



INSIGHT

Lessons learned from our grantmaking programs

Museums After School

*How Museums Are Reaching Kids, Partnering with Schools,
and Making a Difference*

PRACTICAL LESSONS FROM AND FOR MUSEUM LEADERS,
BASED ON THE MUSEUM YOUTH INITIATIVE

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Cover photo: Museum Youth Initiative participants from the Bay Area Discovery Museum work with Master Woodcarver Shane Eagleton to design and create an eight-foot long whale canoe. Photo credit: Bay Area Discovery Museum Staff

Foreword

I am pleased to introduce the first edition of *Insight*, what will be an ongoing series of reports published regularly to share both results and lessons from our grantmaking activities. We believe that as a foundation we have a responsibility to learn from our grantmaking and, in turn, to share those lessons with practitioners in the various fields in which we operate. Among the questions we'll explore in *Insight* are: What has worked? What hasn't? What was discovered along the way? By strategically sharing findings from our grantmaking evaluations and experiences, we seek to help organizations across California do better work, with greater impact.

In this first *Insight* report, we focus on the experiences of museums across the state who participated in the Museum Youth Initiative. Between 2000 and 2004, The James Irvine Foundation provided nearly \$4 million in multi-year support to 10 museums to develop after-school programming for young people. We also commissioned a broad evaluation of the initiative to assess its overall impact and help participants improve their programs. During the initiative, the museums learned a great deal—from successes as well as setbacks—about how to be effective in taking on the after-school opportunity, which is the focus of this report.

We know that practitioners in the museum field are interested in this information, because we asked them. Once we decided to share evaluation findings and participant reflections on the initiative, we consulted a number of leaders in the museum as well as education and youth development fields to determine which topics might be of greatest interest and value. Participants in this market research showed strong support both for the initiative and the effort to share what was learned. In particular, museum practitioners expressed great interest in learning about the ingredients of effective programs.

We were pleased to have supported the 10 museums of this initiative as they learned how to expand their programming to reach youth in the after-school hours. *Museums After School* tells the story of what they did and what they learned.



James E. Canales
President and Chief Executive Officer
The James Irvine Foundation
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Introduction

TAKING ON A NEW ROLE

Across California, museum leaders are discovering a unique opportunity for their institutions to make a difference: the after-school program.

Why step into this new domain? Two trends have paved the way.

One is the rising capacity of museums to design and deliver high-quality education programs. Of course, museums have long served as learning destinations for both adults and children. But in recent years, many have begun to step up their work in this area, strengthening partnerships with schools, expanding education departments, and developing curricula, traveling exhibits, and teacher training courses. The sophistication of these programs is also significant—deeper in approach than the classic museum field trip, richer in potential learning benefits than the traditional after-school activity.

The other trend is a growing recognition by education experts and reformers of the importance of after-school time. Polls show that most Californians say quality after-school programs are a necessity in their communities. Studies indicate that after-school programs can work well as a supplemental educational enrichment strategy. And in states like California, where declining funding and changing curricular standards have pushed arts and culture education to the sideline, museum after-school programs are poised to help take up the slack.

In the wake of these developments, more museums are weighing the benefits and costs of after-school programs, struggling with the inevitable financial and institutional challenges, and looking for new ways to channel their substantial educational assets to help young people. These efforts have produced a mixed bag of educational results. They have generated some surprising institutional impacts. They have yielded valuable lessons for museum practitioners. And they have raised some important issues for museums in general. What assets do museums bring to the after-school arena? What challenges and opportunities do such programs pose? What are the key institutional and program ingredients of success?

Learning from the Museum Youth Initiative

In California, 10 museums spent 2000 to 2004 on an experiment: Could they develop and deliver educational programs after school that would make a difference in how kids learn?

The museums participated in the Museum Youth Initiative (MYI), an effort by The James Irvine Foundation to fund museums across California to implement and evaluate after-school programs for local students. This report is based on interviews with leaders of these institutions, as well as a series of annual assessments conducted by Museum Management Consultants, Inc. Overall, the initiative sought to improve student achievement in the classroom and to help participating museums institutionalize youth development principles, become learning environments that provide academic enrichment, and sustain high-quality program practices and resources over the long term. An additional goal was for participating museums to experience an increase in use by young people and families who have not traditionally come through their doors.

It was an ambitious effort. These were museums moving beyond their common charge, looking to use staff competencies and organizational resources to improve their performance in three roles: as educational institutions,

as partners to schools and communities, and as centers for young people. Although approaches were varied, struggles common and results mixed, in every case the programs ended up galvanizing students and museums alike.

