Bridges to Art, A collaboration between College of the Holy Cross and the Worcester Art Museum

Participating Organizations

- College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, MA

Please note that all data below was derived from the collaboration's nomination for the Collaboration Prize. None of the submitted data were independently verified for accuracy.

Formation

Type of Collaboration:

- Joint Programming to launch and manage one or more programs
- Administrative Consolidation to share, exchange, or provide back office services such as accounting, IT, human resources
- Merger by which governance, programs and administrative functions have been combined but which may or may not have included the integration into a single corporate entity.

Geographic Scope: State
Collaboration Focus Area:

- Arts and Culture
- Education

Population Served:

- Children and Youth
- Economically Disadvantaged
- Families

Year Collaboration was Established: 2000
Goals Sought Through Collaboration:

- Expand reach and/or range of services / programs
- Achieve administrative efficiencies
- Maximize financial resources

Reasons Prompting Collaboration:

- Financial problems / pressures within one or more of the partnering organizations
- Advancement of a shared goal
- Response to a community need

Who Initiated Collaboration: Other senior management staff
Number of Participating Organizations: 2
Were Partners Added or Dropped?: No
The collaboration between the College of the Holy Cross and the Worcester Art Museum Library was formally inaugurated in 2000 when these two historic Worcester institutions embarked upon a mutually beneficial agreement to expand the availability of their collections to a wider public audience. Holy Cross is a liberal arts college with a strong visual arts and classical studies program that heavily uses the Worcester Art Museum for both its art collection and its Library. The Worcester Art Museum is the largest art museum in central New England and houses a magnificent collection of art objects from ancient Egypt to the contemporary. When the Museum’s Library was facing a financial crisis in the late 1990s, Holy Cross became actively involved in securing the continuity of this “community treasure” for everyone. The Art Museum’s Library is unusual because it is open to the public and is heavily used by all members of the community, not just scholars. Those wishing to learn about art or to research an object in the Museum’s collection are welcome to visit the Library where the treasures of the Museum can be “unlocked”. Most museum libraries have become available “by appointment” only because of funding problems; the Worcester Art Museum Library strives to remain open in the midst of many ongoing challenges.

In 1995 the Museum Library was still a paper-based Library without the funds to enter into the 21st century. Without the necessary funding, the Library was facing closure and the elimination of all the services the community had come to expect and rely on. When the Director of the Libraries at Holy Cross became aware of this dilemma, he offered to help by providing work-study students to keep the Library open and initiated a major grant for additional support. The Library received the grant that enabled it to: create electronic records in conjunction with Holy Cross’s library system, mount its entire “card catalog” on the web for worldwide access to its unique collection, purchase on-line computer terminals for use in the reading room, increase public hours, and create an on-line database of 1700 images in the Museum’s collection. The initial collaboration was named Bridges to Art.

By the year 2000 Bridges to Art was thriving (the grant monies were exhausted) and Holy Cross offered to manage the Museum’s Library in order to create more efficiencies, provide a broader base of support, create more opportunities for collaboration, and offer more services to the community. A formal agreement was drafted and the Worcester Art Museum Library became the Adjunct Fine Arts Library of Holy Cross in addition to continuing in its previous capacity.

Management

Management Structure: Management team / oversight committee with representatives from each partner

The collaboration was considered a boon for both institutions who shared the same goals of making their collections better known and better used by the community at large. The collaboration is governed by a committee known as the “Library Steering Committee” which consists of the Director of the Museum, the Museum Librarian, the Director of Holy Cross Libraries, and a faculty member from Holy Cross. The committee meets once a semester to offer guidance to the Museum Librarian in: managing the Museum Library, promoting the Library, creating more efficiencies in training, management, and fiscal issues; and brainstorming for more creative ways to serve the Museum’s constituencies. The future of the collaboration has been guaranteed to continue in three-year increments during the course of each renewable contract. The management structure has been extremely effective in providing support and guidance in order to constantly improve the services offered to the community, especially students and teachers.

Challenges

Challenges to Making the Collaboration Work: Raising funds or integrating fund development to support the collaboration

The challenges faced by the collaboration have been to meet the increased demands and expectations placed on the Library by the Museum staff and the general community. Many colleges and high schools in the central Massachusetts area rely on the Museum to provide the “teaching laboratory” for students who study the humanities, not just art. In order to fully appreciate and understand more deeply the objects in the Museum’s collection and how these objects can be used to understand people and culture, many students and teachers visit the Library to “unlock” the stories of those objects. The information in the Library is unique and not found on the internet; the visitor must use the resources in the Library itself. The Library has relied on increased use of trained volunteers to support staff and answer reference questions during open hours. It has also applied for grants to supplement its budget when needed.

