



Case Statement

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ABSTRACT

Most American and many international museum associations and the agencies and foundations that support museums list “research” among their top priorities for the coming years. The museum field is making research progress in museum learning, but little research has been conducted of museums as businesses operations - the institutional research that is needed to maintain the economic and creative health of this growing, yet endangered sector of our culture.

The White Oak Institute aspires to contribute to that need. The mission of the White Oak Institute is to further innovation in the museum field through research, analysis, and dissemination of data-based findings drawn from museum operations. Over the years, this new non-profit will involve museum leaders in the kinds of field-wide research needed to inform management’s major decisions and to advance promising innovations.

A unique characteristic of the Institute’s methodologies will be the engagement of high-level museum managers as investigators, working with their colleagues in processes supported and facilitated by the Institute’s data analysis and synthesis. The goal is more economically and environmentally sustainable museums that are better able to serve the public by offering more effective community services.

The White Oak Institute is a non-profit formed by the owner/principals of White Oak Associates, Inc., and it benefits from that company’s resources and 39 years of service to the museum field. In that time, it has had hundreds of museum commissions from over a hundred museums.



THE NEED

Museums serve the public in ever increasing numbers and ways. Museums around the world engage over a billion visitors and program customers each year with positive outcomes in education, community building, social interaction, stewardship, scholarship, and economic development. No longer an elite activity, museums have become an important part of mainstream community and culture. Yet museums are complex operating organizations, and they are not easy to run, in large part because we know very little about the field economically and operationally.

Sustaining the operating budget, which typically includes a costly physical plant with high security expectations, requires serving four masters: visitors, program customers, public supporters, and private supporters. Each of these categories of operating revenue puts changing demands on the institution that require constant re-alignment and adjustment to the institutional purpose.

The job of running a museum is getting harder. Visitors can be fickle and they have had rising expectations during the first decades of the experience and information economies. Government support is uneven and prone to political and economic swings. Private support is pulled towards many other worthy causes. Knowledge of the museum's subject is only the starting requirement for the leaders managing museums as they become increasingly complex economic ventures.

Museums are famously local and idiosyncratic, rooted in their communities by the physicality of their unique collections and public buildings. Yet collectively, museums are a global industry with an active network of linked professionals. America, by one count, has 17,500 museum sites (IMLS 2007). Museums are everywhere. The state of São Paulo, Brazil has 300 (Bianchi 2007), for instance. There are over 42 million visits each year to Britain's major museums (only a sub-set of Britain's total museums), with 43% of the population attending at least once during the year (Travers 2006). There has been tremendous growth in the industry in the past decades. Now we have to make sure that individual museums are and will be sustainable, and we need to monitor the industry's health as a whole. What is the size and impact of the museum industry? What do historical trends tell us about the future? How does the industry handle its R & D? How can individual museums innovate and grow by learning from their global peers?

Museums have become a critical part of our global creative economy. The museum member associations (ICOM, AAM, ASTC, ACM, etc.) offer timely periodicals and statistics, but there is little exploration of the data focused on museum operations. It is time for a systematic research and analysis resource that helps museums innovate as organizations and as an industry. We believe the museum field has reached sufficient maturity and value that foundations and agencies will come to support a research institute that harnesses top museum leaders to help the museum field become more effective, innovative and sustainable.



THE MISSION

Incorporated as a 501 (c)(3) non-profit in 2007, The White Oak Institute aspires to lead management-level research in the business and operations of the principal categories of community-based museums. Over the years, this new non-profit will involve museum leaders in the kinds of field-wide research needed to inform management's major decisions and to advance promising innovations.

The mission of the White Oak Institute is to further innovation in the museum field through research, analysis, and dissemination of data-based findings drawn from museum operations.

Unlike the few other nonprofit institutes in the museum field studying learning in an exhibits context, the White Oak Institute will focus on management's key operating and sustainability issues. We will serve the public by serving the institutions that reach the public directly.

THE FIELD OF STUDY

By charter, the field of study for the White Oak Institute is global and embraces all categories of museums. The field of study can include those institutions that fit the International Council of Museums' (ICOM) definition of a museum:

"A non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates, and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment (UNESCO 2007)."