Overview of Museum Youth Initiative Programs

Museum	Discipline	MYI program	School group served	# of participants in year 4
Bay Area Discovery Museum <i>Sausalito, California</i>	Children's Museum	Community Learning Initiative	Elementary	44
Bowers Museum of Cultural Art <i>Santa Ana, California</i>	Art	Kidseum After-School Learning Center	Elementary and Middle	35
Mexican Museum <i>San Francisco, California</i>	Art	After-School Collaborative	Middle	*
Palm Springs Art Museum <i>Palm Springs, California</i>	Art	Museum Youth Initiative	Middle	74
San Bernardino County Museum <i>Redlands, California</i>	Natural History	Museum Youth Club	Middle and High	70
San Diego Natural History Museum <i>San Diego, California</i>	Natural History	After-School Science Adventures	Elementary	76
San Joaquin County Historical Society and Museum <i>Lodi, California</i>	History	Living History Camp	Middle	26
San Jose Museum of Art <i>San Jose, California</i>	Art	Sacred Heart Nativity School Program and Teen Arts Council	Middle and High	52
Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History <i>Santa Barbara, California</i>	Natural History	Quasars to Sea Stars	High	30
Turtle Bay Exploration Park <i>Redding, California</i>	History, Natural History, and Art	Museum Teen Volunteers	High	59

Overall composition of program participants: one-third elementary students; two-thirds middle school or high school students. Majority of participants were students of color (53% in year 4).

* The Mexican Museum concluded its participation in MYI in year 3.

Evaluation Purpose and Approach

The Irvine Foundation contracted Museum Management Consultants, Inc. (MMC) to design and conduct an evaluation assessing the progress of MYI museums, help them refine their programs, and determine if the initiative's goal to improve the academic achievement of student participants was achieved. Toward that end, MMC made multiple site visits to observe program activity; conducted interviews and/or surveys of youth participants, their teachers and parents, and museum program staff; and gathered and analyzed participation data from each of the MYI museums. The principal audiences of the evaluation were the executive and program staff of the museums participating in MYI. In addition, the evaluation documented MYI museum experiences and lessons that appear to be of significant interest to the broader museum field.

Throughout the initiative, the evaluation provided the museums with helpful benchmark data across the MYI cohort and insights into effective program strategies. The MMC reports helped to spark reflection by the museum staff about their progress and stimulate program improvements at several museums. Yet the evaluation had a more difficult task in assessing program impact and in making a direct connection between student outcomes and MYI program elements. In large part, this was due to resource constraints and related design limitations, and also the significant variability across MYI participants in terms of program length, offerings, and youth population served.

Key Findings

The evaluation of MYI, along with interviews of participants, revealed a number of headline findings. For one, it was clear that museums can play a value-added role as effective informal learning organizations. The evaluation suggested that museum after-school programs may well be able to help student thinking skills and behaviors. Consistent with other studies in the after-school education field, the evaluation indicated that students who had higher attendance rates and more exposure to MYI programs experienced better outcomes in terms of improved study skills, classroom comportment and attendance, and higher order thinking skills. In short, the programs were able to engage students in learning.

On the other hand, the evaluation also indicated that the after-school programs were not as likely to improve formal, in-class achievement. Improvements in grade point average among participating students were of a relatively low magnitude in any one year and inconsistent across all years. And while teachers tended to rate participating students as improving their performance as a result of the program, such assessments of student learning could be open to challenge on the grounds of bias. At the same time, given the lack of a comparison group, any improvements in the academic skills and performance of students who participated in MYI cannot be definitively attributed to their participation in the after-school programs.

What about the impact on museums themselves? Both the experience and evaluation of MYI indicated that such after-school programs can significantly influence museums' educational programs, community connections and even—and in some cases especially—organizational culture. The initiative also demonstrated how museums can use youth development principles to improve their after-school offerings as well as their education programs in general. Following the end of initiative funding, six of the 10 museums participating in MYI are continuing their programs without financial assistance from the Irvine Foundation; three other museums may continue a portion of their programs. All the museum leaders interviewed for this report attested to the value of participating in the initiative. And according to the evaluators, all participating museums, as a result of MYI, have undergone substantial institutional changes, established new ties to their communities, and learned new ways of serving young people.

It was clear that museums can play a role as effective informal learning organizations.

This report focuses on the lessons that MYI museum leaders learned about doing after-school work effectively. The aim is to inform a growing conversation among museum professionals who take on the after-school challenge. Many in the field are hungry for more information on these issues, an interest underscored by interviews of 19 practitioners in the museum and education fields on possible topics emerging from MYI. Overall, these advisors expressed great interest in the notion of museums as learning institutions and, more specifically, how museums can effectively develop, run, and sustain after-school programs. The report is organized in three parts to address the questions these practitioners raised:

The Opportunity: How Museums Are Thinking About After-School Work

The Reality: How Two California Museums Approach After-School Work

The Issues: What Museums Have Learned About Effective Practice

The Opportunity

HOW MUSEUMS ARE THINKING ABOUT AFTER-SCHOOL WORK

More and more museums are applying their educational resources and expertise to the development of comprehensive after-school programs. They are finding that such efforts can help students learn and, at the same time, yield multiple institutional benefits. Interest in museum after-school programs appears to be growing, and not just in the museum world. Bill Porter, executive director of Grantmakers for Education, says he's "struck by the idea of leveraging the wonderful resources of the museum for education." Part of the challenge, according to Porter, is to help people see museums as able to play this role well, as "another arrow" in the after-school quiver.