Impact
Internal Efficiencies and Effectiveness:

- Financial savings - Consolidation of management / administration
- Financial savings - Joint purchasing
- Human resources - Increased access to technical expertise (e.g. HR, Finance, IT)
- Improved marketing and communications, public relations and outreach - Improved marketing and communications, public relations and outreach

Community Impact:

- Improved quality of programs / services
- Retained programs / services in the community

Since the collaboration officially began in 2000, the impact on the Museum and the community has been tremendous. The Museum has been able to “piggyback” onto all the scholarly resources purchased by Holy Cross. As a result, Museum librarians have access to all of Holy Cross databases, which cost upwards of $500,000 on an annual basis. The Museum would never be able to purchase access to these important databases on its own. Museum curators can now do the necessary research for publications and exhibitions in house without going to outside libraries for help or having to purchase expensive library memberships. The Museum librarians are, in turn, able to offer research help to students, teachers and the general public through these electronic databases. Since the collaboration started in 2000, the usage of the Library has grown over 76%, with over 3000 people using the Library annually. The increase can be accounted for by the marked visibility of the Library on the internet, additional hours which allowed for greater access by students and the working public, and the increase of art content being taught on the secondary and college level. Because the Library is free and open to the general public, the diverse population of Worcester County has open access to all the resources the Library has to offer.

We have learned that the Museum Library offers a unique learning opportunity to people of all ages, cultures, and socio-economic backgrounds. The tremendous growth in usage demonstrates the value of the Library as a community resource to enrich people’s lives. The Library has moved from being an “inner sanctum” to being a place of learning where everyone, regardless of their background, feels comfortable.

Model

Our collaboration has already served as a model for collaboration between an art museum and a university in the Midwest that partnered to enhance each other’s missions and fiscal stability. Because of our success, there is under way a second collaboration modeled after us, also in the Midwest. Our model has been mutually beneficial and could serve many other worthy institutions for the benefit of society as a whole.

Efficiencies Achieved

The collaboration with The College of the Holy Cross began in 1995 when the College realized the terrible dilemma the Museum Library was in and decided to take unprecedented measures to alleviate our dire situation. The details of that relationship are explained in the first grant application under the “Formation” section. In addition to writing the grant that made the Library electronically accessible and give it a web presence, Holy Cross also supplied the Library with an abundance of work study students (paid for by Holy Cross) who were able to supplement our staff by working on the reference desk and enabling us to open the Library for increased public hours. In the first year of the collaboration, 1995, Holy Cross sent us enough students to total 70 hours of work per week. Because of the influx of student workers to supplement our staff, we were initially able to open the Library an additional day during the week. In order to understand fully the impact the collaboration has had on the Museum Library it is important to look at some vital statistics that monitor the activity of the Library: the number of patrons using the Library, the number of interlibrary loans requested (both number of items we lent and received), and the number of hours the Library is open to the public. The following chart shows the comparison between 1995 and 2010 (the Museum’s fiscal year ends in August) of these three factors.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>FY 1994</th>
<th>FY 2010</th>
<th>% Growth</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td># patrons</td>
<td>1259</td>
<td>3165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># interlibrary loans</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># hours open</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>1202</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The percentage growth numbers reveal the drastic effect the collaboration had on breathing new life into the Library's
program delivery by being open more hours to the public and thus being able to offer its services to a broader public. It
also demonstrates the community's overwhelming positive response to increased public hours by using the Library and
requesting interlibrary loans. In addition to the increased hours during the week, the Library is now open every Saturday to
the public during the academic year. Saturday is the busiest day of the week for the library allowing easy access for the
working public, busy students and teachers who may not be able to get to the Library during the work week. One major
goal of the Library, if we receive the Collaboration Prize, is to offer even more access by offering more open hours to the
public in the evenings and on Sunday afternoons.

When Holy Cross College assumed managerial control of the Museum Library in 2000, they also offered: access to WAM
staff and librarians their vast array of subscription only databases, membership in necessary library network organizations
such as OCLC (online computer library cataloging) and Lyriasis (network support organization), payment for all of our
office supplies, payment for the WAM librarian to attend national Art Library conferences, payment for staff development
workshops for both WAM librarians, web site hosting, hosting our cataloging system on their server, providing professional
training to the Assistant WAM librarian in cataloging, and providing maintenance and support for our state of the art ILS
(integrated library system) called Millenium. Holy Cross's extensive IT (information technology) department performs all
trouble shooting, problem solving, and system upgrades on the Millenium system, thus alleviating the Museum IT staff
from all these time consuming tasks. The Museum's IT department only consists of two people who are busy full time
dealing with the Museum's extensive computer systems. Our IT staff would never have been able to install, train, perform
system maintenance, and install upgrades to the Millenium System. The Millenium System is the state of the art library
cataloging system which cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, a cost the Museum would never have been able to
assume. Because of the collaboration, the WAM Library patrons (either in-house or remotely) have full use of our system.

As a result our unique collection of 50,000 books on the history of art is available to anyone who visits our site. Our books
are loaned via interlibrary loan to people all over the country. Specifically, some of the annual cost savings to the Museum as a result of the collaboration are: office supplies, $2,000; OCLC charges, $2,000; databases that are art related, $15,000; staff development (including conferences) $1,500; annual maintenance charges for Millenium for WAM, $4700; Holy Cross staff time to train and support WAM staff $3,000. Some one time charges that Holy Cross assumed for the WAM Library are: $1500 to install a wireless connection for Library patrons, and adding all the WAM Library records into the Millenium system, $35,000.

