuses on the communities that ACME sought to engage as participants in the events —more specifically, those who attended one or more sessions.
- The second section focuses on the experience of community partners that UMFA engaged in hosting, leading, or presenting during sessions.
- The third section focuses on the Museum itself and the experience of Museum staff.



Community Impact & Experience

The first seven ACME Sessions had an average attendance of more than 90 people, with the largest attracting around 200 and the smallest around 50. Session leaders and other ACME partners agreed that they were happy with the turnout and that participants on the whole were highly engaged. Demographic data was not collected. However, many participants, Session leaders, and UMFA staff remarked that the audiences were diverse and inclusive in ways that mattered to them, be that in terms of race, ethnicity, gender identity, age, neighborhood, or otherwise.

Participants who were interviewed or surveyed were, overall, very positive about the experience of attending an ACME Session. Asked to rank their experience on a five-point scale between “I wish I had not gone” (1) to “I am very happy that I went” (5), participants averaged a score of 4.2. When asked what they found most valuable or what they benefitted from attending, most participants spoke to the value of the sessions as either *community building* opportunities or as *learning* opportunities.

For many, the most valuable outcome had to do with meeting new people, networking, and building community. As one participant explained, “I’ve met some

really, really cool people that I may not have ever met had it not been for that kind of opportunity.” One survey respondent was particularly emphatic in this regard, explaining:

“I was able to meet others in the community, within my line of work, that value learning theory and unique approaches to curriculum presentation. Since this ACME Session in 2016, I have actually consistently worked with people who I met at this session.”

For respondents like this one, the main value came from meeting “like-minded” people or people in the same profession. For others it was about dialoguing with a diverse group of individuals that brought a range of perspectives, backgrounds, beliefs, and strengths to the conversation. As one local resident who participated in the session on hip-hop education explained, it was

“Very valuable to see the amount of diversity participating. Music brings people together and brings out their authenticity. No genre should be considered special or best. They are all unique. As a community advocate, it proved that we all have qualities and talents. These will flourish when given the opportunity.”

The next most common type of benefits had to do with what participants learned at the sessions. Some said they learned new things about the topic at hand or had new questions that they wanted to further explore. Others said they learned more about the neighborhood where the session took place, about new ideas they could use in the classrooms where they teach, or about themselves. One member of a local Community Council came to listen to the community as they discussed their hopes and dreams for the neighborhood, so that this could inform the Council’s decision making. Other participants simply said that they had “a good time.”

When it came to suggestions for improving the ACME Sessions, answers were more scattered. A couple of participants suggested better publicity and use of social media, and better outreach to communities of color. Another couple of participants felt the sessions could have been better organized. Some participants did not think particular activities or tools were relevant to them, though their overall experience was positive. Other suggestions included eliciting ideas for future session topics from the community and providing more scaffolding for networking during the session, given how valuable that part of the experience was.

The Importance of Space and Place

Some argued that the wide audience and positive experience of the sessions had a lot to do with the spaces in which they were held. ACME was launched in part as a response to losing a space on campus and in recognition of the opportunity to enter new spaces around the city. For many attendees and partners, that was a key selling point. When one

interviewee who had attended multiple sessions was asked what intrigued them about ACME, they answered,

“That it wasn’t in the Museum. That’s got to be one of the more user-unfriendly campuses.”

Interviewees almost universally agreed that **the partnership with the Salt Lake City Library system was key to ACME’s success**. The libraries offered free spaces—often very beautiful, open, and welcoming spaces—that fit the diverse needs of the sessions. But the libraries were not only valuable as physical spaces. They were also valuable as places—spaces that had been imbued with meaning and value by the people who used them.⁸ For many community members, libraries are understood as more welcoming, accessible, and “theirs” than museums. By taking place at the libraries, sessions were able to attract those who might not otherwise engage with the UMFA and to create a different “vibe” for the events. As one session leader said,

“Being at the Marmalade Library, it’s a beautiful space. It’s so beautiful. Having people sit down, really vastly different people, like every program I’ve ever been to at the Library... It’s a testament to the Library. It’s for all comers.”

The impact of place and space varied widely by which library branch was chosen. Tommy Hamby helped session leaders make a decision about where to hold their sessions based on “the vibe and the culture of the different libraries.” Some noted that the Glendale Branch, for example, is a place that young people use frequently, and holding Sessions there attracted youth in a way other locations did not.

“Having it at the Glendale Library was the perfect venue. That library is so unique that it really is a community center. It’s not a quiet library, you’re there and you hear people, you hear the kids, you hear the interaction happening. It really is a place where the community comes together and feels comfortable coming.”

