

From: "Anne Bergeron" <ABergeron@GUGGENHEIM.ORG>
To: <gli@getty.edu>
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Subject: Maxwell Anderson's "Metrics of Success"

Dear Getty Leadership Institute:

I recently had the pleasure of reading Maxwell Anderson's 2004 paper and appreciated many of the beliefs he articulated and recommendations he made for appropriately measuring the performance of art museums. I agree that, in pursuit of dollars and numbers, museums have, at times, strayed too far from their fundamental missions of education.

I also agree with Anderson's assessment that museums equate "bigger" and "more" with "better" -- bigger shows, better press, more visitors, more members, more earned income, etc. The reality is that so many programmatic decisions are predicated on financial resources. Thus, the vicious cycle of special exhibitions. Isn't this, in part, a reflection of our sensory-overloaded contemporary culture that is in continual search for the next exciting, though fleeting, thing?

Anderson is absolutely correct about the significant, often unaccounted, size of indirect costs. When raising money for special exhibitions (or any other program, for that matter), I always present these figures to funders, many of whom balk at a museum spending \$1M+ on staff time for a \$3-4M project. But how else does a major exhibition occur if not through the dedication of substantial human resources?

Anderson aptly notes that the missions of museums (and cultural organizations in general) have changed to reflect "social outcomes." I would posit that this was a direct result of funders similarly shifting their perspective. Twenty years ago, all one needed was a good idea, some professional polish and a few connections to raise money for the arts. That changed in the late 80s/early 90s when donors, especially institutional funders, began to demand more accountability from their grantees. Perhaps this was because the competition for funds dramatically increased as arts organizations became more sophisticated and institutionalized; perhaps private funders were being guided by government agencies that had to consider the public good*. Soon, funders wanted to know the return on investment and providing a public service became paramount. As Anderson noted, this rise in venture philanthropy will only continue.

* I think this is a factor in the \$35 membership he mentions -- the need to make museums accessible and affordable to a large public. Museums are indeed subsidizing their lower level members, but, one could argue, in the spirit of the public good.

As someone who has spent nearly 20 years helping museums and other arts organizations create organizational and financial stability, I welcome the adoption of Anderson's success metrics and look forward to hearing about the steps being taken to have these suggestions reviewed and addressed by the museum community.

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