Because we have a state of the art cataloging system with our entire collection available on the web, and are open to the
public 25 hours per week, the WAM Library has become a valuable and much needed resource to our diverse community.

Funding cuts have slashed the budgets of public school systems decimating the schools' art departments, school libraries,
and public libraries. The WAM Library supports and supplements all the area public school systems by providing access
to teachers and students to a magnificent collection of books, periodicals, and databases not available anywhere else in
the area. Because the average cost of an art book is over $100 most public and school libraries cannot afford to purchase
high quality art books. The Library is a community treasure with a tradition of over 100 years of serving the public. So
many art museum libraries have become "inner sanctums" available by appointment only; we are striving to stay true to our
mission of offering educational opportunities to everyone on a "walk-in" basis.

An important program that evolved out of the collaboration is an annual event called "WAM 101: College Night". The
Museum invites all students who attend college in the central Massachusetts area to an evening at the Museum designed
exclusively for them. There are 13 colleges in Worcester alone with a total student enrollment of over 37,000. The goal of
WAM 101 is to demystify the Museum, make it a welcoming institution, encourage students to visit, and introduce students
to the WAM Library as a learning tool during their educational experience in Worcester. Holy Cross provides free bus
transportation to and from the Museum during this evening allowing students to attend who have no transportation. Our
highest attendance numbers were over 400 for one evening and many students have returned to use the Museum and the
Library. Many students developed a strong connection to the Museum by coming back for internships and volunteer
opportunities. One attendee from the first WAM 101 came back to work at the Museum after graduating from college. The
Museum and the Library have strong connections to the community we serve.
Evolution

In 1994 the Museum was facing a severe financial crisis and was actually considering closing the Library, laying off the librarians and support staff, and selling off all the Library materials. The Head Librarian at that time was a member of a local library consortium called WACL (Worcester Area Cooperating Libraries). During one of their regular meetings she announced that the WAM management had decided to close forever the WAM Library to save money. The members of WACL were greatly saddened to hear that the city of Worcester was about to lose one of its greatest Libraries with a tradition of serving the public for over 100 years. The Director of the Libraries at Holy Cross Libraries, Jim Hogan, was also a member of WACL and was extremely distressed over the thought of losing the WAM Library and its resources that the community had come to depend on for so long. Holy Cross has a strong tradition in teaching the humanities and has a very strong studio art and art history department. The Holy Cross community, along with many others, had become accustomed to using the unique and often antiquarian materials at the WAM Library to supplement their own humanities curriculum. Jim decided to take whatever measures he could to save the WAM Library from extinction. He met with our Director and Chief Financial Officer and offered his aid to help save the Library. Our Director and CFO were eager to listen to his ideas and offers of help. The management at WAM was reluctant to close the Library but saw no other way out of their financial dilemma. The three men worked, collaborated, and brainstormed and gave birth to the idea of a collaboration between the two institutions that would be mutually benificial to both institutions, and most of all to the community at large. Because all parties involved were so eager for a fruitful solution, there really were no major "bumps in the road". The trustees of the Museum were eager to find a solution and the Dean of Academic Affairs at Holy Cross was pleased to be able to offer an "Adjunct Fine Arts Library" to his community of learners. The management structure of the WAM Library is explained in the original grant application.

There are many benefits of the collaboration to both parties involved. Holy Cross already had several specialty libraries: Science, Music, and Religion. Now they would have a Fine Arts Library with a collection of 50,000 art books, 45,000 art history slides, 18,000 auction catalogs, and 6,500 bound volumes of art periodicals. Much of the WAM's collection is antiquarian and rare, because we have been collecting materials for over 100 years. It would be virtually impossible to build our collection today because of the enormous expense of acquiring out of print art books and periodicals. Holy Cross is able to use the WAM Library as a tool to recruit both new faculty and students who wish to study and/or teach fine and studio art. The Art Museum benefits by being able to keep its Library open for research for its staff to present and interpret art to the public through traveling exhibitions, docent led tours, exhibiting works in the permanent collection, and writing scholarly publications about the Museum's collection in order to educate the public. The collaboration has been a "win-win" situation for both involved parties with both institutions flourishing as a result. The Art Museum has demonstrated its connection and commitment to the community by expanding its public hours and offering walk-in service without appointments.

The success of the collaboration can be measured quantitatively by the statistics given in the answer to the question posed in G1. Because of the increased usage of the WAM Library the community at large has benefitted tremendously with more students, teachers, and interested visitors using the Museum Library as an educational resource to supplement their learning. With the increased emphasis on learning across disciplines in the public school system, the study of art has increased because of its interdisciplinary nature. The WAM Library is ready to offer all of its resources to encourage and support structured and unstructured educational opportunities to everyone in our community. There are other measures of success besides statistics. There have been countless students, both high school and college, who have used our Library to research works of art, write papers, prepare presentations, and have come back to tell us how successful their efforts were. We have even received phone calls from students thanking us for the guidance, research help, and insight they received from us while working on projects and making their educational endeavors more meaningful.

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