Just as the libraries helped ACME to engage new communities, the City Library saw ACME as a chance to help them bring new people to the libraries and to further its goal of being vibrant community centers. One participant spoke of ACME as an effort to support “place making” at the libraries.

Building on this, a couple of interviewees suggested other spaces where ACME Sessions could take place. One idea was to continue the library approach and partner with the Salt Lake County Library system, which would expand ACME beyond Salt Lake City. Another idea was to hold sessions in community centers or in spaces run by session leaders—for example, running a hip-hop session in the space of a local hip-hop arts group (although this could conflict with the goal many partners had of reaching new audiences).

⁸ Tuan, Y. F. (1977). *Space and place: The perspective of experience*. University of Minnesota Press.

Catalyzing vs. Ongoing Engagement

When discussing community impact, some interviews and surveys suggested an underlying tension in the work that had to do with follow-up. An ACME Session would bring new people together, start conversations, and elicit ideas and perspectives, and then... what next? While the ACME Initiative and its partnership with the City Library are ongoing, each session had its own character, target audience, and goals. Each functioned, to some extent, as a one-off event.

For those leading the ACME Initiative, that is exactly how it should be. They described their role as being a *catalyst*. The Museum would **convene people around an issue in order to spark dialogue and build new connections**, but would not seek to control what happened next. In fact, as Jorge explained, this was one of the ways that ACME was countercultural to how museums usually run programs. The Museum already has ongoing partnerships through its education and outreach department. ACME was meant to be something different.

However, a few of those involved asked for more. They suggested that the community impact of the sessions would be limited by their one-off nature and asked, in the words of one staff member, “where does it go from here?” One partner shared the feedback from artists involved in their session:

“The feedback is very much like, ‘That was cool. What are you going to do next? I met people I didn’t know, which was great, I heard things I liked, heard things I didn’t like’...Lots of people will do one thing and then be done with it. To really build within community, it’s like, ‘What’s the follow up going to be?’”

A couple of session leaders felt like the conversations were good but had just gotten started. They suggested sticking with a particular theme for two or three sessions or having a similar event every year. Building connections across sessions could encourage people to attend more than one session and begin building a broad-based community around ACME. Another session leader commented on what they saw as missed potential:

“I like things that are more connected over time, instead of just a one-shot deal... It didn’t feel like the session was, in and of itself, building a community. Originally I thought it was going to be about how we, through all these different topics and people, build this base of people that are interested in this, that potentially can come together again in other ways.”

One survey respondent expressed disappointment after attending a session that elicited input about community goals and priorities. This attendee said that the session itself was good and that people were able to share their perspectives. However, the attendee had not seen how, if at all, this input was used afterwards. As they put it, “If you’re going to generate engagement, there’s got to be a vehicle of both accountability and follow up.”

This is an important issue because, especially in low-wealth communities and communities of color, there is a long history of institutions like universities coming in, asking questions, and leaving without following through about what happens with the information.

This tension between the Museum's stated role as a catalyst and the desire among some that there be more follow-up or ongoing engagement, raises more questions than answers. What, if anything, should take place to follow up on the conversations had at a session? What would be the mechanisms for those next steps? And whose responsibility should it be to lead that effort? One partner suggested that the responsibility for follow-up falls equally on the shoulders of partners and attendees.

After all, ACME was built on a model of shared leadership. With ACME, **the Museum is not framed as the expert and leader but rather as a collaborator with community groups** that have more expertise and rootedness in relevant communities. It is trying to shift power relationships and "de-center" the museum, which is explored in more detail below. In this case, the question for the UMFA might be, "What should the Museum's role be in supporting *partners and participants* in taking next steps?"

Partner Impact & Experience

The first seven ACME Sessions were led by a wide range of community and University partners. The UMFA acted as a "convener" rather than programmer, leaving much of the design of the sessions to the partners. Partners expressed appreciation of this aspect of the initiative. It allowed them to design sessions in a way that fulfilled their own goals and missions, which were quite diverse.



One partner used their session to gauge participants' interest in future arts programming, in order to inform their own planning. Another group used its session as a launching pad for joining a national effort they had wanted to be a part of. A few other partners saw their sessions as a chance to get in front of new audiences and spread understanding of cultural art forms across diverse communities. As one leader of the *Community Dance Mashup* session explained:

"We're thinking of how can we reach out more to certain kinds of communities. This event was great. It was really interesting. It's multigenerational, young and old are dancing together and all these different forms of dancing coming together. We want more of that."

For some partners, the sessions informed their work in unexpected ways. For example, one leader in the session on hip-hop education was pleasantly surprised by the level of interest from participants.

“A lot of the teachers that were there had really awesome questions that I think none of us had answers for. We had this really great back and forth. A lot of them were way more interested in it than I was expecting them to be. Usually, you get this pushback, but a lot of them were like, ‘I am interested in this. My kids like it. I want to know more about it. How can I find out more about it?’ That was eye opening.”

By far the most commonly reported benefits came from the collaboration among the partners. Some sessions were led by groups that worked together regularly. However, the majority of the sessions were run by groups collaborating for the first time or who did not often get a chance to be in a room together. This offered valuable opportunities for relationship building and reciprocal learning, starting with the planning meetings themselves. As one session leader explained:

“The conversations that we had all together sitting up at the business building, talking about a number of things, talking about bathrooms, or talking about pop culture... These conversations didn’t really make it into the session but I wish I could’ve packaged them up, like as a podcast. They were as instructive for me as the session itself.”

Other session leaders shared how collaboration with other artists informed their own work. As one dance educator said:

“I really enjoyed working with [Ririe-Woodbury’s] Ai Fujii, and I learned a lot because she’s so experienced in going out to the community. I took away a lot from that and found it personally useful. I work in a very frame worked, boxed sort of dance form, and working with Ai gave me ideas on how you can open up that box a little bit so that people can get a flavor for it and not feel boxed in.”

Meanwhile, partners were building stronger connections with the UMFA. In effect, the ACME Sessions have helped the UMFA to build a network of artists, activists, educators, and media makers in the city who now see the Museum as a potential partner and resource for their work. Two of the early session leaders have already reached out to the Museum to collaborate around future sessions or events. Something similar took place with the City Library as well, as Tommy explained:

“The Museum was great about including me and ensuring that I knew everything that was going to be happening. That allowed me to demonstrate what the library can offer to a community group or community members that may want to do more of this type of programming. It was

good practice for all of us in actual partnerships. **And I believe that's how we will make any impact in our community: good partnerships between major institutions.** And a huge benefit, for me, was meeting one of the facilitators who ended up doing an interview for us when an author was coming through on a book tour.”

With new relationships being forged among Session leaders, the UMFA, and the City Library, it appears that **ACME Sessions are helping to increase the overall density of networks among individuals and institutions working in the realms of community, education, and the arts.** As Tommy’s comment above suggests, this can lead to an increase in the field’s civic capacity—its ability to develop shared goals and take collective action—in addition to the individual benefits that might accrue.⁹

Museum Impact & Experience

How did the ACME Sessions impact the Museum itself during its first year of operation? First of all, the ACME Sessions were successful in broadening the traditional UMFA audience or, as one staff member put it, “casting a wider net.” The diversity of ACME attendees was remarked upon widely by staff, participants, and partners. One attendee summed it up this way:

“I feel what the UMFA has done really successfully is they have expanded their audience, not just in terms of racial and ethnic difference, but in terms of gender, LGBTQ identity, and socioeconomic range. It really has been inclusive, in a wide variety of ways.”

This is not to say that session attendees were fully representative of all of the area’s diverse communities. The audience varied widely depending on the Session topic and which library branch served as the host. Many of the most regular attendees—those who went to multiple sessions—were individuals already well acquainted with the UMFA and involved in the local arts scene. Still, by almost all accounts, the ACME Sessions have at least partly fulfilled the goal of connecting with new communities and should continue to build on this by expanding outreach and publicity efforts and being intentional about which partners are asked to lead Sessions.

Whether this engagement of new communities will lead to future engagement with other Museum activities, or visits to the Museum itself, is not clear. However, while bringing new audiences into the Museum is a long-term goal of the UMFA’s community engagement activities, UMFA leaders explained that there exists multiple metrics on which ACME should be judged, such as increasing support for the museum, learning from community, and forging new relationships with partners and other community members.

⁹ Saegert, S. (2004). *Community Building and Civic Capacity*. Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change.

According to UMFA staff members, the ACME Sessions have helped to raise critical financial support for the Museum, because funders find it an attractive piece of the Museum's programming. Staff also reported that the Sessions (alongside other ongoing engagement and educational programming) helped to keep the UMFA in people's minds during closure. One staff member explained,

"The ACME Sessions have been responsible for our maintaining a high-public profile and a really good level of public opinion while we were closed. We got a lot of feedback, 'You guys were so active while you were closed,' and a lot of that is because of ACME."