If one conclusion came through loud and clear from interviews with museum leaders who participated in MYI, it was that museums bring a number of unique assets to the after-school opportunity, including creative staff, educationally rich settings, and collections of objects with great pedagogical power. Listen to museum leaders talk about their after-school programs, and you'll hear a striking belief in what museums can add to the education equation. "Museums are places of things," says Jim Stone of the San Diego Natural History Museum. "We can engage kids with a real object because there's a story behind it, we're doing research on it, and it can be used as a springboard to a real learning experience. If a kid sits before a whale fossil that is two million years old, and I talk about how that whale used to live right here in the San Diego area, it's the ultimate in hands-on learning."

One of the goals of MYI was to give after-school programs run by museums greater structure, as well as grounding in educational and youth development theory. Indeed, this aim came from the Irvine Foundation's assessment of many after-school programs as well-meaning but poorly planned, a take echoed by others. "Even though after-school programs have been around a long time, quality is a big problem across the board," says Sheila Murphy, a program officer at the Wallace Foundation. "There's a need for a standard framework that museums and other institutions can draw upon in developing standards for program content, participation, design and effectiveness."

Why Take On After-School Programs?

Research found that museums are running after-school programs for three main reasons: to make an educational impact, connect to the community, and improve the internal culture and capacity of the museum itself. As many museum leaders attest, taking on extensive, ongoing after-school programs has brought many benefits—some anticipated, some not.

First and foremost, MYI museums—along with the Irvine Foundation—sought to help kids learn. "The most straightforward answer to why we do these programs is that it goes to the core mission of what we do as a museum," says Karl Hutterer, executive director of the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History. "It's such a successful application of our educational opportunities and resources. We're all convinced that museums are good educational institutions, but when you look at the run-of-the-mill educational encounter [at a museum], kids piling in a bus and so on, the encounter is so superficial that the educational impact is minimal. We all struggle with what we can do to bring to bear our educational resources effectively."

A second reason for embarking on after-school programs: connection to the community. “For an institution like ours,” says John Peterson, president of Turtle Bay Exploration Park, “a key to sustainability and success is creating a beloved feeling and relationship with the community. If people are saying good things about the institution, if students are saying good things at home and at school, it can create a network of good feeling.” Turtle Bay and other museums see an opportunity to build young people’s appreciation for museums in general. “When we interview applicants for our program, we ask ‘What other museums have you visited?’” says Traci Wierman, the museum’s director of education. “Eighty percent of our applicants have never been to a museum. These programs bring young people into a cultural institution and show them ‘there’s something here for you.’ Now they seek out museums in other places.”

Third, and perhaps more surprising, research found that museums take on after-school programs to grow as institutions. Many participants observed that programs created a ripple effect on the internal culture and capacity of the museums themselves. For the San Bernardino County Museum, participation in MYI “has been a vehicle to increase the professional staff’s awareness of what an education center, and museums in general, can do for the community,” says director Robert McKernan. “It benefited the staff to understand that they can play a greater role beyond their particular discipline.” As Peter Keller, president of the Bowers Museum of Cultural Art, reflects, “If your museum is in the process of reinventing itself and wanting to become more relevant to your community, I can’t think of any better way than to do after-school programs.”

“These programs can help you integrate youth into the fabric of museum life. That has forever changed us.”

*Janice Lyle
Palm Springs Art Museum*

A Heated Debate: Formal or Informal Learning?

While museum leaders tend to agree on the unique assets that museums bring to the after-school opportunity, there is less consensus around the proper focus of such programs. Echoing a growing debate in both the museum and after-school fields, MYI participants struggled over defining the proper learning role, focus, and target impact of these programs. An array of views exists on these issues, but they generally fall into two camps. Some focus on *what* to learn, advocating programs that emphasize academic achievement as measured by improvements in grades, test scores and specific knowledge. Others focus more on *how* to learn, contending that after-school museum programs should instead seek to develop more general academic skills and a love of learning among students.

In spite of political and social pressures in favor of the formal achievement camp, many practitioners in museum and education fields indicate that they are leaning toward informal learning as the most appropriate and feasible focus of museum after-school programs. “In the end, we felt the value we brought was not in the focus on the curriculum,” says Janice Lyle of the Palm Springs Art Museum. “We felt the creativity and emphasis on unstructured learning and how that enhances one’s life—that was the long-term benefit for students that we valued.” She says their informal learning approach emphasized “understanding decision-making; the role that young people could play in their community; the fact that outside the school there were adults who valued their opinions; and the idea that they could take risks and try new things.”

