



RESEARCH INITIATIVE:

Impact of Art Museum Programs on K–12 Students White Paper

Introduction

In 2011, under the auspices and support of the National Art Education Association (NAEA), the Museum Education Division of NAEA began to conceptualize a research initiative to address one of many strategic questions that museums and art educators face: **what are the benefits of art museums to people?** When administrators or officials respond to this question, they often report revenue growth, participation rates across demographic segments, or correlation with K–12 academic test scores. While important, none of these data points address the meaning of art museums to individuals and communities. One of the most pressing needs in the cultural sector is to identify the difference that art museums make in people’s lives and to demonstrate this value with evidence that can withstand intense scrutiny. Without research-based data, art museums and art educators will not succeed in convincing policymakers and civic leaders that museums are vital to civic life, leading to the significant reduction or even absence of opportunities to engage with original works of art as an integral part of education and community experiences.

The NAEA Museum Education Division Directors, Director-elects, and Randi Korn (the Division’s representative to the NAEA Research Commission from 2012–2015) developed a strategic framework for the Research Initiative focused on articulating the value of art museums to people. Specifically, the Impact Framework proposes that research studies explore the value of people engaging directly with original works of art within the context of museums as learning institutions. It also identifies six types of communities that the research would serve: art museum educators; CEOs, directors, and other museum leaders; formal and informal education communities; funders; Educational policy-related entities; and the media. The intended results or impact of the pending research may be pragmatic or strategic, depending on the audience: for example, museum educators might use the results to strengthen their practice and advocacy; K–12 educators might be better equipped to justify the instructional time and cost of integrating field trips to art museums within their curriculum; and policymakers might use the results to demonstrate how art museums are one piece of the American educational apparatus. With viable research in hand, all stakeholders will be able to better understand how art museums matter as part of the educational infrastructure of the United States and why they matter as a result of their sustained contributions to education and society.

Proposed Research

The first major research project seeks to better understand and identify the value that art museum education brings to student learning within the formal, K–12 American school system. We are committed to assessing qualitatively and quantitatively, cognitive, affective, and social outcomes as well other instrumental outcomes of guided, school programs. We also seek to gather generalizable data across multiple types of communities in the United States. Focusing on a specific cluster of grades, this study will investigate this question and related factors:

- *What are the benefits to 4th–6th grade students of engaging with original works of art within the distinctive physical setting of art museums when students are guided in their experiences by means of constructivist pedagogies?*
 - What is the current and most prevalent practice for a school visit program in U.S. art museums?
 - What are the primary learning outcomes for 4th–6th grade students that result from facilitated engagement with original works of art in an art museum setting?
 - What other patterns and important benefits emerge among the data?
 - What conclusions can be made about the cause of the results (how and why these outcomes have occurred)?

In September 2013, the journal *Education Next* published the results of a rigorous large-scale study analyzing the impact of school field trips to Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art on students in grades K–12. The University of Arkansas research team found that field trips to cultural institutions have significant benefits for students. Given these results, and the questions the University of Arkansas study raised across the field, the time is right for additional research.

NAEA and the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD) designed a study that takes a comprehensive and focused comparative approach in order to elucidate the value of art museums within different communities and in relation to a range of educational priorities.

Project Background, 2011–2014

Since 2011, the Museum Education Division has sought to align its efforts with the strategic priorities of NAEA. This has included forging a working relationship with the NAEA Research Commission, established in 2012. The Division has also identified a research area and research questions, informed by the outcomes from facilitated discussions with museum educators in 2011, Focus Groups with K–12 educators and administrators from across the United States who attended the 2012 NAEA Convention in New York City, and a Museum Education session during the 2013 Convention in Fort Worth. Also in 2013, the AAMD became a formal project partner.

In the summer of 2013 a Museum Education Division convened a Task Force to further define the scope of the research study, develop a Request for Proposals for a formal planning year, establish a rigorous protocol to review proposals, and select a project planning consultant research team. During this period funding for the planning year was secured through a generous award from the Samuel H. Kress Foundation to NAEA.

The Task Force, representing the NAEA Museum Education Division, NAEA Board, and AAMD along with a representative from the NAEA Research Commission, reviewed six RFPs and narrowed the selection down to two finalists. In July 2014 NAEA announced the selection of Randi Korn & Associates to lead the planning year, which began on August 1, 2014. At this time, having accomplished its work, the Task Force concluded.

Planning Year, 2014–15: *Impact of Art Museum Programs on K–12 Students*

Core tasks of the Planning Year:

- Develop a full understanding of the value of this study within the context of prior and current research.
- Understand what constitutes prevalent single-visit field trip practices in art museums.
- Define program elements that will ensure research fidelity as we investigate different single-visit field trip programs across a diverse range of museums and communities.
- Define the student outcomes that this study will explore, while allowing room in the design of the study for other outcomes to emerge.
- Establish a set of criteria for site selection.
- Design an approach to the methods and instruments that the study will adopt.
- Identify Institutional Review Board requirements and develop an approach to this process.
- Pursue funds for the full research study and its dissemination.

