



PUBLIC PROGRAMS

A Best Practice document based on
My Armenia Program's projects
with regional museums in Armenia

Public Engagement is the term used increasingly among museums to encompass all the activities that interface with or impact the museum's visitors – such as providing tours or other educational activities, creating informational brochures, or providing input on exhibitions to ensure they are relevant and accessible to the general public.

Public engagement, like in-person or virtual public programs at your museum, is outward-facing and is responsible for “translating” the research, collections, and assets of the museum into resources and activities that serve the needs and interests of the museum's many publics. It facilitates and promotes audience attraction and retention – and enables a museum to form and deepen relationships with the public. In a virtual format, your museum can expand its reach and engage audiences that may otherwise be unable to visit your museum in person or extend a museum experience beyond the on-site visit.

This document focuses specifically on in-person public programs. Though they are not the only way museums conduct public engagement, they are an important way to create unique experiences for diverse audiences.

THIS DOCUMENT INCLUDES INFORMATION ABOUT:

- 01 Identifying a type of public program to implement
- 05 Developing a program concept
- 06 Piloting a program
- 07 Evaluating a program
- 08 Pricing a program
- 09 Marketing a program
- 10 Program examples



TYPES OF PUBLIC PROGRAMS



Ideally museums can offer a suite of thoughtful programs and tours for different age groups. You can consider offering:

- Onsite tours and programming related to permanent and temporary exhibitions;
- Programs and resources specifically for school groups, perhaps related to curricula;
- Materials, such as worksheets, gallery guides, fact sheets, or historic texts, to facilitate the in-gallery experience for visitors;
- Festivals and celebrations around national holidays or religious celebrations;
- Symposia, workshops, and trainings;
- Theater/drama programs, performances, and/or demonstrations as they relate to the collections.

DEVELOPING A PROGRAM CONCEPT

For any type of public program, in person or virtual, it's important to consider a variety of factors that will impact the program's planning, execution, and success. Some programs may be simpler to develop and launch (such as a collection highlights tour), while others may take more research to develop.

For any program, experience, or activity, we encourage you to:

Consider audiences – what are the different needs for different audience types, and how might you adapt the program to accommodate different audiences?

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Think critically about its unique selling points and desired outcomes – why should someone wish to participate in this program?

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Fully think through the main components or parts that comprise the overall program – how do you plan to take people through the experience, literally and figuratively?

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Outline program details (description, duration, group size, supplies, seasonality, etc.);

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Highlight training needs that would help museum staff lead or facilitate the program;

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Note associated costs (special instructors, supplies, etc.); and Practice!

DEVELOPING A PROGRAM CONCEPT *(CONT.)*

After refining your program idea, securing necessary resources, completing necessary research, and developing program materials, try testing your program. Museum staff could invite their friends or family to participate in the experience you have developed. During the program, it will be important to observe the participants' experiences - do they have a hands-on experience? Does the program feel age appropriate? Are there parts of the program that seemed to be confusing? Were there specific questions that came up more than once?

After the program, ask participants to share their feedback (either verbally or through a short evaluation) on their overall experience. These responses will help you to determine what, if any, modifications may need to be made to improve the participant experience. Perhaps there was an area of the program that requires more context from the facilitator or perhaps a particular type of material was not suitable for the hands-on project you created.

This pilot phase is an excellent time to gather this information and make any necessary adjustments that will ensure a high-quality program and museum experience!

PILOTING YOUR PROGRAM

Evaluations can be conducted during and after pilot testing your program, as well as after the official launch of your program. As with piloting your program, you can ask participants for feedback either verbally or through short, written evaluations. Consider how your review can support your program:

Refining your program - feedback can be used to make adjustments to your program. Participants like to feel heard, and making necessary adaptations to improve your program is a great way to demonstrate this.

Reporting - sharing statistics and participant feedback can be important to incorporate into your reporting to the municipality, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sports, grant organizations or others. Consider ways that this feedback can be used to ask for additional funding or support to continue these programs or expand your offering.

Marketing - select anecdotes can serve as "reviews" as you market your experience online or in print.

PRICING

You may decide to include some programs in your ticket pricing. Ideally, you will be able to develop a program, experience, or activity that both connects participants with your museum and is also cost-recoverable. It will be important to price your experience accordingly.