The term "non-profit" has varied definitions internationally, and does not apply in certain cultures, where the private sector has created middle grounds for educational museums. "Material evidence" may unintentionally seem to exclude museums based on digital collections and natural phenomena like gravity and magnetism explored by science centers; so, for practical reasons of identification, we will rely on regional museum associations to determine whether a museum-like institution qualifies as a museum in our field of study. This choice relies on: 1) institutions to self-identify themselves as museums through their application for membership in a museum association, and 2) on their peers to accept that they qualify as "museums" by their association's definition. This filter will miss some museums. Many museums are too small to become actively involved in museum associations or to place annual dues high on their priority of expenses. Other institutions – and this is an increasingly diminishing



number – are too independent to see the relevance of membership in a museum association.

This definition will also exclude some corporate museums and all for-profit museums, like the very successful Salem Witch Museum and International Spy Museum (Washington, D.C.). While the museum field may have a lot to learn from such organizations, the White Oak Institute’s commitment is to institutions in the non-profit world (or its local equivalent) that place community service as their highest priority, above corporate marketing or private gain.

This provides the Institute with a definition of its potential study field. While we will occasionally also study models in other fields, such as for-profit museums, libraries, theme parks, interactive video games, etc., our purpose will be to gain insights that support the non-profit museum field and its members, as we have defined them.

In practice, especially in the early years, the Institute’s work will focus on specific subsets of the museum field. Museum managers are understandably more interested in the successes and experiments of their peer institutions. We will start with the sub-sets that we know the most about: mid-sized to large science centers, community history museums, children’s museums in the United States and Canada, and giant screen and planetarium theaters globally. From that base we will branch out in time to other sizes, disciplines and regions.

THE NATURE OF THE STUDIES

A unique characteristic of the Institute’s methodologies will be the engagement of high-level museum managers as investigators, working with their colleagues in processes supported and facilitated by the Institute’s data analysis and synthesis – experience and data. The goal is to involve museum decision-makers in working together to look at qualitative and quantitative data drawn from their field and from societal trends around them in order to distill practical knowledge that will help them and other managers achieve more economically and environmentally sustainable museums that are better able to serve the public by offering more effective community services.

Most museum research funding has been channeled to *learning research*. Little funding has been sought so far for *institutional research* that looks at such museum operating issues as attendance factors, information exchange protocols, revenue models, or “how-to’s” that provide museum managers with useful frameworks in emerging fields (e.g., digital giant screen theaters and green-sensitive operations).

Museum membership associations are already working with us on our initiatives and research grant applications. American Association of Museums, Association of Science-Technology Centers, Association of Children’s Museums, International Planetarium Society and Giant Screen Cinema Association are participants in one or more of our



initiatives. Such grants will build on the data these associations have collected already, and they will also distribute the Institute's findings back to their members.

THE CONTEXT: WHAT CONSTITUTES "KNOWLEDGE?"

Learning researchers view the visitor experience as their study arena and approach experiential learning from an academic, scholarly perspective, typically building on previous studies and observing and interviewing visitors in specific museum contexts about specific learning behaviors. Visitor experiences are seen as central to museum practice, and a considerable amount of research funding has been invested in investigating the nature and impact of different kinds of visitor experiences, from children's discovery worlds to traveling exhibitions. The tacit assumption of learning research is that museums are the operating machinery that supports the field's core learning resource: the visitor experience.

The findings from these learning research studies are distributed horizontally to peer exhibit developers in kindred museums. For instance, when the NSF funds the Exploratorium to do research on the effect of clustering exhibits on learning, other exhibit developers at other museums are encouraged to apply the findings to their work.

While this is the theory, in practice the learning research findings can have difficulty influencing decisions. For instance, despite the findings from the Exploratorium that clustering exhibits around a particular subject reinforces retention of the connections among the exhibits, the rest of the science center field has not adopted clustering as a general policy of exhibit design; rather, other forces including inertia, seem to be at work. What kinds of knowledge actually do drive decisions? What is the process of knowledge management and decision-making within an organization? How do these affect the museum's community services? How do individuals and their personal drives and museum definitions affect a museum's direction?