Planning Groups and Process

Jackie Terrassa, NAEA Museum Education Division Director (2013–2015), led the Planning Year in concert with the research team of Randi Korn & Associates. This team consisted of Randi Korn, Founding Director; Stephanie Downey, Managing Director; and Olga Hubard, Associate Professor of Art Education at Teacher’s College, Columbia University.

On a monthly basis as well as more informally, the research team, Terrassa, Museum Education Division Director-elect (2013–2015) Emily Holtrop, and AAMD Policy Director Andy Finch gathered by phone to ensure progress and address questions. Continuing its commitment to transparency and broad engagement, this core team worked collaboratively with the following groups to develop and finalize the study’s design:

- A Working Group comprised of 11 additional art museum educators representing NAEA’s geographic regions and a range of art museum types, sizes, and communities informed the research study’s design and implementation. This group convened in New York City on October 3, 2014 to begin identifying some of the key components that influenced research design, including program elements and possible student outcomes to investigate.
- An Advisory Group, comprised of 4–6 researchers, museum directors, and policymakers throughout the United States provided input on research study’s design and implementation.
- The NAEA Board, AAMD leadership, NAEA Research Commission members, NAEA Museum Education Division regional representatives, and the NAEA and AAMD membership, as appropriate, will also contribute to project design. These stakeholders will ensure that the project remains aligned with organizational priorities and that it has broad support.

Literature Review

In preparation for the planning year and with support from the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, Division Director Jackie Terrassa (2013–2015) completed a 6-week summer fellowship in museum education at the Clark Institute of Art. During this time, she developed a preliminary framework for an annotated literature review and established these three goals for this component of the research:

- Justify the need for the study.

- Contextualize the study within past and current research from a range of relevant disciplines.
- Inform the study, inform the field, and inspire future research.

She used four research questions to build a systematic annotated bibliography:

1. *Based on the research, how do students benefit from experiences in art museums that take place during the school day and that involve engagement with original works of art? What research has been conducted in this area?*
2. *What does the published literature tell us about effective field trip practices and the value of these activities for students? Where does a field trip begin and end?*
3. *Which student outcomes are most appropriate, most feasible, and most important for us to study as we look at the benefits to students of field trips to art museums?*
4. *Which theories and texts underpin current pedagogies and practices in American art museums related to K–12 field trip programs?*

The research team continued to develop and refine the literature review during the planning year, adding sources from within and outside of the field of museum education to test our assumptions against what is already known about the subject.

Survey of the Field and Constituent Interviews

An online survey was administered during winter 2015. Distributed to art museums with K–12 single-visit school programs, it sought to gauge the landscape of single visit programs in U.S. art museums and to inform the development of the research plan. The survey was circulated broadly to AAMD and NAEA members and served the following purposes: exploring elements of current and most prevalent practice for a single-visit program in U.S. art museums; identifying perceptions about program outcomes; and gauging interest and capacity of art museums to participate in the research initiative. A total of 270 museums responded to the survey, which constituted a 49% return rate, representative of museums that have single-visit programs. An overview of these results is available on the [NAEA Museum Education Division](#) website.

In tandem with surveying the field, we gathered the perspectives of the constituents outlined as six communities in the Impact Framework through a series of interviews. Together with NAEA and AAMD, RK&A identified potential interviewees from among lesser-known constituents such as funders, school district superintendents and museum directors. These interviews explored what constituents value about and perceive as the benefits of single-visit art museum programs, among other possible topics.

Site Selection

These steps established the criteria for selection of research sites that represent a diversity of museums and communities as well as current practices in art museum education. Once study locations were identified, RK&A reviewed the IRB requirements of the school districts that each museum serves in preparation for implementing the research. Preparation of IRB and school district applications occurred during the second phase of research, after funding was secured.

Research Study Design

All of these steps informed the core outcome of the Planning Year—the development of a research plan. A preliminary plan was developed in November 2014, in order to inform grant requests. A final plan for research was completed in June, 2016.

Securing Funding Support for the Study

Under the Direction of Division Director Jackie Terrassa (2013–2015), in the fall of 2014, the research team submitted a proposal to the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) through the National Leadership Grants for Museums program. The proposal requested \$500,000 over three years to implement this national research study. The grant was successfully awarded in September 2015.

Pilot Year, 2015–16: *Impact of Art Museum Programs on K–12 Students*

Core tasks of the Pilot Year:

- Recruit and hire a part-time project manager.
- Finalize the student outcomes that this study will explore, while allowing room in the design of the study for other outcomes to emerge.
- Select research sites based on established criteria.
- Publish the Literature Review.
- Test the methods and instruments that the study will adopt through a pilot program, including training for research site partners.
- Secure Institutional Review Board approvals.
- Confirm formal commitment from all research sites and allied partners.
- Convene the Advisory Group to provide input on outcomes, research methods and instruments and communication.