UMFA staff members interviewed for this study had varied levels of engagement with the ACME Sessions. One was a presenter for a session, two had written about the sessions in grants, while others were tasked with taking notes during sessions. Staff said that they enjoyed their ACME experiences and saw this as a valuable opportunity to "interface with the community."

However, during its first year, staff members had somewhat divergent ideas about what exactly ACME was for and what its long-term goals were. There was, for example, some disagreement about whether to assess ACME as an *education program* akin to others done in schools and libraries or more of a *community engagement* effort. Staff requested more clarity on the goals of ACME, how it fits into the mission of the Museum, and a quick "snapshot" or elevator speech that they could use to explain the program to others.

There was also discussion of whether the UMFA could involve staff members more in the ACME Sessions. This, staff suggested, could better leverage staff knowledge and skills, give staff opportunities to strengthen their own networks, and enhance understanding of ACME within the Museum. One staff member expressed frustration that they had not been asked to collaborate on any of the Sessions that related to their work at the Museum.

These comments reflected internal tensions around the ACME Initiative as a relatively new and still-evolving project. ACME leaders described initial "pushback" from some staff members when ACME was launched. Jorge suggested that, in large part, this was the natural "discomfort" of starting any new program. Staff raised questions and concerns about what their role in ACME would be and how it would impact their other responsibilities and museum priorities. As Jorge explained, **"Change is difficult, and it creates discomfort and it takes time for people to fully get on board ...** It creates an opportunity for dialogue and conversations, but sometimes they are difficult."

One of the goals of ACME is to create cultural change at the Museum and to "disrupt" the usual way Museum outreach has been done. As Jorge explained, museum staff—particularly in the education department, where community engagement is both a mission and a passion—agreed with the basic goals of ACME. However, there are aspects of the ACME Sessions that are countercultural to the way that the UMFA and most museums have historically carried out programming.

This research is limited in its ability to judge the extent of culture shift or “disruption” at the UMFA. However, at the focus group staff members appeared to have accepted ACME as part of what the Museum does. There was no talk of jettisoning the program. In fact, there was a lot of dynamic conversation about how to improve ACME, to reach an even more diverse community, and connect ACME ideas and energy to other aspects of the Museum and its programs. So ACME may be succeeding in sparking new conversations about how the Museum does its work.

Within these conversations, two key areas of tension were made clear: a tension between *experimentation* and *structure*, and a tension around the process of *decentering the Museum*.

Experimentation vs. Structure

Conversations with UMFA staff surfaced a tension between the value of experimentation on the one hand and the value of structure on the other. The ACME Initiative as a whole was always about experimentation and trying new things. As Gretchen Dietrich, UMFA Executive Director explained:

“I would say that Jorge and I have always talked about our commitment to failing and being okay with taking that risk. It’s a really important part of it for us, which is not a very museum-y thing. We tend to create a formula, find the formula that works, and duplicate over and over again because everybody’s comfortable with it. When you deviate from that, it feels scary.”

This openness to experimentation makes room for the Museum to be bold in trying new things, to see unexpected results, and to learn from what works as well as what does not. It also, as Jorge explained, allows the Museum to be nimble and respond to rapid changes in current events. But this does not come without complications:

“Often times, as a museum, we’re used to planning out things one, two, or three years in advance. ACME requires responding to things in a more immediate manner, and it’s great. But it requires changing some of how we operate. It has led to great internal discussions. How do we respond to current affairs? Should we respond to current affairs? What is our stance on current affairs?”

While experimentation is valuable, it can also be challenging. Some staff members expressed nervousness about the unpredictability and opportunity for failure that ACME represented. One staff member expressed frustration that ACME was still “very nebulous and experimental.” They worried about it “going wrong, and then it ruins our reputation.”

And structure does have value: it allows the Museum to improve its practice over time. It also offers a framework for setting clear goals, evaluating success, and promoting accountability within the institution. Another staff member suggested,

“We need to put in a structure and definition because the program requires so many resources, a lot of staff time is put into it...Structured experimentation somehow.”

Too much structure, however, can risk diluting the very experimental and countercultural goals that ACME was meant to advance. The exact balance of experimentation and structure is likely to be an area of ongoing discussion.

(De)Centering the Museum

Traditional museum outreach tends to be “museum-centric.” Everything is tied back to the museum’s collection, programs often include a visit to the museum, and a core goal is to get more people to become regular museum attendees. The ACME Sessions, however, were designed differently. As Jorge explains, “the way they work, it’s really de-centering the museum.

