

Cultural Mediation, Museums and Diverse Audiences

Summary of Recommendations

A section of the
Guide for an Inclusive
Experience

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Stages prior to the cultural mediation project

1.1 Point of departure

Circumscribe the project that will be subject to cultural mediation.

Museum

Realistically assess the resources involved.

Museum

1.2 Forms of collaboration in the project's development

Define the partnership approach that the museum wishes to adopt in developing and putting together the project.

Museum and, sometimes, partner group(s)

Identify partner(s) if this is the chosen option.

Museum

Create a collaborative structure if the mediation project is carried out in partnership or by people from outside the museum.

Museum and partner group(s)

Reflect on the relevance of the "by and for" model, i.e., the presence or absence of a part of the targeted audience among the people organizing and carrying out the activity.

Members of the collaborative structure

1.3 Foundations for collaboration in the project's development

Make sure that key values are shared, since there must be a match between the museum's values, the activities that are planned, the potential partners and the targeted audiences.

Members of the collaborative structure

Agree on intentions, directions and overall goals.

Members of the collaborative structure

Agree on decision-making processes by carefully thinking about formal and informal power relationships.

Members of the collaborative structure

Agree on a project budget and its allocation.

Museum and partner(s) or members of the collaborative structure

1.4 Identification of the communities and individuals for whom the project is intended

Develop a good knowledge of the targeted communities or individuals and their needs with respect to museums.

Members of the collaborative structure + mediator(s) if not on the committee and any other person(s) involved in creating the activity - artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation

Consider the composition of groups of audiences, i.e., mixed or not. This choice varies according to context, communities and intentions.

Members of the collaborative structure

Consider the diversity (or non-diversity) of the audiences you are trying to reach: one community, several or all.

Members of the collaborative structure

1.5 Coherence between the sites and the project

Make sure that the site is suitable for the planned activities and the targeted audiences. For a museum, it is also necessary to be open to thinking about off-site mediation activities if a need has been expressed to this effect.

Members of the collaborative structure + mediator(s) if not on the committee and any other person(s) involved in creating the activity - artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation

1.6 Participatory creation structure

Consider the undeniable contribution of an activity involving both mediation and a participatory creative structure led by an experienced artist.

Members of the collaborative structure

Select an artist or group of artists as quickly as possible (ideally from the early stages) so that the entire project can be conceptualized in an integrated fashion.

Members of the collaborative structure

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Ideation and preparation of mediations

2.1 Diversity and participation: Mediation between the museum and the groups concerned

2.1.1 The relationship between the museum and the organizing partners

Clarify the specific goals of the project from the ideation stage by assessing its impacts for the museum and the partner organizations, the relationship to be developed or strengthened between the two, and the participants in the mediation activities.

Agree on a timetable and a distribution of tasks.

Consider the forms of consultation or collaboration to be implemented with the targeted community or communities.

Members of the collaborative structure + mediator(s) if not on the committee and any other person(s) involved in creating the activity - artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation

Members of the collaborative structure + mediator(s) if not on the committee

2.1.2 Relationships with community organizations and formation of groups of audiences

Beyond the groups involved in conceptualizing the activity, identify the relevant community, non-profit or activist collaborators to reach out to in order to mobilize audiences and adapt the activity in agreement with them, taking into account their vision of the issues explored by the exhibition and the mediation activities, and their group's needs.

Having a staff member who is specifically devoted to creating and maintaining ties with social organizations is considered a plus for museums.

Take into account the concerns that are crucial for certain groups and consider adaptations to specific needs.

The people concretely involved in the implementing the activity - mediator(s), artist, other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, in collaboration with the members of the collaborative structure

Museum

The people concretely involved in implementing the activity - mediator(s), artist, other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, in collaboration with the reference persons and the members of the collaborative structure

Reflect on the connection between the invited audiences and the topic of the exhibition or the mediation activity.