Support for an informal learning focus seems to come from both the demand and supply sides of the after-school arena. On the demand side, there is increasing support for development of learning skills and motivation among today's young people, especially given the prevailing premium on, and resources allocated to, more formal, quantitative achievement. On the supply side, some argue that after-school programs should provide a focus on enrichment activities separate from and complementary to the classroom curriculum. There is also the belief among many practitioners that museums are uniquely positioned to provide this informal learning. "A lot of teacher feedback we received is that the most important coordination has to do with the other side of the report card—the whole social realm, speaking skills, confidence, all those qualities that make a well-rounded and healthy child," says Traci Wierman of Turtle Bay Exploration Park. Her colleague, Robyn Peterson, adds, "Museums have a role in fulfilling some of these needs. We're able to do this because we have a real-world setting rather than school classrooms."

Stanford professor Shirley Brice Heath comes down firmly in support of the informal learning argument. "The great harm in community and cultural organizations saying 'We're going to enhance what happens in school' is that they miss the boat—kids are in school about 20 percent of the time, while probably 40 percent of their time is discretionary. What these organizations should be saying is 'How can we maximize the human potential during this 40 percent?' which is twice as long as they're in school. And because students typically aren't tested on what they learn after school, programs can be more imaginative."

Against the backdrop of school reforms pushing performance on standardized tests as the critical measure of learning, the gulf between those on the formal and informal sides of the debate seems to widen. Kathleen McLean, formerly of the Exploratorium and now a museum consultant, suggests that the two sides have become needlessly—but perhaps inevitably—polarized. "The formal school system is pretty entrenched in focusing on quantitative measures, and museum practitioners focus more on qualitative skills—more on how to learn than what to learn," she says. "The rift is a big one, but it shouldn't be an either/or proposition."

The Reality

HOW TWO CALIFORNIA MUSEUMS APPROACH AFTER-SCHOOL WORK

The museum practitioners interviewed for this report want to learn about real-world examples of successful museum after-school programs. What were the struggles? What were the successes? What were the lessons? This section profiles two museums that participated in the Museum Youth Initiative: the Bowers Museum of Cultural Art and the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History. They represent different disciplines—Bowers is an art museum; Santa Barbara is a natural history museum. They represent different student groups served—Bowers focuses on elementary and middle school students; Santa Barbara on high school students. And different storylines emerge from each: how the Bowers Museum reaches out to adults in the near orbit of participating students, and how the Santa Barbara Museum manages to bring together high schoolers and scientists.

Bowers Museum of Cultural Art (Santa Ana, California)

After the Bowers Museum of Cultural Art opened its expanded facility in 1992 in Santa Ana, the capital of Orange County, the thrill for museum president Peter Keller suffered a momentary setback when he received his eight-year-old son's assessment: "Daddy, your museum is boring." That comment helped trigger an effort by the museum to improve its program for young people, culminating in the opening of Kidseum two years later. According to federal data, roughly 25,000 kids under the age of 16 live within two miles of the museum. "I felt we weren't doing enough for these kids," Keller says. "We've partnered with great museums all over the world but didn't focus on helping kids right here in the local neighborhood, so I thought we could create an after-school program. Things took off after MYI funding."

Like many of the museums participating in the initiative, the Bowers Museum envisioned more than the occasional student field trip. "We wanted a clean and safe environment for kids, but we also knew it had to be different from a recreation program," Keller says. The Kidseum After-School Learning Center offers low-income elementary and middle school students a comprehensive and multidisciplinary education program as well as year-round academic tutoring. Also, like many MYI participants, the Kidseum program ultimately shifted in scope from broad to narrow, moving from spreading its resources across five days a week to a more manageable and focused three.

The distinctive storyline of the Kidseum program is how it engages key adults in the orbit of participating students, including teachers and, especially, parents. "In order to be effective, you need to serve not just the child but parents and teachers," says Peter Keller. Their approach includes not only keeping parents informed and engaged in their child's activities but also providing courses to the parents themselves, on subjects as varied as parenting skills, health and safety, law and your child, even income taxes. "It's a way to show families that we're there for them," Keller says. "We feel that if we educate the parents, it benefits the children. It's a very holistic way of approaching the program."

**"If you don't have support
of parents and teachers,
you won't reach the child."**

*Peter Keller
Bowers Museum of Cultural Art*

Bowers staff use a number of methods to involve families. For starters, they send invitations to parents to “come see what your children are doing,” according to Keller. “That brings them into the museum. We’re not a low-priced museum, and that’s a challenge. And we’re in a poor neighborhood, and we’ve always been put on a pedestal and thought of as unapproachable. This has dramatically changed that—having an open house has broken that barrier.” Staff also make sure events accommodate family schedules and circumstances. For example, in planning a family recital, “we came to realize that a lot of fathers and mothers would come straight from work,” says Genevieve Barrios-Southgate, manager of Kidseum. “So we served dinner. That took care of that problem. And we opened the dinner and recital to the immediate and extended family. That took care of the babysitting problem. You have to know your clientele and be sensitive to the structure and culture of the family.”

