

Diversifying Art Museum Leadership Initiative

Accomplishments and Recommendations

Generously funded by
Alice L. Walton Foundation and Ford Foundation



The Ford Foundation and Alice L. Walton Foundation believe passionately in the power of art museums and their exceptional contributions to our communities, and we know that the future health and vibrancy of museums will depend on their relevance and resonance to the broadest cross-section of America.

Currently, however, less than 20% of art museum leadership positions are held by people of color and other underrepresented populations. Too many people do not find art museums appealing, in part because they do not see themselves represented in museum staffs and Boards. If museums are to sustain and expand their important leadership roles, their staff, Boards and programs must change to better reflect the demographics of their communities.

One exciting opportunity embedded in this challenge to change is to ensure that more young

people from underrepresented communities can pursue museum careers successfully.

In 2017, we began a partnership to help museums seize this opportunity. We launched the **Diversifying Art Museum Leadership Initiative** (DAMLI), a \$6 million seed program to increase the diversity of American art museums' curatorial and management staff. Through a competitive process, we awarded 21 diverse art museums multi-year grants to expand pathways to leadership for young people from a wide range of backgrounds – including high school and college students, graduate students and doctoral graduates.

In a complementary initiative, in 2019, we also partnered with the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to support *Facing Change: Advancing Museum Board Diversity and Inclusion*, a national initiative organized by the American Alliance of Museums.

Both initiatives built on much previous work, including research, philanthropic investments and art museums' own efforts to advance diversity,

equity, access and inclusion. But our timing became almost prophetic in light of the COVID pandemic and uprisings for racial justice during 2020. *The urgency of forceful and sustained action to address equity in cultural organizations has never been clearer.* This may start with diversifying staff and Board but does not end there. As the DAMLI museums learned, it requires organizations to see and change a wide array of biases and practices that keep them from being truly welcoming and equitable.

The scale and scope of DAMLI, with 21 museums involved, serves as an example of the meaningful progress that can be made through these efforts. This brief report summarizes the significant achievements and key lessons.

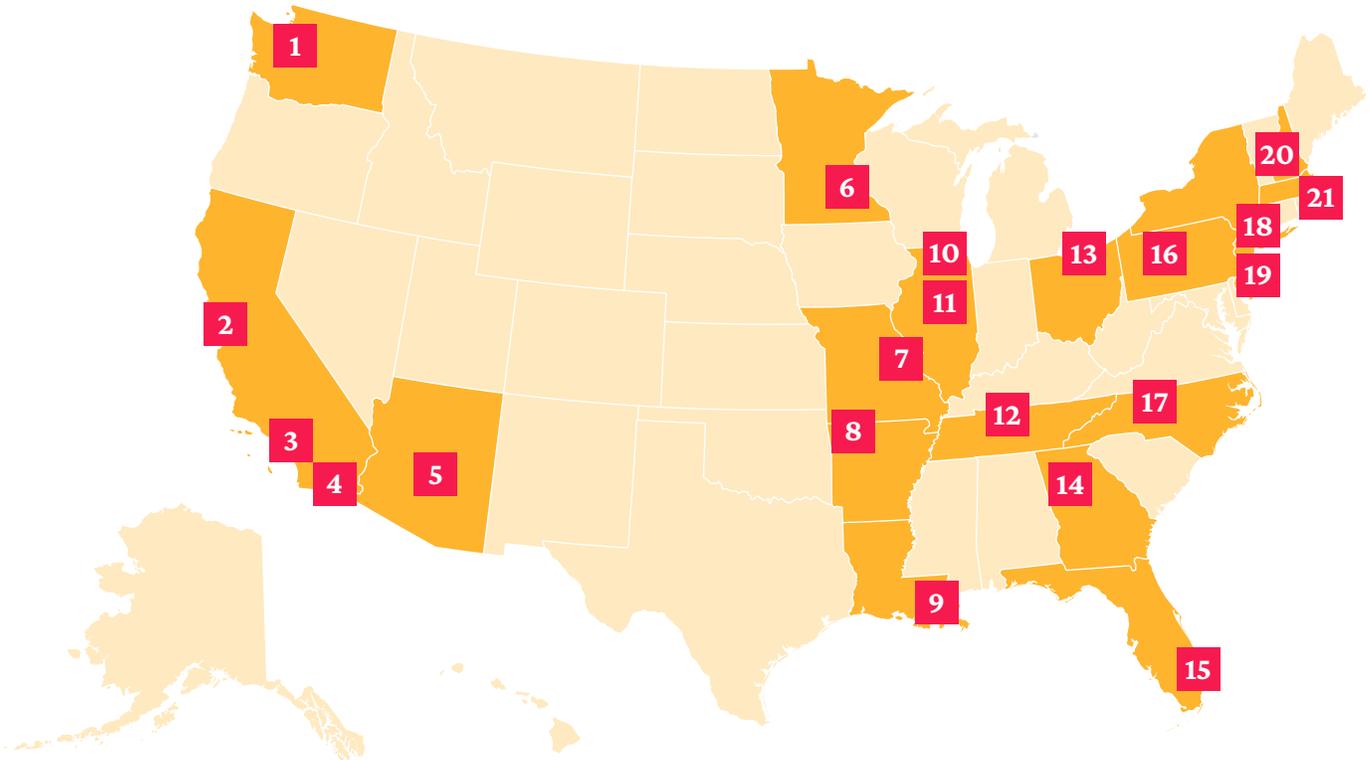
We are enormously grateful to the museums who engaged with us through DAMLI. We are inspired by their determination to grapple with the hard work of bringing about justice. Each of the DAMLI museums took important steps forward. And they all know – as we do – that there is much more to do. We look forward to further opportunities to collaborate with others who are dedicated, as we are, to making art museums vibrant, welcoming and exciting places for all.