Planning Groups and Process

Emily Holtrop, NAEA Museum Education Division Director (2015–2017), will lead the Pilot Year in concert with Project Manager Melissa Higgins-Linder and the research team of Randi Korn & Associates. This team consists of Randi Korn, Founding Director; Stephanie Downey, Managing Director; and Amanda Krantz, Senior Associate.

On a monthly basis as well as more informally, the research team, Holtrop, Museum Education Division Director-elect (2015–2017) Michelle Grohe, and AAMD Policy Director Andy Finch will gather by phone to ensure progress and address questions that may arise. Continuing its commitment to transparency and broad engagement, this core team will work collaboratively with the following groups to develop and finalize the study's design:

- A Working Group comprised of 3 additional art museum educators representing NAEA's geographic regions and a range of art museum types, sizes, and communities will inform the research study's design, implementation and dissemination.

- The Advisory Group, to provide input on research study’s design, implementation and dissemination.
 - **Angela Fischer:** Omaha Public Schools Art Supervisor.
 - **George Hein:** Author and leading expert in museum education, Professor Emeritus in the Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences at Lesley University and Senior Research Associate with the Program Evaluation and Research Group (PERG) at Endicott College.
 - **Jennifer Novak-Leonard:** Arts and cultural researcher and policy advisor, Research Manager at the University of Chicago, currently serving as principal investigator of the California Survey of Arts Participation (working title) through NORC, and of the Chicago Arts and Culture Issue Briefs project with Arts Alliance Illinois.
 - **Danielle Rice, PhD:** Program Director of the Museum Leadership program at Drexel’s Westphal College of Media Arts & Design. Formerly Executive Director of the Delaware Art Museum, senior curator of education and associate director for programs at Philadelphia Museum of Art.
 - **Sree Sreenivasan:** Former Chief Digital Officer at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and tech journalist. Previously the chief digital officer of Columbia University and has served as an academic administrator and professor in the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism.

- The NAEA Board, AAMD leadership, NAEA Research Commission members, NAEA Museum Education Division regional representatives, and the NAEA and AAMD membership, as appropriate, will also contribute to project design. These stakeholders will ensure that the project remains aligned with organizational priorities and that it has broad support.

Literature Review

After a deep editing process and review by the Advisory Group, the Literature Review will be prepared for wide electronic publication and dissemination and a limited print run. The research team and working group will develop lists to ensure that dissemination includes the constituents outlined as six communities in the original Impact Framework. The Literature Review is also intended to inform the field and inspire future research, and as such, it will be disseminated widely to NAEA Museum Education Division members and AAMD members.

Site Selection

Using criteria that emerged from the field survey of art museums with K–12 single-visit school programs, the planning group and RK&A will select six museums in the United States to participate in the research study. The sample of participating museums will:

- Be located across the United States and represent six regions as designated by the American Alliance of Museums
- Be of various sizes (based on the number of full-time education staff in education departments)
- Serve an ample number of students in targeted grade levels
- Serve Title 1 schools
- Have a student-teacher ratio of 16–20 (or fewer) students per facilitator/gallery teacher
- Include 4–5 (or fewer) stops at works of art during gallery program

- Train facilitators in more than one area, such as in art history and inquiry
- Conduct an evaluation/assessment (and implement the results)
- Articulate and apply outcomes to train facilitators
- Apply a constructivist approach in school-tour programs, as demonstrated by high ratings on the survey for the following actions:
 - Group dialogue evolves in response to students’ comments and questions
 - Facilitators ask open-ended question
 - Content emerges organically from the group

Research Study Design

The research design is rigorous to account for the many factors in a student’s life that can affect behavior. There will be a control group and two treatment groups. The Control Group will not have experienced a single-visit to an art museum or an in-classroom art lesson. Treatment Group A will have an in-museum experience and Treatment Group B will have an in-classroom experience. We hypothesize that experiential differences will emerge between the Control Group and both treatment groups and between Treatment Group A and Treatment Group B.

Museums selected as research sites will receive limited grant funds to offset expenses related to study activities, host webinar orientations for relevant museum staff in advance of data collection, compile select reports and make select facilitators available for the research team.

Conclusion

Increasingly, support from the private and government sectors is tied to demonstrations of relevance and value. In order to become even more integral parts of education and society, art museums must first understand and then effectively demonstrate the benefits that museums provide—what people gain from them, and what they afford that other settings do not. It is the museum community’s responsibility to persuade others that art museums and art museum education have value. And it is also vitally important for the National Art Education Association to articulate and demonstrate how experiencing art museum collections and exhibitions further its mission: *Advancing visual art education to fulfill human potential and promote global understanding.*

The NAEA Museum Education Division believes the time to act is now, and we look forward to continued coordination and collaboration with our NAEA colleagues and many other stakeholders on this important initiative.

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