

# Saving an art museum and its neighboring community



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## Saving an Art Museum and Its Neighboring Community

Art museums are an important and beneficial part of society. They connect us with different cultures and histories in ways that books cannot. Bouton (2017) wrote, “ When we stand in an art museum and take in an artist’s work, we allow our minds to cross borders and oceans and gain a better understanding and respect of one another’s societies, ideas, beliefs, values and opinions.” The loss of a local art museum would not go unnoticed in a community. It not only would hurt the economic aspects of a city like employment, revenue, and tourism but the cultural aspects too (Bouton, 2017). Art museums are a place where artists and people can connect and learn new points of view and better understand the world around them. Sarah Green (2018) said, “... museums [benefit] society in direct ways, giving us insight into the past and future of the world we inhabit.” Without art museums exhibiting and protecting art, the art world would have no way to showcase and share their art with the world and future generations. Saving a local art museum from the possibility of closing its doors forever is not the easiest task, but it is invaluable for a community.

I choose to write about how to save a local art museum because I think the impact that art museums can have on a community is significant. For example, in 2013, when the city of Detroit filed bankruptcy, some looked to selling artwork from the Detroit Institute of Arts to pay off the city’s debts, endangering the museum (Kennedy & Davey, 2013). The museum and its supporters fought against this and were able to save its collection, keep its doors open, and protect its influence on the city (Kennedy, 2014). Today, its impact on not only the city of Detroit but the surrounding cities as well, is

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immeasurable. They have many community outreach programs, including the Inside| Out program, “ which brings high-quality reproductions from the DIA’s collection to outdoor venues throughout metro Detroit... and engaged tens of thousands of residents with art in places where they live, work and play” (“ Inside| Out,” 2019). Other well-known museums, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, have saved themselves from closing down in similar ways (Loayza, 2019; Pogrebin, 2017). All of these museums have an important influence on their communities and have proved to be worth saving. Gaining proper funding and connecting with its community and local artists would be the first steps of this process.

Funding for a failing art museum is a huge priority. Museums need funds to take care of their collection, building upkeep, and to pay their employees. According to Bell (2012), “ the majority of museums in the United States are nonprofits” (p. 1). This means museums have to get funding from a variety of things like government aid and donors. The first step in saving a local art museum would be finding new ways to get funding by applying for grants. The National Endowment for the Humanities, the Foundation for Advancement in Conservation, and the National Endowment for the Arts are all corporations that offer many grants to support preserving collections and continuing education through museums (“ About,” n. d.; “ Museums,” n. d.; “ Professional,” n. d.). Grants can be used as funds to support the museum itself and some can be used to train employees in fields like conservation to further benefit the museum’s collection. There are tons of grants available and they are readily accessible and simple to apply for on the Internet.

A second step to save a local museum would be to build a connection with local artists to gain funding for the museum as well as establish its cultural relevance. This could be done by starting a fundraiser using donated art from local artists; their artworks can be auctioned off at a charity event. To save costs from the event itself, the museum can ask for donations from small businesses in the community, benefiting the museum and giving publicity to the businesses. An auction like this would give attention to the artists' work and to the museum, bringing the museum the funds it needs and the artists a voice in their own community. Connecting with the public outside the art world is also important to save a museum. One way to do this would be to start programs with local schools. Field trips can introduce the students to the art world and inspire them to visit more with their families; an after school art program could be run by the museum to teach students art techniques like painting and sculpting as well as art history.

A museum investing in their community benefits the public by giving them access to culture and history from around the world as well as their own home town. Arinze (1999) noted, “[Museums] can use their unique positions to reach the conscience of the nation and to foster dialogue” (p. 3). Art museums bring communities together in ways other establishments cannot, they can connect experiences and history through artworks. In turn, the public can enjoy the programs offered by the museum and support the museum in appreciation for the work it does for its community. All of these steps could take years before the art museum is financially stable and even then it still needs constant support. Despite this, it is a worthwhile investment in a local community.

The result of fundraising and connecting with the public is saving the museum and its collection. In turn, the museum can become a place in the community that shares cultures and educates its people. It also will protect artwork for future generations. An art museum will also give a voice and platform to local artists. The outcome of this outweighs all the work it takes. The research and education coming out of an art museum, as well as the jobs it offers and tourism it brings to a city, is beyond price.

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