**Darren Walker &
Alice L. Walton**

The Andy Warhol Museum
One of the four Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh



21 Participating Museums



The Andy Warhol Museum (16)
The Art Institute of Chicago (10)
Clark Atlanta University Art Museum (14)
The Cleveland Museum of Art (13)
Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art (8)
Fisk University Galleries (12)
Hood Museum of Art (20)
Institute of Contemporary Art / Boston (21)
Los Angeles County Museum of Art (4)
Minneapolis Institute of Art (6)
Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara (3)

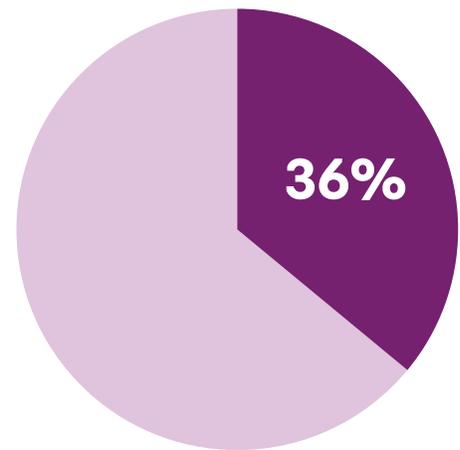
National Museum of Mexican Art (11)
New Orleans Museum of Art (9)
The Newark Museum of Art (19)
Oakland Museum of California (2)
Pérez Art Museum Miami (15)
Phoenix Art Museum (5)
Reynolda House Museum of American Art (17)
Saint Louis Art Museum (7)
The Studio Museum in Harlem (18)
Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific
American Experience (1)

Budget Size



BIPOC Directors

8 of the 21 museums (36%) have/had BIPOC (black, Indigenous and people of color) directors



Grant Sizes

\$70,000–\$550,000

Over 2–3 Years

Matching funds totaled \$3.3M

Strategies and Accomplishments

DAMLI museum activities were as varied as the 21 museums themselves, and each museum set and achieved significant goals.

Primary strategies:

- **Programs for high school students and teens** – including teen councils curating museum public programs and teen-to-teen exchanges between museums
- **Internships for public, private and community college students** – including semester- and year-long internships, and multi-year internships in various museum departments and functions
- **Fellowships for post-baccalaureate, graduate students and post-doctoral professionals** – one- and two-year residential programs focused on creating curatorial and program portfolios of exhibitions, lectures, publications and collaborations with artists
- **Staff development and anti-racism, anti-bias training**
- **Hiring Diversity officers**

Populations engaged included Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian Pacific American and Arab/Middle Eastern communities. Some participants also identified as transgender and gender non-binary; LGBTQ+; people with disabilities; immigrants; and people from low-income and working-class backgrounds.



The Studio Museum in Harlem



Hood Museum of Art

Accomplishments cluster in four major areas:

1. Young people gained exposure to and experience in the work of museums, and emerging museum professionals furthered their careers.
2. Young people contributed to creating more than 12 noteworthy exhibitions and related publications, video materials and public programs, many highlighting artists of color and histories of communities of color.