“Historically, the museum has been very strategic about making sure that all of our programs are directly connected to our art collection. The approach for ACME has been different. It has been about not having the collection at the center and having it be more about people in the community. There are times when sessions connect to our collection when it makes sense, but not always.”

Gretchen put it this way. “For Jorge, the starting point every time is just who’s in the room and here’s the conversation that we’re going to have today, which is a really beautiful thing.”

From the point of view of partners, this de-centering is a definite strength of the initiative. At the same time, a few Museum staff raised concerns that the Museum was too de-centered. They suggested that the sessions seemed isolated from the rest of the Museum programs and that ACME could do more to raise awareness of all the other good work the Museum has been doing. As one staff member explained,

“I do feel separate from the sessions. I wish they were tied more closely to the work that we do here so that people know that the Museum is a place where we’re talking about women and migration or about [other ACME topics]. Those conversations are all happening here in the Museum right now all the time, and I don’t know if that connection is coming back.”

Gretchen raised concerns in the early months that, though promoting the UMFA was not the only goal of the sessions, it needed to be clear with participants of the central role the UMFA is playing in them.

“I’m comfortable with not promoting the Museum to the folks that show up at the library. I am a little bit less comfortable with the degree to which

I perceived not a super strong tie between the ACME Sessions and the UMFA. I feel some responsibility as Director when I'm using the resources of the Museum to give credit where it's due and to make sure folks know that this is something we're doing."

A couple of staff members went farther. They suggested that, now that the Museum is open again there could be more explicit links between some of the session topics and other UMFA activities—linking, for example, a session theme to a lecture at the Museum, a "Third Saturday" family program, or a tour of the collection. This could be a form of "follow-up" to ACME discussions and could bring new people into the Museum itself. One staff member described this as a "back and forth" engagement "so we can go to the community and then the community can come up here." As other staff members noted, this strategy may run counter to the experimental, flexible, and responsive nature of the sessions. However, ACME already has made some links to specific exhibitions or pieces in the collection, when, as Jorge said, "it makes sense."

More fundamentally, these calls to add more structure and to re-center the Museum, raise questions about what it means for a Museum to share power. They raise questions about who has control over what is done, what is said, how it is evaluated, and where it goes next. According to Jorge, letting go of control has at times been difficult, given that the institution wants to ensure the quality of activities that carry its name. As an example, he described the debate around what to do if partners express views the Museum doesn't endorse.

"With ACME Sessions we are learning to give up that control in order to acknowledge other people's voices and let them say what's important to them. It's about shared leadership and shared power, and that's tricky. We have had conversations about whether we fully subscribe to what was being talked about by someone at a session. My answer is that we don't need to prescribe to every point of view shared at the sessions, that's not the point of this. It's more like a communal spirit of celebrating diverse voices and points of view."

Conclusions and Recommendations

This report was compiled in 2018 and offers a snapshot based on qualitative data from the first year of the ACME Initiative's operation. There are multiple directions that the ACME Initiative might head in the coming years and many considerations and partners to take into account as the UMFA plans for the future. Therefore, this report does not offer strict recommendations but rather points to promising areas for growth and improvement.

1. Broadening Partner Recruitment

The ACME team has relied heavily on personal relationships and word of mouth in order to find and recruit Session leaders. While this was enough in the beginning, it could be limiting in terms of the breadth and diversity of session leaders. Another strategy might be to build an advisory or recruitment committee, made up of a diverse group of artists, activists, community leaders, educators, and arts professionals. Or perhaps former session leaders could be systematically asked to identify potential partners. Such strategies could help broaden the "net," ensuring diversity and breadth while keeping ACME responsive to community interests.

2. Supporting Collaboration Among Session Leaders

Session leaders who had not worked together much before joining ACME had a harder time planning their sessions than did those with long-established relationships. At the same time, session leaders found that working with people they had not previously been able to collaborate with was rewarding. The UMFA may be able to help alleviate the challenges and promote the rewards by offering more scaffolding for the process. The ACME team could consider starting the process earlier for such groups, offering a bit more guidance, and creating more time for relationship building and planning.

3. Supporting Session Follow Up

It is not clear whether and how UMFA and its partners should follow up on what happens at sessions. The answer would likely vary based on the specific session and partners involved. However, it is a worthwhile discussion to have. UMFA staff could raise the question of "what next?" with session leaders during the planning process. They could, for example, encourage session leaders to think of ways to integrate the session into their long-term goals and plan for next steps as appropriate. If session leaders did want to continue the work begun in a session, the UMFA could look for ways to connect them with funding, partnerships, or other kinds of support.