Bowers has also been effective in aligning its after-school program with the particular needs of students in the classroom, as indicated by teachers. For example, museum staff worked with one elementary school to determine how the Kidseum After-School Program could best advance the school’s pedagogical goals. One need identified by principals and teachers was help with language improvement, because a majority of students didn’t speak English as a primary language in their homes. In response, Bowers staff emphasized reading, writing and speaking activities in the after-school program. Staff and teachers have since reported noticing improvements in student language patterns, memory skills, and ability to learn.

Since MYI, the Kidseum After-School Learning Center has remained a significant part of the museum’s educational program as well as institutional culture. The program will continue beyond the initiative because of relationships the museum has developed with other funders, who made grants over the last few years to match the Irvine Foundation support. The program has broadened participation from primarily one elementary school to several other neighborhood schools. Meanwhile, students who have been with the program over four years are now in high school, and a number of them volunteer on weekends and are training to become junior docents at the museum.

Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History (Santa Barbara, California)

Just a year before, Anna was an immigrant eighth-grader who spoke in limited English and was terrified of speaking before crowds. Now, in a large lecture hall, she was presenting her research on the keyhole limpid, a marine mammal, before a large audience. Her parents were in tears over her progress. Anna’s development happened through an innovative program at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History called “Quasars to Sea Stars.”

The program takes a set of students the summer before they enter ninth grade and has them work with museum scientists and staff on research projects over the course of the next four years. Begun as an experiment before the museum participated in MYI, “Quasars to Sea Stars” offers predominantly underserved teens the opportunity to learn about scientific methods and develop skills through mentoring relationships. “We were looking for a way to engage teenagers in the museum,” says Karl Hutterer, the museum’s executive director. “Teenagers can be a difficult audience for museums. The high school curriculum is very full, and it’s hard to get their attention. At the same time, we felt that the high school years are such critical years. The kids get pushed through a mass production system, and, with some exceptions, they get lost.”

Selected from local public schools, participating students have demonstrated the potential to be good in science but, at the same time, aren't getting the support they need to realize that potential. Museum staff rely on junior high school teachers for nominations of students who could especially benefit from the program. "Many of the students we selected did not at all expect to go to college when we first selected them," Hutterer says. "They were going to be glad to finish high school. But now all participating students are going to college."

What makes the "Quasars" program noteworthy is its use of mentors. Students are paired with a research scientist and work on "an honest to goodness" research project, Hutterer says. The project culminates at the end of the summer, when students use PowerPoint® to give a formal presentation on their research findings. The audience is often as large as 150 people and includes museum staff, parents and fellow students.

The individual mentoring relationship between student and scientist, according to Hutterer, is the key ingredient—but often the key hurdle as well. "Over many years working in science museums, I've run into the issue of scientists being reluctant to get out of the lab and deal with kids," he says. "Early on, that happened here, too—our scientists expressed concern about how much time they were spending away from their research obligation. But after a few years, they became really fond of the program."

"We learned how critical it is to give students the opportunity to learn and also the responsibility," he says. "It built self-confidence and individual identity. From what I've observed over five years, that has been the most important result of the program—that students discover in themselves responsibilities and capabilities they hadn't before imagined."

The museum is continuing the Quasars program beyond MYI, using funding from corporate donors cultivated over the course of the initiative. At the same time, it is seeking to build on the program's success by developing a consortium of cultural organizations to focus on teens and improve their personal and job skills as well as academic achievement. If the consortium is established, it will offer Quasars participants opportunities to explore more varied areas of academic interest.

"Students discover in themselves responsibilities and capabilities they hadn't before imagined."

*Karl Hutterer
Santa Barbara Museum
of Natural History*

The Issues

WHAT MUSEUMS HAVE LEARNED ABOUT EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

How can museums do after-school work effectively? The question was on the minds of museum leaders interviewed for this report. This section focuses on what was learned and what key issues emerged regarding how museums can effectively develop, run, build support for and sustain after-school programs.

Issue One: How Can Museums Establish Effective Partnerships with Schools?

A key component of MYI was to link the after-school program to what happens in the classroom, as a way to ensure academic reinforcement, effective recruitment, and mutual advice regarding student participants. To realize this alignment, participating museums had to establish effective partnerships with the schools. For many museums and schools, in MYI and in general, this is new and essential territory.

It can also be difficult ground to cover, requiring big commitments of time and energy from already-strapped staff and involving programmatic cooperation between institutions with different charges, cultures and operating approaches. For many MYI participants, working with schools to align their after-school programs with in-school curricula was the most challenging part of the initiative. This doesn't surprise some observers. "There can be a real disconnect," says Laurie Schell, executive director of the California Alliance for Arts Education. "Arts provider organizations sometimes don't understand the language of schools, and schools sometimes have not clearly articulated what they want to get out of a partnership with arts providers. It's often hard to keep students at the center."