Over three years, museums collectively:

- Served more than 2,000 teens/high school students;
- Worked intensively with more than 200 community college and undergraduate students;
- Sponsored 35 extended post-baccalaureate, graduate and post-doctoral fellowships;
- Conducted diversity training sessions with more than 500 staff members;
- Collaborated with more than 30 partner institutions, including public schools, community centers, academic institutions and others.

Outstanding examples include:

- *Form and Relation: Contemporary Native Ceramics* at Hood Museum of Art
- *i'm yours: Encounters with Art in Our Times* at ICA Boston
- *40 años a la esperanza*, an exhibition commemorating the 1979 mural *A la esperanza*, at National Museum of Mexican Art
- *Mapping Black Identities* at Minneapolis Institute of Art



National Museum of Mexican Art
Esperanza Exhibition Postcard

3. Museums changed ways they interact with people who are underrepresented in their staff and audiences. Important shifts in program structures and internal processes included:

- Forming new partnerships with community organizations, schools and other galleries, museums and art organizations to learn and collaborate
- Providing social supports for interns and fellows through culturally-sensitive career development workshops, building peer cohorts, and introductions to broader professional networks
- Providing cultural consciousness training to people tapped to be mentors of interns and fellows, and entire museum staffs
- Partnerships between staff and Board for diversity assessments and development of museum-wide diversity, equity, access and inclusion plans

4. Four new curatorial and management positions created under DAMLI grants will be sustained, and 25% of the DAMLI Fellows secured employment or are now pursuing doctoral programs in museum studies or visual arts/culture.



William Forsythe, *The Fact of Matter*, 2009. Installation view, William Forsythe: *Choreographic Objects*, the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston, 2018–19. Photo by Liza Voll. © William Forsythe



Oakland Museum of California



The Andy Warhol Museum

Practical Steps for the Future

Numerous practical steps undertaken by the DAMLI museums may be useful to other institutions seeking to become more diverse, equitable, accessible and inclusive.

Overall, DAMLI museums significantly increased their success when they:

- **Engaged trustees as essential partners in DEAI work.** Official DEAI statements are more powerful when accompanied by specific work plans, budget allocations and monitoring and evaluation systems to make the commitments real.
- **Dedicated paid staff at senior leadership levels to carry forward DEAI work,** with ample resources, authority and designated collaborators across all museum ranks.
- **Acknowledged that learning goes in multiple directions,** and young people have questions and insights that can help museums become more relevant and resonant.
- **Understood that diversifying staff requires re-thinking job qualifications,** recruitment processes, and other barriers to identifying and onboarding people who are underrepresented in museum ranks. It also requires recruiting young people where they are – in schools, at extracurricular sites, and community spaces, for example.
- **Calibrated internship and fellowship stipends to be competitive with other employment opportunities for young people** and in line with pay equity scales within museums. The costs of transportation and housing must be taken into account, including relocation expenses for fellows.
- **Crafted internship and fellowship experiences to allow for broad exposure to a variety of museum functions and project completion in areas of interest.** Two-year fellowships are exponentially more impactful than one-year fellowships. Also, providing support for

interns and fellows to visit other museums and attend conferences heightens learning and broadened professional networks in ways critical to future success.

- **Supported museum staff supervising teen participants, interns and fellows with culturally sensitive training to do this important job well.** Also, hiring former interns and fellows into staff positions, including as mentors, can have multiple benefits.
- **Assisted graduating fellows and interns in securing jobs,** entrance into academic programs for further study or alternative career pathways.



Saint Louis Art Museum



Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience



The Biggest Learning

One overarching lesson emerged from all the DAMLI participants, and it is a critical lesson for the larger field:

Diversification of staff leadership—and increased relevance to communities—will not happen without changes in institutional consciousness and an unequivocal commitment to undoing racism and other forms of bias and inequity inside institutions—at all levels, in all functions.

Internships and fellowships for people from underserved communities can be critical agents in helping institutions make these shifts in consciousness – but only if they are embraced as opportunities for the museum to learn as well as teach, and only if museums are truly seeking the more equitable future that is spurring younger generations to challenge traditional structures of authority.

A corollary to this lesson is that staff of color, and staff with other marginalized identities, cannot hold all—orevenmost—of the responsibility for institutional change. The commitment to learning and to shifting practices must be animated throughout the museum, starting with Board members and senior leaders but vigorously pursued by all museum staff. Without this level of commitment, the difficult work of change will not be sustained, and progress will be halting at best.



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