

## Engagement Tools for Building Creative Communities, Placemaking, and Partnerships

**Presenters: Candace Tangorra Matelic, Ph.D., CTM Professional Services  
Candace Lee Heald, Ph.D., AHA!, New Bedford, MA**

### Session Overview

The places where we live each have an authenticity, character and spirit. Engaging that heart and soul of a community is what keeps it unique and holds it from being not just anywhere. In an era of homogenization of brands, and a population that is connected through electronic media and not physical place, being part of a place builds on values of humanities, culture and local creativity and is a much greater enterprise than maintaining the local museum, historical society or cultural center. Increasingly, museum professionals need to work in partnerships to be successful and at the center of their creative communities.

This session explores experiences of place-making and building communities involving the creative economy. Candace Heald presents a 12-step toolkit for building a community program platform that emerged from AHA! (Arts, History and Architecture), a community organization that has spurred a cultural renaissance and economic resurgence in New Bedford, MA through 60 plus partnerships with community and cultural organizations. Candace Tangorra Matelic shares tools for civic engagement learned from a decade of work in the field, helping museums and communities move towards sustainable relationships.

### Heald: The Successful AHA! Model

“AHA! Night” is New Bedford’s Free Second Thursday Arts and Culture Night, which started in July 1999 and has been continuously operating since that time. The AHA! partnership in New Bedford has established a reputation in Massachusetts as a successful network for community collaboration that has invigorated the downtown cultural landscape for a decade.

The AHA! case study demonstrates how communities can connect and utilize cultural resources to build sustainable audiences and support. The two parallel concepts that are embedded in the AHA! model are:

- **Creative Economy**, which is cultural nonprofits, artists and creative businesses that produce and distribute cultural goods and experience impacting the economy by creating jobs, revenue and quality of life.
- **Cultural Tourism**, which is a travel industry term describing, travel and visitation activities directed at the area’s arts, heritage, recreation and natural resources.

AHA!’s monthly celebration of the arts and culture scene, the diverse city population, fabulous food, performing arts, and feasts and festivals have attracted new development and business growth, populated the city center with residents and students, increased tourism and generated new enthusiasm in this vibrant community. A critical mass of people, the magnet of programming of AHA! and the diversity of interests attracts suburban people back to the city.

More details can be found in the AHA! booklet distributed at the session.

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### Matelic: Tools for Engagement

Community Engagement IS:	Community Engagement IS NOT:
Identifying and addressing what the community cares about.	Identifying what the community can do for your organization.
Doing things that really matter, e.g., activities focused on building better communities.	Token exhibits and programs about or with community groups.
Establishing long-term relationships and partnerships with other community groups.	Occasional stakeholder input meetings or an annual visitor survey.
Working with community groups to plan and offer your programs and activities, and sharing the control, acknowledgement and proceeds.	Continuing to control and run your programs and activities, yet expecting other community organizations to participate and donate.
Getting involved in community activities outside of your organization.	Expecting reciprocity for contributions to the community outside of your organization.

Audience Development	Community Engagement
<b>Short term marketing strategy</b> to increase the number of people who visit your organization: builds and broadens your audience, which can turn into support for your organization	<b>Long term organizational development strategy</b> to build community ownership, participation, relationships, and support for your organization: builds a better community, which in turn, builds your audience and position of importance in the community
<b>Looks at who is and who is not coming</b> and why or why not; identifies potential audiences for marketing existing museum services	<b>Looks at what matters to the community</b> and how your organization is or is not responding; identifies how existing museum services could become more relevant
<b>Focus on increasing visitation numbers</b> from existing and new groups, and building membership numbers, the relationship with community remains the same as it is currently	<b>Focus on developing relationships</b> and increasing partnerships and collaborations with a variety of community groups, benefiting all participating partners
<b>Internally focused approach:</b> how can the community serve us and our needs (this approach potentially closes doors as it does not address what other organizations need—it is all about your organization)	<b>Externally focused approach:</b> how can we serve the community's needs, working with others (this approach opens doors as it is a shared goal with other community organizations—it is about what we all need)
Involves education, marketing and development staff members	Involves all stakeholders, including staff, trustees and volunteers
A consultant can complete the bulk of the work, working on your behalf, conducting interviews in the community and facilitating focus groups and then summarizing salient points (a consultant goes to the community and reports back to you)	A consultant can facilitate and guide the initial conversations and summarize the collective input from community participants, but your staff needs to be actively involved to make it work (a consultant helps to bring the community to you for collective dialogue)
<b>Organizational identity, goals and priorities remain essentially the same</b> , as does the organization's current reputation, public service, value and standing in the community	<b>Organizational identity, goals and priorities could be fundamentally transformed</b> in response to community input and ideas, increasing reputation, public service, value and standing in the community
<b>A more conservative approach</b> , with more predictable and focused outcomes, if completed thoughtfully, impacting a limited portion of the organization	<b>A more risky approach</b> , but if completed with sincerity and honesty, outcomes can far exceed initial expectations, impact all aspects of the operation and last longer