Members of the collaborative structure + mediator(s) if not on the committee and any other person(s) involved in creating the activity - artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation

Make sure that the cultural experience addresses more than one dimension of people's life experience or only the difficulties or challenges they face.

The people concretely involved in the implementing the activity - mediator(s), artist, other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, in collaboration with the members of the collaborative structure

Examine the interest of reaching out to young people in the communities concerned, using formats and venues appropriate for them.

Persons concretely involved in implementing the activity - mediator(s), artist(s), other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, in collaboration with the members of the collaborative structure

Promote activities that allow for intergenerational dialogue.

• Specificities of the participatory creation structure •

Choose a participatory creation structure that is adapted to the different audiences, contextually appropriate, and created either specifically for the exhibition or its topic, or in alignment with it.

The artist in collaboration with the mediator(s) and members of the collaborative structure

2.2 Mediation, art and communication with the audience

2.2.1 Communication

Consider communication issues: both the language itself (English, Spanish, Quebec Sign Language [LSQ], etc.), levels of formality (being accessible), the cultural references involved (conceptual knowledge related to a unique field such as art or to cultural elements—law, the state and rights advocacy do not mean the same thing to everyone), and the tools used to communicate.

The mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, in collaboration with the members of the collaborative structure

Create a visit guide that is as clear, succinct and accessible as possible. This guide must be drafted in a language and format suitable for the targeted audiences and provided to the participants prior to the tour.

Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, reference person

Develop communication tools adapted to the targeted audiences.

Museum

← Off-site particularities →

Develop arguments to explain the interest of a museological mediation activity to groups and participants.

Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, reference person

2.2.2 Organizational elements

Be mindful of the time allotted to the activity, depending on the people you are addressing.

Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, reference person

Plan small groups.

Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, reference persons

← Off-site particularities →

Anticipate more fluctuating groups than at the museum—even if they also fluctuate in the institution.

Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation

2.2.3 Design a cultural mediation activity

Create an activity that is suitable for the space at hand.

The mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, in collaboration with the members of the collaborative structure

Offer mediation that resonates with what is going on in the community organization, i.e., that is in continuity with or complementarity to it.

Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, reference person

Maintain a focus on enriching the community organization through the proposed activity.

Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, reference person

Bear in mind, from the ideation stage, that some people may prefer to visit the museum on their own—even if they come in a group, as part of mediation activities. The activities and premises' setup must therefore allow for this freedom.

Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation

Develop mediation that generates a lived, experiential space; that is open and uses creative strategies and art; that focuses not only on rationality, but on sensibility and the senses; and that opens up the possibility of involvement.

The mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, in collaboration with the members of the collaborative structure

Design the cultural mediation activity in the form of a toolbox: provide a variety of ways to access the exhibition (content that is more factual, aesthetic, discursive, physical artifact-focused, etc.) and equally diverse tools (stories, photos, testimonies, and objects to stimulate reflection).

The mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, in collaboration with the members of the collaborative structure

← Off-site particularities →

Bring traces of the exhibition, and, if possible, artifacts or authentic works, into the community organization.

Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, museum

2.2.4 Design of the participatory creation structure

Incorporate the creative structure into the exhibition space itself, if it is in the form of an installation.

Artist and museum staff

Connect the cultural mediation activity and the artistic structure: imagine and conduct them jointly, in order to promote seamless coherence.

The mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, in collaboration with the members of the collaborative structure

Think about what will happen to the works created by the participants.

The mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, in collaboration with the members of the collaborative structure

← Off-site particularities →

If an installation is involved, opt for a structure that can be set up in a variety of places (making sure it is reasonably sized and unobtrusive); easily transported; and, if necessary, quickly assembled and disassembled.

Artist and members of the collaborative structure

2.3 Drivers of an inclusive experience

2.3.1 The space

Make sure that the premises are physically accessible.

Museum and all its employees

← Off-site particularities →

Be familiar with the site and the resources available, both for the cultural mediation activity and for the artistic creation structure.

Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, reference person

2.3.2 Scheduling

Propose schedules adapted not to the institutional modus operandi, but to the needs of the targeted audiences, i.e., according to the times most convenient for them.