Museums are a much more active force than the operating machinery behind visitor experiences, usually offering many other learning experiences in addition to their galleries. Little research and less analysis are conducted on museums as learning institutions. How do they serve their communities? How can museums improve their services and become more economically sustainable? What is a good museum? And what is a great museum? How do the good become great?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Institutional research, or operating research on the museum field and its sub-sets, will benefit from a different approach than *learning research*. As organizations, museums collect huge amounts of operating data which appear in attendance records, annual financial statements, IRS Form 990s, economic impact studies, grant applications and



filings, program enrollment, and school group uses, for instance. On the qualitative side, museum managers build up experience that informs judgment from a street-savvy, in-practice perspective, as well as from an academic and scholarly in-principle perspective.

By collecting and comparing such quantitative data from like sub-sets of museums (e.g. large science centers, city history museums, medium children's museums, etc.), we can start to see patterns of use to museum managers.

Busy managers, however, seldom read long research reports, although they are interested in the sound bites and executive summaries. Managers are also bombarded with many other ideas and seldom have the time to participate in on-line discussions. However, most museum managers do respect their peers in other institutions, and look forward to opportunities to work together on specific challenges to their field. While schedules are tight, a two or three day workshop with other selected colleagues from similar institutions will be an attractive format that will involve the leaders in exploring and applying the research. Ironically, it may be easier and more effective to engage busy managers in a two-day creative workshop than to get them to spend two hours quietly reading a report.

One tactic is to employ museum managers with a variety of perspectives and experience to analyze data summaries, apply their experience to understand them, and draw possible qualitative conclusions that will influence their decisions when they return to their museums.

Relevant academic research will be reviewed and referenced by project teams as appropriate, and team members will build on it in their work. Distribution of findings will focus on other museum managers and their needs, and we will make best efforts to also distribute to related academic researchers.

THE WHITE OAK LEGACY

The White Oak Institute is a non-profit formed by the owner/principals of White Oak Associates, Inc., and it benefits from that company's 35 years of service to the museum field. In that time, it has had hundreds of museum commissions from over a hundred museums. White Oak Associates specializes in planning and producing large-scale expansions and new museums, and we have significant involvement in the IMAX® and now digital theater worlds. White Oak Associates has 20 current and recent museum and theater projects internationally, representing a combined one and a half billion dollars worth of planned community investment in museums.

The principals' expertise is in overall institutional planning, linking creative strategies with economic analysis. We understand museums operationally, and are active players in the museum community, particularly those areas focused on family learning and community-based museums. We have a wide network of contacts among top museum



directors and professionals, and the *White Oak Forum* is shared with 1,800 museum leaders.

Each of these projects is for a specific museum client, although we often form networks to collect data from comparable museums. Over the three decades, we have accumulated a significant amount of information, both in our library and in our digital databases. However, none of these individual clients is prepared to spend their scarce dollars on field-wide research, so we are forming the non-profit White Oak Institute to partner with other nonprofits to investigate the kinds of larger questions that have long intrigued us, but that no single museum client could finance.

We love the museum field and have had an extremely busy career, launching innovative new museums. Now, we are interested in addressing the broader questions that face the international family of museums. White Oak Associates will continue to serve its current clients, as most do not open for years. At the same time, we will slowly establish the White Oak Institute with the hope that it will grow and continue to serve the museum field.

THE INVESTIGATORS AND ANALYSTS

Our project research teams are likely to involve both active and retired museum managers working together with promising upcoming museum directors, guided by the Institute's principal investigators and supported by careful analysts.

CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS

John W. Jacobsen, the Institute's President, CEO and Co-Principal Investigator, was associate director of the Museum of Science in Boston in the '80's, leading the Theaters and Marketing Division, and he was also executive producer of their highly successful new Hall Wing and Mugar Omni Theater. During Jacobsen's tenure and under Dr. Roger Nichols' leadership, overall Museum attendance grew from 950,000 to 2.2 million visitors per year. Since then, Mr. Jacobsen resumed his position as president of White Oak Associates, Inc. where he has led strategic planning and marketing initiatives for many of America's new science centers, history museums, children's museums and other family learning centers. As Executive Producers, White Oak formed the Ocean Film Network to provide financing for *The Living Sea*, an Oscar® nominated, IMAX® film. Mr. Jacobsen was the executive producer of the visitor experiences at Exploration Place (Wichita, KS) and the new Science Center of Iowa (Des Moines, IA, 2005). White Oak's additional recent planning projects include new museums, theaters and expansions in Hartford, Anaheim, Peoria, Calgary, Charlotte, NW Arkansas, Ottawa, Providence, Edmonton, Palm Beach (FL), and New London (CT). Through conference sessions and publications, Mr. Jacobsen has contributed new models for the museum and special format theater fields that respond to evolving economic conditions. Jacobsen's BA and MFA are from Yale University.



Jeanie Stahl, the Institute's Senior Vice President, COO and Co-Principal Investigator, joined White Oak Associates, Inc. full time in 1989 as vice president, bringing her expertise in research and finance. She has since developed White Oak's extensive database on museums and has worked closely with White Oak's museum clients to develop attendance projections and business plans that are sustainable and realistic. Working with Mr. Jacobsen, Ms. Stahl was the co-executive producer of the Oscar[®] nominated 1570 film, *The Living Sea*. Ms. Stahl was a member of ASTC's Analysis and Trends Committee that oversaw the publication of *ASTC's Sourcebook of Science Center Statistics and Analysis*. She continues to be an advisor for the annual sourcebook. She has also been active with the Association of Children's Museums organizing and leading several of the pre-conference seminars for emerging museums. Prior to joining White Oak, Ms. Stahl was head of finance for a New England audio-visual and communications company and previously was a research analyst for an international consulting firm. Ms. Stahl is a Wellesley graduate and an accomplished musician.

PEER REVIEW PROGRAM

The Institute's official publications will be reviewed by peers prior to publication in part to avoid any conflicts of interest by the project's principals. The Institute will investigate practices of peer review by other research institutes, and adopt a policy appropriate to the Institute's field, work and audience. Peer reviewers will not be participants in the research being reviewed, but rather independent of the process and able to look at the draft findings from other perspectives to make sure they are sound. The Institute will respond to peer reviewer comments by either addressing them or documenting the exceptions.

ANALYSIS AND SUPPORT TEAM

The Institute's team includes Project Manager Rebecca Robison and researchers Karen Hefler and Karen Stelle who have been doing similar work as a group for White Oak Associates for years. For the Institute, they will be responsible for project management, collection of data, preliminary analysis of existing relevant research, review of relevant literature, preparation of executive digests, organization of colloquia, conversion of data and information into relational databases, and the production of the Institute's written documentation and reports.

WOI RESOURCES

The White Oak Institute benefits from White Oak Associates' completely functioning office environment with space for 5-8 staff supported by a fully integrated sophisticated computer network and an array of top-quality office equipment and software. The Institute's Museum Reference Library is a result of decades of collection, including published books on museums and related learning theory, unpublished museum documentation, collateral material from museums around the world, databases of



museum operating information, coded mailing lists, and many other operating administrative assets that allow the Institute to operate efficiently. The Museum Planning Room is equipped for creative charrettes for up to eight museum professionals with all the tools needed for productive brainstorming and planning sessions. Other nearby spaces in Marblehead are capable of accommodating larger groups.

BUILDING ON PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

The Institute starts with a debt of gratitude to the work done by the museum associations and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). The Association of Science-Technology Centers (ASTC) publishes operating statistics, as do other museum associations, along with a full line of museum publications. The IMLS's *Museum Data Collection Report and Analysis*, for instance, is a survey of all the documents that pertain to museum operating data, and the authors make recommendations for improving data collection. It contains an extremely useful bibliography, as well as a thorough listing of sources of information about museums.

This document, and others on the same subject, point out that quantifying museum field is particularly elusive, even when limited to just American museums. Data is collected in different ways, and no one has taken the time to reconcile the differences and look for meaningful patterns.

Both the 1998 and 2005 IMLS studies (DeBruin and Wharton 2005, 24-28) included recommendations that the museum field standardize and centralize its data collection. The field is finally moving in that direction, and the Institute is active moving it along.

IMLS has completed a study of museum and library use, and is starting a landscape study of museums, with the goal of a census count of museums in America; this inventory of museums will provide a foundation of research. Yet, before that landscape survey can be conducted, data definitions need to be established. Some sectors of the museum field have established definitions and collected data, but they vary from children's museums to science centers to art museums, for instance.

The White Oak Institute is partnering with the American Association of Museums to establish field-wide definitions through the Museum Operating Data Standards (MODS) initiative to broker adoption of shared data definitions that will allow comparisons of key performance indicators.

One possible source and steward of shared data definitions is the Cultural Data Project, an on-line reporting tool for cultural non-profits seeking grants in five states that soon will account for a third of the grant-seeking museums. Developed by the Pew Charitable Trusts and other Pennsylvania public and private grant-making organizations, the CDP intends to expand coverage state-by-state, and already allows museums to benchmark against peers and cities to assess the health of their cultural sector. The Institute is part of these conversations and in regular contact with the key



players. These initiatives and studies, and the many more on our shelves, convince us that every study at the Institute needs to start with an appreciation of the work done to date, and an understanding of the challenges faced by previous researchers and innovators.

DELIVERABLES AND INITIAL STUDY PROJECTS

The formal deliverables of Institute projects will be colloquia and peer-reviewed research reports. Whenever practical and fundable, the Institute's projects will also apply the research to the development of practical "tools" that will help museum professionals use the findings in their museum's operations. Examples of tools included in WOI's current actual and proposed projects include:

- ◆ Definition Glossaries
- ◆ Key Performance Indicators
- ◆ Shared Technical and Facility Standards/Protocols
- ◆ Management Handbooks
- ◆ On-Line Databases

Some protocols have been developed within the associations, so that ASTC members are nominally consistent in how they report data, but this does not align with how AAM or ACM collects data. There are a few networks for high-definition media, but planetariums continue to produce their own shows, and traveling exhibition halls vary greatly as do the kinds of equipment available. Grant funders ask for museum data in a wide range of formats, requiring more accounting time. What kinds of standardization have worked? What kinds of standardization foster innovation and what kinds stifle it? Which standards, like the 990's, should we build on? What areas will benefit from more standardization? And what are the reasons and/or resistance points for museums agreeing to follow shared standards? What kinds of processes will work to develop standards that a wide range of museums will accept?

Dissemination may include: distribution of findings and tools through partnering organizations, on-line forums, articles, conference sessions, web sites, webinars and management briefings. The intangible outcomes of a WOI project will be museum innovation implemented in part by the museum leaders who participated in the process and who use the tools.

To illustrate the range of research questions that the White Oak Institute might address in its early years, see the attached "Actual and Potential Studies."

The following studies are funded or in proposal stage:



KEY INDICATORS AND RATIOS: BENCHMARKING CALCULATOR

(Funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services)

The Association of Children’s Museums (ACM) and the White Oak Institute are developing a Benchmarking Calculator, a Web-based tool for children’s museum professionals to produce on-demand reports of key performance indicators and ratios derived from extensive data collected by ACM on more than 230 museums. The key indicator reports will assist in benchmarking – the practice of measuring performance against industry leaders - to identify strengths and weaknesses and make adjustments to operations. Detailed data analysis and interpretation provided by the Benchmarking Calculator will equip children’s museum professionals to strengthen operations of their institutions with the goal of achieving sustainability and building capacity to serve children, families and communities.

DIGITAL GIANT SCREEN THEATERS: WHAT IS THE BEST FORMAT FOR MUSEUMS?

(Funded by the National Science Foundation: NSF-ISE 0946691)

There are currently 207 museum and institutional analog giant screen theaters globally, and 115 of those in North America (Hyder 2007). Many, but not all of these, are IMAX[®]. As Hollywood goes digital, this network is in danger, as there will shortly come a time when analog 15 perf x 70 mm film will no longer be made. Currently none of the digital system manufacturers have plans to create a digital chip that is the right aspect ratio for “giant screen;” rather, suppliers, including IMAX, are focusing on the Hollywood aspect ratio. Museums, with their commitment to unique and immersive learning experiences, have succeeded with analog giant screen theaters precisely because they are unlike Hollywood and offer a level of experience unmatched by other formats. For the relatively small market of museum theaters, this means that we must take an active role in specifying the digital format that is right for museums in order to encourage suppliers to develop appropriate digital technologies. A significant partner in this venture could be the world’s inventory of 300 Fulldomes (Savage 2007), as digital stars and other databases converge with Dome GS Theaters. Without this proactive stance, museum giant screen theaters will be forced to convert to Hollywood standards.