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### Steps Toward Community Engagement

<b>Take a Leap of Faith</b>	Work through your fears. Begin it, even though you may not accurately predict the outcomes.
<b>Examine Your Agenda</b>	Your reasons for engaging community must go beyond your organization's purpose. Rather, focus on building a better community.
<b>Make New Friends</b>	Push beyond existing friends and stakeholders to establish new relationships with community groups and individuals. Put energy into a thoughtful selection process.
<b>Plan Memorable Community Events</b>	Even with very important work to do, community gatherings can be informal, thematic, and fun. Plan them as social events.
<b>Ask What Your Community Really Cares About</b>	Develop synergy by focusing on the distinctiveness of place and people. Help participants identify community assets, needs, and issues, and then envision collaborative solutions.
<b>Work With Others to Implement New Ideas</b>	Shift your organization from controlling and doing everything independently to working collaboratively for all activities and programs.
<b>Articulate an Inspiring Vision</b>	An inspiring vision can attract new board members, funding, partners, and community attention for activities. Articulate how your organization wants to change the world.
<b>Develop Strategic Programs That Matter</b>	Solicit ideas for collaborative programs that can help to address important community issues. Plan innovative program approaches with partner organizations.
<b>Keep the Momentum Going</b>	Share results of gatherings. Integrate community engagement into all activities. Form a Community Working Group to participate in all planning.
<b>Transform Organizational Operations and Practice</b>	Work towards social entrepreneurship by paying it forward, giving back to those in need, and addressing social issues in your community, guided by the spirit and passions of your organization.

A more detailed explanation of these charts can be found in Chapter 6, "New Soles for Small Museums," AASLH: Altamira Press, pp. 141-162, 2011.

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### Resources for Community Engagement

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Kretzmann, John P., McKnight, John L., Dobrowolski, Sarah, and Puntenney, Deborah (2005). "Discovering Community Power: A Guide to Mobilizing Local Assets and Your Organization's Capacity," Asset-Based Community Development Institute, School of Education and Social Policy, Northwestern University. The Guide is available to download freely on the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's website: [www.wkkf.org](http://www.wkkf.org) and the ABCD Institute's website: [www.northwestern.edu/ipr/abcd.html](http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/abcd.html).

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Worts (2008). "Measuring Museum Meaning." *Journal of Museum Education* 31:1 (Spring 2006) pp.41-48. [http://www.csin-rcid.ca/downloads/worts\\_jme\\_article.pdf](http://www.csin-rcid.ca/downloads/worts_jme_article.pdf)

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**Candace Tangorra Matelic** is the President of CTM Professional Services, an independent business since 1998 focused on teaching and consulting in the areas of community engagement and organizational transformation, development, and learning. With over 30 years in the field, she regularly speaks and teaches throughout North America. Previously she directed National Landmark sites in Maryland and Hawaii and managed the visitor experience, interpretation and programs at museums in Michigan and Iowa. For a decade she directed the Cooperstown Graduate Program. Candace's consulting and planning work is distinguished by helping museums, historic sites, cultural organizations, community organizations, and educational organizations engage their communities as partners, and then fundamentally transform their vision, assumptions, organizational culture, and work patterns. Candace holds a Ph.D. in Organizational Studies from The University at Albany, a MA in History Museum Studies from SUNY Oneonta, and a BFA (Fine Arts and American Studies) from the University of Michigan. Candace can be reached at: CTM Professional Services, 21 Mariano, Santa Fe, NM, 87508 [www.transformorg.com](http://www.transformorg.com) 843.655.0216 [candace@transformorg.com](mailto:candace@transformorg.com) or [candacematelic@gmail.com](mailto:candacematelic@gmail.com).

**Candace Lee Heald** has been the Program Director of AHA! since 2007. Previously, she was Vice-President of Program, Education and Exhibitions at the New Bedford Whaling Museum where she oversaw educational and public programs, exhibitions and library functions as well as visitor services and volunteers. During her tenure, the Museum won the Mass Cultural Award for excellence in community programming. Previously, Lee had held the positions of Director of Education at Plimoth Plantation and Exhibition Associate at the Rhode Island Historical Society. Lee received her Ph.D. from Lesley University, holds an MA in American History from the University of Delaware and BA in American History from Brown University. She has been adjunct teaching faculty at Lesley University, Tufts University and UMASS Dartmouth. Lee was one of the authors for the original AHA! grant and was on the Steering Committee as Program Chair and Steering Committee Chair from 1999 until she was hired as staff. Lee can be reached at:

Note: **Ethelyn Abellanosa**, Deputy Director for Operations, The Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience, was unable to attend the meeting. Information about their successful community process model for developing exhibitions, involving the creative community, can be found at the museum's website: <http://wingluke.org/pages/process/introduction.html> (there's a pull down menu to explore some of the sub-topics). Ethelyn can be reached at: