

Museum Funding as Critical Practice

OMA Annual Conference
Changing Directions: Practice Over Permanence

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About us



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Big idea

**Funding is a
fundamental
museum
practice.**

It should therefore be practiced, critiqued,
and reformed according to the critical
frameworks that help shape museums.

Defining key terms



Donations

Philanthropic giving; tax-receiptable gifts from individuals or organizations

Grants

Funds given by an external body for a particular purpose or project

Sponsorship/ Corporate Partnerships

Corporate financial support in exchange for certain perks: audience reach/access, name visibility, etc.

Membership

A series of organizational perks for which an individual can sign up with an assigned cash value

Earned revenue

Ticket sales, gift shop revenue, concessions, school trip bookings, etc.

Audience poll:

Does your institution
have a funding ethics policy?

How did we get here?

RESEARCH

Samantha Summers. *Divestment in Times of Change: The Loss of Major Donors in Art Galleries*. (2021). MMSt thesis

Camille–Mary Sharp. *Decolonize and Divest: The Changing Landscape of Oil-Sponsored Museums in Canada*. (2022). PhD thesis

+ writing and presenting about fundraising in the arts and museums

PRACTICE

Samantha worked in fundraising for Toronto's First Post Office, the Railway Museum of Eastern Ontario, and TIFF

Samantha also serves on two film boards, with a focus on fundraising policy

Research



Photo by Derek DeBono, 1976.

Re-printed in K. Robertson, *Tear Gas Epiphanies* (2019)

- **CRITIQUES OF MUSEUM SPONSORSHIP ARE NOT NEW**
- **THERE IS A GAP IN THE ACADEMIC LITERATURE RE: HOW WE APPROACH FUNDRAISING IN MUSEUMS**

Research



Rebecca Belmore, Artifact #671B, 1988

- MUSEUMS AND WEALTH ARE DEEPLY ENTANGLED
- CORPORATIONS PARTICIPATE IN NON-PROFIT SPACES TO ENABLE THEIR SOCIAL LICENSE
- DIVESTMENT IS AN IMPORTANT STRATEGY, BUT NOT A LONG TERM SOLUTION

Practice

**NOBODY FEELS
PREPARED FOR
THEIR OWN
"SACKLERS"**

**PROFESSIONALS
ARE HAVING
THESE
CONVERSATIONS**

But there are no
established frameworks
for having them.

**CUTTING OFF ALL
SOURCES OF FUNDING
THAT COULD BE
ETHICALLY COMPROMISED
ISN'T A REAL OPTION**

Because there is no source of
money that everyone will agree
isn't ethically compromised.

Practice

**ASKING THE QUESTION:
WHAT SOURCES MAKE
SENSE, AND WHAT
SOURCES CROSS THE
LINE?**

Where the "line" is often
extremely contextual and
changing.

**PUBLIC-FACING REVENUE
SOURCES THAT DO NOT ALIGN
WITH MANDATE/MESSAGE
THREATEN TO DERAIL PUBLIC
LEARNING**

Collective brainstorm: What does "ethical funding" mean to you?

Click the Google Jamboard link in the chat to participate!
shorturl.at/dFISO

Pathways forward

DO WHAT MAKES SENSE FOR
YOUR ORGANIZATION

HAVE INTERNAL
CONVERSATIONS
ABOUT WHERE THE LINE IS

MAKE IT CLEAR TO DONORS
WHAT IS EXPECTED OF THEM,
AND WHAT YOU'RE WILLING TO
DO (OR NOT) FOR THEM





**LET THE PUBLIC KNOW WHAT
YOUR STANDARDS ARE**

**THIS IS A MESSY CONVERSATION,
BUT ONE THAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN
ACROSS THE FIELD**

**LISTEN TO ACTIVISTS: WHAT
THEY'RE CALLING FOR NOW IS
OFTEN THE SOCIAL STANDARD
TEN YEARS FROM NOW**

Next steps for our research

Gaining perspectives from professionals in
the field

Bridging practice and academic literature,
and making research accessible to
practitioners

Continuing to develop our framework and
recommendations

Developing our article and submitting for
publication

Our questions to you

- What would you like to see in funding-focused discussions in the museum field?
- What is your plan for protecting your institution's reputation if a donor is publicly called out for being problematic, and if your institution's integrity is called into question?
- Where is the line for you personally? Where is the line for your organization?

Thank you!

If you have any insights or experiences you would like to share with us (confidentially or otherwise) to be included in our in-progress article, please get in touch!

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