Museum, members of the collaborative structure, the mediator(s) and reference persons

2.3.3 Pricing policy

Adopt an adequate policy on pricing; the admission fee can be a real obstacle for audiences in the social sector.

Museum

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Implementation of the mediations

3.1 Outside support

Assign a reference person from the invited group(s) to the activity.

Mediator(s)

← Off-site particularities →

Include a reference person from the group, or even discuss the interest of proposing the activity as a special moment involving several members of the work team.

Mediator(s)

See if the mediation topic or strategies employed are linked to recurring activities in the group. If so, invite the people in the organization responsible for these activities.

Mediator(s)

3.2 Reception

Make sure that everyone at the admission, and indeed all museum staff—including volunteers and room supervisors—is able to welcome, guide and respond to the specific needs of the audiences.

Museum

Anticipate that audiences may be smaller or participate less than expected.

Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, reference person

← Off-site particularities →

Begin by having the mediation team formally or informally introduced to the members by the reference person, who will be able to break the ice and situate the activity within the group's unique context.

Reference person

3.3 Attention to comfort

Begin by explaining the activity's goals and how it will unfold, as well as the implicit rules of a museum tour.

Mediator(s)

Make sure to warn everyone if certain elements might affect the sensitivity of visitors, i.e., if some things spark strong emotions or involve noise or bright lights that can make it difficult to see and hear, etc.

Mediator(s)

Make sure that the environment outside the activity is relatively calm and not too noisy.

Mediator(s), the artist
and other individual(s)
involved in co-mediation

Clarify how anyone wishing to do so can choose not to participate (remain silent, leave the group for a self-guided visit, choose not to participate in a participatory work, etc.), or even withdraw for a time, for example, by going to the bathroom or to a dedicated quiet space, such as a calm room with low sensory stimulation.

Mediator(s)

Be attentive to the physical effort and concentration of the participants and provide breaks if necessary.

Mediator(s), the artist
and other individual(s)
involved in co-mediation,
reference person

Plan for beverages and a snack, as well as free time for discretionary activities (such as smoking).

Mediator(s)

3.4 Carrying out a cultural mediation activity

Good preparation, flexibility and the ability to let go are all important in order to be well equipped and have the confidence required.

Mediator(s), the artist
and other individual(s)
involved in co-mediation

Adapt formats and content to the participants in attendance, while making sure certain key ideas are conveyed.

Mediator(s), the artist
and other individual(s)
involved in co-mediation

Open up space for discussion, and even for disagreement, while upholding respect for everyone. A polyphony of perspectives and discourse is fundamental here.

Mediator(s), the artist
and other individual(s)
involved in co-mediation

If possible, promote co-mediation activities where various people can share the floor in a fluid manner.

Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, reference person, participants

← Off-site particularities →

Emphasize co-mediation even more in this context, especially to reinforce the connection between the activity and the group.

Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, reference person, participants

Make sure, in the mediation, to make links with the premises and how they are used.

Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, reference person

Expect to welcome and deal with potentially more personal and emotional self-expression from participants.

Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation

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Wrapping up the activity

Conduct an activity evaluation with the participants.

Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation

Take a step back after each mediation to share views on your experience and identify strengths and weaknesses, see if adjustments are needed, and simply clear your mind and recharge your batteries, since mediation can be demanding and emotionally charged.

Mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation

Plan a review with the groups involved, through the reference person. It should include thanks and a debriefing, both by the group (for the museum) and by the mediators.

Mediator(s), reference person

Consider whether it is appropriate to offer participants something related to the activity as a souvenir of their experience.

The mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation, members of the collaborative structure

← Off-site particularities →

Return the premises to the state they were in upon arrival.

The mediator(s), the artist and other individual(s) involved in co-mediation

If appropriate, offer participants free admissions to the museum, or even prepare groups for a museum tour if the off-site activities are part of a broader program of activities both within and beyond the museum.

Mediator(s)