The White Oak Institute and our team including the Giant Screen Cinema Association, the Institute for Learning Innovation, the LF Examiner, and the MacGillivray Freeman Foundation-Informal Science Education convened the Digital Immersive Screen Colloquium for Unified Standards and Specifications (DISCUSS) in June, 2010, funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF-ISE 0946691). During this colloquium and online forum, science museum industry leaders and technical experts in the giant-screen (GS) theater field have started a process for establishing digital immersive giant screen specifications (DIGSS) to transform the currently analog film-based, global network of science-oriented GS theaters. Such shared protocols will set the stage for innovations in museum-quality equipment and productions in the digital age.



MUSEUM DATA DEFINITIONS PROJECT (MDD)

(Contract Award Number: IMLS-2010-047 in partnership with the American Association of Museums)

For some time, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the American Association of Museums (AAM) and other museum organizations have discussed the need for clear and common data standards. Now is the moment for the museum field to make a more formal commitment to shared standards. Standardized data collection will facilitate benchmarking and make it easier to share best practices and innovations, mobilize capital and operating support, and highlight the contributions of museums to American society. It will also reduce the administrative burden on individual museums, which are now called upon to supply slightly different information to a variety of funders, government agencies, and professional associations each year.

The White Oak Institute with the American Association of Museums has been awarded a 6-month contract to develop a standard set of data definitions and a roll-out strategy for the IMLS Museum Data Definitions Project (MDD). WOI and AAM will **1)** Develop a comprehensive review guide of current national databases on U.S. museums and museum participation by writing a *Review Guide of Existing Museum Databases*; **2)** Select a number of individual museum directors, research and evaluation leaders and other interested stakeholders from the museum community to offer their individual opinions on technical matters by enlisting the National Museum Census Advisory Panel and a larger circle of Stakeholders; and **3)** Provide a final report to IMLS that includes a vetted Data Glossary, Recommendations for Portal Functionality, and a Roll-out Strategy detailed in a *Museum Census Roadmap*.

MEASURING MUSEUM IMPACT: QUANTIFYING PUBLIC VALUE

Measuring Museum Impact and Public Worth is a future proposal for research, analysis and evaluation of the relationships between American museums and their communities and the impacts museums have on their communities. Building on our benchmarking calculator for the children's museum field, the proposal will seek funding to test a field-developed model for quantifying museum impact and worth, as valued by its community.

The outcome of the project is to establish quantified benchmarks for a number of field-determined *key performance indicators*, in a number of community services and for a number of museum sectors. This is the first opportunity to set the bar for American museums because new studies and data compilations will soon make this possible, and the data quantity and quality will improve during the three-year term of this project.

The impact of establishing metrics is to provide both museum managers and community leaders with quantified objectives and best practices. This measurable knowledge will enable museum managers and community leaders to partner to lead and support every American museum toward more impact and greater public worth in that museum's chosen areas of community service.



STUDY PROCESSES

Each of these studies will require a specific sequence of phases and grants; what follows is the base model:

PHASE 0: NEEDS AND PRIOR KNOWLEDGE ANALYSIS

Phase 0 (Pre-Funding) starts with a review of work to date, an assessment of the quality of existing data, a finer grain focus on the research objective, and an identification of the set of museums appropriate for that study. In later phases, these participating museums will be included as project partners.

PHASE 1: FRAMING THE RESEARCH

The White Oak Institute will summarize the prior knowledge and collect relevant public information (990 forms, financial statements, etc.) and add from its own extensive database of museum economics to create a Briefing Package. The Institute's *principal investigators* and their professional staff will format, analyze and look for preliminary patterns in this data.