4. Making Thoughtful Links between ACME and Other Facets of the Museum

There seems to be room for the ACME Sessions to be more connected to other Museum programs and exhibitions. At the very least, ACME leadership could do more to communicate the ACME vision among UMFA staff and to give staff members the tools to explain ACME to others. The interest shown by UMFA staff in being more involved with ACME, and finding ways to connect their own work to ACME, is an asset the Museum could leverage. However, such connections must be done carefully to avoid re-centering the Museum and making the sessions less experimental and responsive to current events.

5. Exploring other Ways to bring UMFA into Partnership with Communities

The ACME discussions indicate a clear demand among community members for more arts-based experiences in their neighborhoods. Participants spoke of the need for experiences that bring diverse groups together in dialogue and learning, that offer opportunities for professional networking and development, and that connect arts practices to questions of equity, access, and social justice. The Museum could take advantage of new and long-standing relationships that it has strengthened through ACME to explore other partnership opportunities. This might involve looking beyond traditional partners (e.g., schools, libraries) to arts-based and non-arts-based partners working on pressing community priorities.

7. Collecting More Information

This study faced some significant limitations, particularly when it came to understanding participant experiences at the sessions. Rather than waiting for another round of evaluation research, the UMFA could gather more feedback during the sessions themselves. This could take the form of an exit-survey of participants and perhaps a reflective conversation at the end of each session among attendees and/or partners and volunteers. This real-time feedback could support more effective organizational learning.

8. Encouraging Connectedness Across ACME Sessions and Partners

The growing community of individuals and organizations that have been involved in sessions could turn out to be one of the most valuable outcomes of the Initiative. While networking among partners and attendees within each session appears to be strong, connections across sessions appear to be much weaker. The UMFA could increase support for the growth of this network by encouraging session leaders to attend other sessions, and by creating opportunities for session leaders to meet one another. The Museum might also think more intentionally about following up with session leaders about their work and possible future partnerships.

Epilogue: Looking Forward

As this report is wrapping up, it is 2019 and the ACME Initiative is just over three years old. The ACME Sessions have continued every two months at Salt Lake City Public Library locations. Sessions have explored how the arts intersect with feminism, indigenous culture, mindfulness, and other topics. Meanwhile, the reopening of the UMFA in fall 2017 included the launch of the ACME Lab space inside the UMFA. The Lab is now featuring its fifth show, *Ummah*, inviting participants to explore the primary tenets of Islam and celebrate Utah's Muslim community. And this fall the Honors College is offering a credited yearlong course that Honors students can take, taught by Jorge with help from museum staff.

The UMFA and the Library have become more experienced and adept at putting ACME Sessions together and have already implemented some of the ideas outlined above. There is now a program survey for all attendees, which will allow for a more thorough and timely assessment of community members' experiences. And the Museum has begun to make some stronger connections between sessions and other Museum activities. For example, the session *Native American Artists' Voices* was tied into the exhibition, *Go West! Art of the American Frontier from the Buffalo Bill Center of the West*. The session *The Art of Mindful Living* included a UMFA staff member sharing pieces from the Museum's education collection. The session *Railroad Stories: Community Voices and Regional Perspectives* offered diverse community perspectives to the exhibition *The Race to Promontory: The Transcontinental Railroad and the American West*.

This report tells a story about what it looks like to start a new community engagement initiative in a well-established institution. It is about challenging a museum to do things differently: to let go of some control, to position itself as not being the expert, to adapt to a faster pace of development, and to experiment in a way that carries increased risk of failure. Future analysis, perhaps looking at year 3 and 4, will tell a different story—how does a new and experimental program grow, evolve, and become integrated into the overall mission of the institution?

About the Author

Paul Kuttner is an educator, organizer, and scholar whose work sits at the intersection of culture, community, education, and social change. His research has been published in both academic and popular venues, including the Harvard Educational Review, Teachers College Record, and Curriculum Inquiry. Prior to his doctoral studies at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Paul taught theater and writing in schools and community organizations across Chicago. Today, Paul serves as Associate Director at University Neighborhood Partners (UNP) at the University of Utah, where he builds community-campus partnerships that advance educational justice and well-being. He is a board member for Mestizo Institute of Culture and Arts in Salt Lake City and a Cabinet member for the U.S. Department of Arts and Culture. Paul blogs at culturalorganizing.org

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