Offering programs or experiences at a modest price is also an important way to convey the inherent value of these special offerings to the public!

To keep programmatic costs down, you could consider:

- Drawing upon staff expertise to lead and facilitate programs;
- Reduce the amount of disposable supplies or 'take away' program materials that will need to be replenished between programs; and
- Purchase supplies that can be reused and stored at the museum.

MARKETING YOUR EXPERIENCE

Any program or tour offered at your museum should be marketed appropriately to bring awareness to this special experience. At the very least, your museum's website and brochure should list the different experiences available to visitors.

For a public program, you may also wish to consider developing a specific marketing brochure or brochure insert with more specific information. This brochure should include the name of the program, a description of the program, pricing, group size, relevant age groups, languages available, days/times offered, and how to reserve a space in the program. Your museum's name, address, website, and phone number, and email should be clear and visible. The brochure should be easy to read and visually appealing. Consider sharing these brochures with business owners (restaurants, bed & breakfasts, or hotels), tour operators, as well as mother museums or other museums in the region to maximize reach and attract a diverse audience.

A monthly program calendar can also provide information about regularly offered tours, and programs can be listed on the museum website, brochure, and other promotional material.



PROGRAM EXAMPLE: ART BY THE MOUNTAINS

The Jermuk Art Gallery took advantage of its beautiful location to offer an outdoor program focused on plein-air painting. By using the landscape as inspiration, the experience is a unique draw to the gallery.



The program utilizes the expertise of the director, who is also an artist, to offer visitors a truly special experience.



The program is based on the age-old practice of landscape painting and highlights the collection of the gallery itself, which is known for beautiful landscape paintings.

PROGRAM EXAMPLE: 1001 SHADES

In this hands-on ceramic workshop, visitors are given smocks, paintbrushes, and paint and invited to sit outside in the garden (or indoors if weather does not permit) to try their hand at painting on a miniature ceramic plate – either in the style of the Aslamazyan sisters or their own style.

Similar to Jermuk, the program in Gyumri takes advantage of working with a local expert. While visitors paint, a resident artisan walks around and continues discussing the work of the sisters and how their practice was significant in the history of Armenian ceramics. He/she also discusses current ceramics practices in Gyumri, linking the



This program stands apart because visitors can take home a truly unique souvenir – one they have made!

PROGRAM EXAMPLE: TREES THAT TELL STORIES

The Sisian History Museum displays a rich ethnographic collection, including a beloved and cherished family tree dating back to 1680 belonging to well-known historian and philologist Nicholas Adonts after whom the museum was named. Since the Middle Ages, family trees have been created and used around the world to record family lineage, helping us trace where we come from and learn more about those family members who helped shape who we are.



This program builds on the museum collection, enabling visitors to explore examples of original family trees of well-known Armenians, including that of Nicholas Adonts, before creating their own. A personalized workbook allows this program to be creative, insightful, and inspiring for visitors of all ages.

At the end of the program, visitors take home their workbook and family tree and can continue adding to its branches as they learn more about their ancestors and family traditions.

PROGRAM EXAMPLE: THE ART OF PRINTMAKING



This program at the Dilijan Local Lore Museum and Art Gallery is grounded with information about the history of printmaking in Armenia as seen through works of art in the gallery. The program begins with a tour that encourages visitors to examine different types of print media in the galleries.

Visitors can choose one of four pre-made designs to use for their own prints. My Armenia worked with a contemporary Armenian illustrator to create these designs, each linked to the collection and the cultural heritage of Dilijan.

The program provides first-hand experience of printmaking processes and allows participants to take home their own handprinted illustration.



PROGRAM EXAMPLE: SAMOVAR STORIES

Inspired by Aksel Bakunts' family tradition of drinking rose petal tea, participants are invited to gather and learn the practice of the traditional samovar to prepare and serve tea.

While participants enjoy drinking tea in the family's garden in Goris, they have the chance to read Bakunts' short story "Alpine Violet" and draw parallels between rural and urban life during the soviet period and today.