According to the museum professionals interviewed for this report, as well as the initiative evaluators, a series of factors can spell the difference between museum-school partnerships that flourish and those that fail. These factors include:

Shared goals. Is there a clear and common understanding from the outset about the *why*, as well as the *how*, of the partnership? "Collaboration is key, and it's a two-way street," says Sue Ann Robinson, Director of Collections at the Long Beach Museum of Art. In many cases, such collaboration means becoming part of the culture of the school, according to Val DeLang of the San Jose Museum of Art. "We've learned that for the program to work you need to become part of the spread of everything else that goes on in the school," she says.

Lori Fogarty of the Bay Area Discovery Museum urges museums to specify at the outset of any partnership the key criteria for success. "We try at the beginning of the partnership to talk with the partner about their needs, what would be most important for children and families in their particular community," she says.

Communication systems. How can you ensure consistent and clear communication between museums and schools? Evaluators cited an effective communication strategy as a common ingredient of programs with successful museum-school partnerships. "The number one thing you need is to make communication between school and staff brief and frequent," says Traci Wierman of Turtle Bay Exploration Park. Because communication was such a vital and complicated element, two museums decided to reduce the number of partner schools during the course of MYI. Participants developed systems to keep schools, parents and community members informed. One especially valuable method was the use of a staff liaison who was based at the school but accountable to both school and museum.

Teacher participation. How can the after-school program align with and help advance the work of teachers in the classroom? For many of the museums participating in MYI, successful outreach to teachers proved to be the linchpin of good school partnerships. In many cases, the key was finding the right teachers. “You need not only the support and endorsement of the school administration but teachers who are highly engaged, passionate and willing to do extra work to motivate students,” says Janice Lyle of the Palm Springs Art Museum. “You really need to start slow, build incrementally and build on your previous strengths and relationships.” Given the hefty workloads of today’s teachers, it came as little surprise that the most committed teacher partners were ones who saw, or were shown, how their work could be advanced by partnering with the museum program. According to Peter Keller of the Bowers Museum, “It starts with partnering with teachers, and the only effective way is to provide something for them. For example, we would present workshops based on our exhibits, along with curriculum guides, to 60 to 100 teachers. We’d try to give teachers something they need.”

“You can’t force one institution into the mold of another—you have to find a new container that can fit the agenda of both institutions.”

*Sue Ann Robinson
Long Beach Museum of Art*

Issue Two: What Institutional Ingredients Are Helpful?

Museum practitioners were asked about the institutional factors they considered key to success in after-school programs. Their answers fell into two categories: first, what might be termed ‘hard’ ingredients, such as sufficient allocation of money, staff, space and time; second, what might be termed ‘soft’ ingredients, such as staff skills, organizational culture, and community credibility and relationships. Although museum leaders acknowledged that programs could never get off the ground without a substantial commitment of hard resources, they tended to focus on the softer side when reflecting on factors key to success. Three ingredients rose to the surface:

Staff commitment. After-school efforts can pose more hurdles than traditional museum education programs and require staff energy and stamina to clear them, according to Janice Lyle of the Palm Springs Art Museum. Several participants noted how museum leaders can nourish that commitment by making the program a priority, doing so at the outset, providing staff with ample autonomy to shape it, and weaving it into the life of the museum. “The key to working with your staff is to be sure to get buy-in from them upfront,” says Robert McKernan, director of the San Bernardino County Museum.

Clarity about institutional benefit. Making clear how the museum might benefit—advancing its mission, heightening its community profile, invigorating its organizational culture—can sustain board support, galvanize additional funding and achieve broad buy-in. One benefit often overlooked is the potential for attracting new audiences. The San Jose Museum of Art’s Dan Keegan encourages museum professionals to recognize and work to advance the institutional benefit of cultivating new audiences through after-school programs. “You need to be honest with yourselves that there are two principal reasons you’re doing this: You believe in the goal of educating youth, and you also need to build new audiences. You have to be mindful of the importance of working with young people as future supporters of the arts.” This purpose should even be incorporated into curriculum design, Keegan says, but often it is not. “For example, we were delivering a program in schools without the mechanism of students actually coming to the museum. We realized that not only was education a goal but that it was important to get young people familiar with the life of the museum, and we found ways to bring them on site.”

Adaptability. Museum leaders found they needed to customize programs to the particular circumstances of partner schools and student populations. They needed to be fluid in response to changing players, incoming feedback on programs and often unanticipated needs expressed by students, teachers and parents. They needed, in other words, to adapt. “There needs to be a willingness to change,” says Val DeLang of the San Jose Museum of Art. “If we ask people what they’re interested in, we have to be ready for answers that we might not expect, be willing to do things a little differently and, in the process, be ready to change as an institution.” According to the San Joaquin County Museum’s Mike Bennett, using market research is one way for museums to adapt their programs to the needs of students.