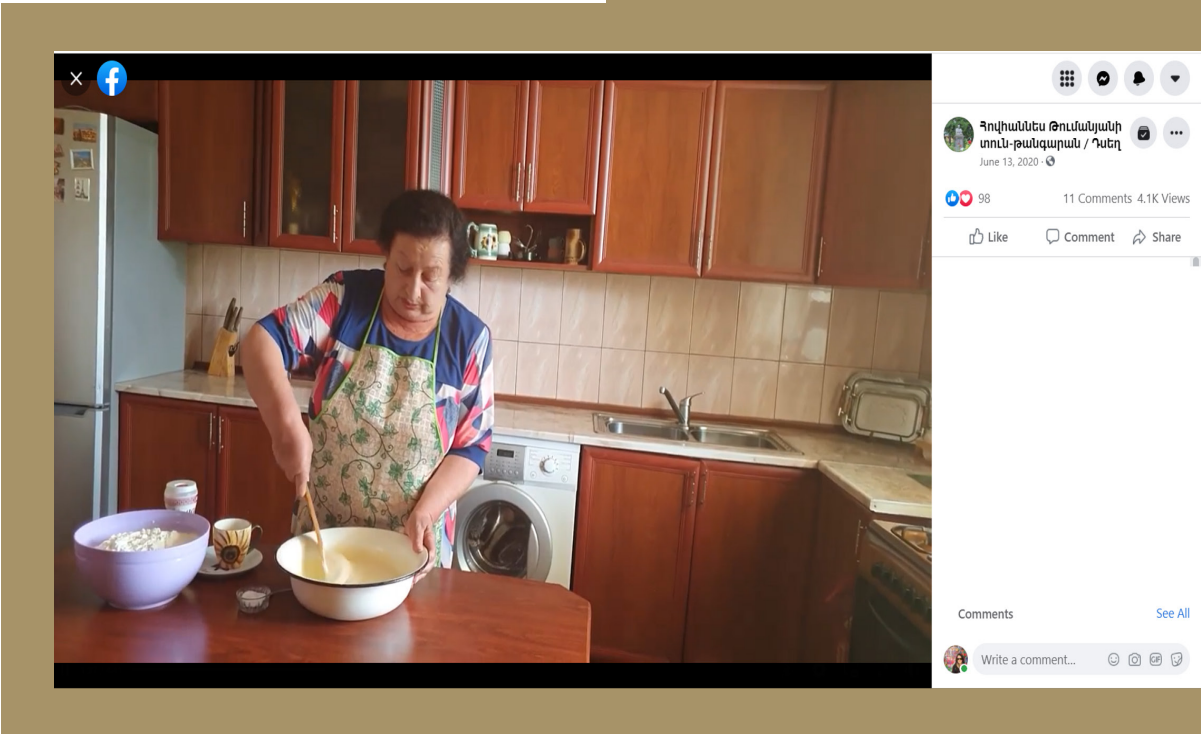


ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Determining the strengths, roles, and responsibilities of your team will help encourage participation, ownership, and accountability. Some museums have full-time staff who are trained in education. Others may use volunteers or university students who have expertise either in education or in the museum’s primary subject matter. You can leverage external partnerships and experts to create programming, too!

Museums can benefit from having the following to support program development and implementation:

- Educator (or other) working with researcher/ curator of the museum on the content development, including any new research that is required and also to lead the implementation/ delivery of programs, which includes general skills interacting with the public;
- Event coordinator who can oversee logistics, such as welcoming school groups and/or supporting the visits of larger tour groups.
- Social media specialist who can manage digital presence and dissemination of information about programs online, which could include managing social media and responding to visitor inquiries and comments online.



Closed due to the pandemic, the Hovhannes Toumanian House Museum in Dsegh was unable to host their usual in person tours and programs for visitors. Using the camera on her mobile phone, the museum’s director got creative and recorded herself cooking a traditional Armenian dish that Toumanian’s family would have enjoyed. The video was shared to Facebook, and so far, has received over 4,000 views!

MAKING YOUR MUSEUM ACCESSIBLE

While inviting audiences to attend on-site programs, increasingly museums are understanding the value of offering programming online. It can help you:

- Expand your reach to new audiences
- Use data to better understand audiences
- Use digital tools to enhance engagement
- Lower the cost of delivering programming
- Create long lasting resources

Things to remember if offering programming online:

- Staff need digital production skills
- Staff and audiences need digital access (internet and devices)
- Copyright issues for sharing images/music online
- Online programs can't replace social aspect of in-person experiences



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CULTURAL HERITAGE
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