“Because we were given a planning grant for the program, for the first time we met with student groups and asked them what they thought was important,” he says. “It taught us the wisdom of going to your marketplace before you design.”

“The youth initiative has got to be a central theme of your museum and has to be integrated into your culture and operations.”

*Robert McKernan
San Bernardino County Museum*

Issue Three: What Program Ingredients Are Helpful?

At the core of MYI were, of course, after-school educational programs. Participating museums employed a variety of methods to design and deliver after-school activities. Their approach depended on such factors as the type and scope of program, age of students, number of schools participating, and size and skill level of museum educational staff. But two core principles—built by the Foundation into the initiative, and common among all museum efforts—proved especially important to success.

Applying a youth development approach. The first principle stitched into the initiative was application of the Youth Development Framework (YDF),¹ which outlines a set of core experiences that young people need in order to learn and succeed. In 1999, at the outset of MYI, staff from participating museums were trained by the San Francisco-based Community Network for Youth Development to implement YDF program practices. Several museums continued this training in 2000 and 2001. As they implemented after-school programs, museum staff drew on the following “core experiences” prescribed by YDF:

- To have clear and consistent communication with children and youth and their families about program goals, guidelines and activities
- To provide safe and accessible facilities for program activities
- To involve children and youth participation in program planning
- To structure activities to provide hands-on, active learning
- To use a low ratio of museum staff to children and youth (greater than or equal to 1:10)
- To have a consistent, quality staff that provides supervision and mentors children and youth
- To conduct regular staff program reviews and adjustments

¹ The Youth Development Framework was developed by Dr. Michelle Gambone of Youth Development Strategies, Inc., and Dr. Jim Connell of the Institute for Research and Reform, in partnership with the Community Network for Youth Development.

According to the evaluators, using YDF as a guiding set of practices had a “profound impact” on how the museum after-school programs were delivered. By the initiative’s second year, they observed, the framework had become institutionalized in participating museums, influencing not only programs funded through MYI but other museum educational activities as well. One executive director told evaluators that YDF training was a “defining moment for our museum.”

Participating museums found some YDF-shaped program practices to be especially useful. One was the premium on student involvement in program planning. “For me to stand up before students and talk about what’s interesting,” says Robert McKernan of the San Bernardino County Museum, “just doesn’t compare to hearing a 14-year-old do it. We’ve brought in the youth club as part of the museum family and try to integrate them in various activities. If students feel we’re a credible part of their life, we’ve won, because they realize that museums are a significant resource in their landscape.”

Another standard program practice from YDF—using structured activities to provide hands-on, active learning—was widely used, hardly a surprise given how well-suited museums are to implement this approach. Yet many museums still don’t provide the kind of direct connection to museum objects that they could, according to Karl Hutterer of the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History. “The closer you can get the kids to the actual resources of the museum—in most cases, that means the collections, the artifacts, the objects—the stronger a platform you build for success,” Hutterer says. “This is the unique thing we have as museums. One reason why it’s been difficult for museums to make this connection is that we’re so protective of our collections, and often for good reason. But if we can bring young people together with collections, it can produce great results.”

Some leaders of non-MYI museums interviewed for this report expressed interest in the Youth Development Framework as a tool for improving museum education programs. “It would be useful to be trained in youth development principles,” says Kathleen McLean, formerly of the Exploratorium, “because many of us in the museum field want to do good work with young people but don’t always think through how to lay the foundation to have the desired effect. People often don’t realize they need to be more rigorous and do their homework. For example, the notion that board and staff can be trained in principles of youth development would be surprising to most, and the notion that there are learnable youth development skills might surprise people as well.”

Linking programs to in-school curricula. While most practices of the youth development approach were smoothly absorbed into the after-school programs, MYI’s second core principle—coordinating after-school programs with classroom curricula—proved to be more vexing for the museums. Part of the difficulty was aligning with California curriculum standards. Another part was coordinating with teachers to complement in-class instruction. “One of our greatest challenges,” says Lori Fogarty of the Bay Area Discovery Museum, “was to be an after-school program and, at the same time, link with curriculum and teachers.”

Initiative museums developed several ways to realize this coordination. “It helped to have an advocate at the school site willing to share information about the curriculum with us so that our museum’s educators could apply it in a timely fashion,” says Janice Lyle of the Palm Springs Art Museum. Staff of the Bowers Kidseum, as another example, determined at a staff retreat that they weren’t serving teachers and students as well as they could in tying programs with state curriculum standards. “We’ve gone back and developed workshops, curricula and high-quality objects in line with what the teacher needs,” says Peter Keller. At the same time, Keller acknowledges that, while programs ideally “would focus on a seamless experience with the classroom, we think after-school is much more than that.”

Issue Four: How Can Museums Financially Sustain These Programs?

One dimension of MYI was clear to participants and observers alike: such structured and sophisticated after-school programs are expensive. “It’s costly,” says the Bay Area Discovery Museum’s Lori Fogarty. “If you’re going to do a program in such an in-depth way, you have to realize that it’s a labor-intensive and resource-intensive effort. And there are real tradeoffs between using \$100,000 to serve 40 kids over the course of a year versus bringing in a thousand kids one time a year. That said, we felt we really did make a difference in a way we could never do in a single field trip.” As planned from the outset, the Irvine Foundation funding tapered off in years three and four and then ended for good. Participating museums were then faced with the significant challenge of sustaining these sophisticated after-school programs, financially and programmatically.

How have they handled this challenge? For starters, the museums had to begin fundraising at MYI’s midway point. In the third year of the four-year initiative, the Irvine Foundation reduced the grant amount from \$100,000 a year to \$75,000 as a challenge to the museums to raise the additional \$25,000 to maintain program funding. In the fourth year, funding was further reduced to \$50,000, with the requirement that the museum match that amount through fundraising. Most museums succeeded in sustaining their programs during the full term of the initiative through fundraising. But once Irvine Foundation funding ended, some museums decided to drop or scale back their after-school programs.

“The programs can only be sustained through continued commitment,” says Karl Hutterer of the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History. “You can’t make it self-sustaining. So we committed to continue fundraising for it. This is the limit of any program like this. If you start with external funding, it will stay with external funding.” Mike Bennett of the San Joaquin County Museum says, “Don’t get spoiled by grant money, because it won’t be there forever.”

Fundraising for intensive programs with high costs per student can be a tricky business, according to museum leaders. “A lot of funders are interested in the total number of kids in a program,” says Jim Stone of the San Diego Natural History Museum. “They’ll say, ‘We can reach a whole auditorium of kids with a presentation on one afternoon.’ But with a lot of programs, the total contact time with students can be very little, and the Youth Development Framework told us you need sustained contact with students to make a real difference. That can get costly.”

Many of the museums participating in MYI are committed to doing the fundraising necessary to sustain their programs. Some executives say they wish they had done more to diversify their funding sources earlier on, including finding other donors to invest in the program and make it their own, as well as charging families even small fees for participation at the outset. Evaluators noted that most of the museums in the cohort didn’t directly engage trustees in developing funding for future after-school programming while the initiative was underway. And yet among the museum and education leaders interviewed for this report, there’s a good supply of optimism regarding the fundraising potential of high-quality after-school programs. Many were encouraged by their successful efforts to raise the \$50,000 in matching funds in year four of the initiative, accomplished by eight of nine museums. “It’s not impossible to raise the amount of money needed for an after-school program, because the complexity of children’s needs resonates with donors at the moment,” says Janice Lyle of the Palm Springs Art Museum.

What's Next for Museums After School?

What do the experience and evaluation of the Museum Youth Initiative say about the future of museums after school? For museums ready to invest the considerable resources, time and energy required, the significant potential institutional benefits make for a bright forecast. Museums are becoming more sophisticated in designing and implementing such programs. They are forming partnerships with schools and parents with increasing effectiveness. They are gradually finding the donor dollars and board support required for sustainability. But MYI participants also made it clear that comprehensive after-school programs can be a complicated undertaking. As Lori Fogarty of the Bay Area Discovery Museum says, “You have to go in with your eyes wide open.”

Research underscored the need for more conversation within the museum field regarding some of the burning questions that emerged from MYI. What should be the proper focus of after-school programs, between formal and informal, between the *what* and the *how* of learning? How can museums build their capacity to design and deliver high-quality educational programs? How can museums raise the money needed to sustain comprehensive after-school efforts? How can they leverage investments in such programs into broader institutional benefits? And are these investments worth it? Do the benefits—for both students and museums—justify the costs? This report aims to spark and inform further conversation about these matters.

MYI addressed at least one question conclusively: Do museums bring special assets to the after-school opportunity? The answer was a definitive yes. Museums of all stripes—whether focused on art or science, history or culture—bring to bear a rich and varied portfolio of objects, settings, staff and skills, all of which can galvanize how kids learn. “It’s really the perfect learning environment,” says Karl Hutterer of the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History. “Museums provide kids the opportunity to learn in relationship to their own interest. For example, the objects of a natural history museum allow students to confront nose-to-nose the realities of our universe. Those really are 55-million-year-old fossils. Those really are ancient artifacts. They offer kids something different from what they experience on a day-to-day basis, and it’s a magical way to arouse interest and drive learning.”

Contributors

The James Irvine Foundation is a private, nonprofit grantmaking foundation, with offices in San Francisco and Los Angeles. The Foundation was established in 1937 by James Irvine, a native Californian who devoted most of his life to business interests in San Francisco and the development of his 110,000-acre ranch in Southern California, which was among the largest privately owned land holdings in the state. With current assets of more than \$1.5 billion, the Foundation expects to make grants of \$61 million in 2005 for the people of California. For more information about The James Irvine Foundation, visit www.irvine.org.

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