Each study will have a panel of 3-12 *associate investigators*, carefully selected for diversity of perspectives within the field of study and a range of seniority in museum practice. This will make sure that both wisdom and fresh ideas are present as well as reminders of the needs of human resources, exhibition development, finance and other operating aspects of museum management. The principal investigators and the associate investigators will be sent digests of the work-to-date that will help the Institute frame the research questions for the next phase. This will be accomplished through an on-line forum where the panel discusses the implications of the work-to-date and identifies what additional information will be most useful to them as managers.

PHASE 2A: RESEARCH

In Phase 2, research and survey processes will take place run by the Institute involving the collection of source data, the administration of visitor research studies, (both qualitative and quantitative) and interviews with selected museum managers and academic learning researchers.

- ◆ Structured interviews with museum professionals.
- ◆ Partnerships with demographic and psychographic data providers, such as ESRI, Claritas, GuideStar, etc.

Given the difficulty of previous attempts to collect comparable data, we expect that the work of this phase will be the most challenging and time-consuming. In order to get historic operating data from the participating museums, staff at those museums will need to assemble data from their files and enter it into survey instruments according to



specific definitions. For this to happen in a timely fashion, the participating museums must be involved financially in the project budget, even if at modest amounts. At the Institute, staff will need to remind participants of their deadlines, check their data, question responses that seem abnormal, and apply adjusting factors to account for inflation, regional differences and other anomalies. Only after considerable task management and fact checking will such data be ready for analysis in comparison with *clean data* from other museums.

PHASE 2B: FINDINGS

Information arts and science can provide innovative ways of seeing the data for the first round of analysis. Data visualization and the ability to layer in social and economic data, maps and graphs from regional sources will reveal trends and correlations that mere columns of numbers make opaque.

A two-day colloquium will bring the panel together to hear the preliminary analysis, and collaborate on how to apply this new knowledge to their institutions in particular, and to the field being studied in general.

Based on the outcomes and notes, the Institute's principal and associate investigators will draft sections of the research report. Pairs or trios of associates will then collaborate in developing these drafts into formal report chapters. The Institute will support and monitor these collaborations on-line, leading toward presentations to the rest of the group. After hearing the chapter drafts from each of the sub-groups, the investigators as a group will integrate the findings and distill the new knowledge for the field as "news we can use to better serve the public," and/or as practical tools to distribute to museum managers.

Depending on the nature of the findings, a formal distribution of the new knowledge and tools to other museum managers will follow through conference presentations, white papers and other forms of distribution, including on-line archiving through the Institute's web site. Some associate investigators will host round-table creative sessions at appropriate museum conferences to broaden the exploration of the findings and instructions in how to use the tools.

PHASE 3: FOLLOW-UP EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS (OPTIONAL)

Some studies will have a Phase 3, which will return to the research question some years later to gather new data and reconvene the colloquium to assess impact and success in the field. This evaluation and continuation of the conversation is likely to augment the understanding of the research as well as reveal where more research is needed, which will spiral the question back to Phase 2.

RESPECT AND HUMILITY: HARNESSING GROUP CREATIVITY

The Institute values group creativity as a way of doing its work. While the romantic myth celebrates the individual creator and derides design by committee, in practice



significant innovations are usually the result of collaboration (Sawyer 2007), particularly in the context of innovations that advance a particular field. Since the Institute's purpose is to advance the museum field, collaboration among museum leaders will be an effective way to develop genuine innovations with advocates who are ready and have the power to apply the innovations in their real-world institutional settings.

Keith Sawyer's *Group Creativity* will be adopted by the Institute to guide its processes and colloquia. Central to the Institute's creative colloquia are participants with the right expertise, plus the humility to recognize that stronger ideas will emerge from the collaborative, improvisational give-and-take among their peers in the right setting. In selecting its project teams and creative groups, the Institute will look for individuals who will respect the other members as peers, and who think of leadership as a process of listening as well as contributing. In Jim Collins' terms we are looking for Level 5 leaders, rather than autocratic bosses (Collins 2001).

This notion of group collaboration is consistent with new research into creativity and knowledge management. Bringing together experts and novices in joint-problem solving opportunities has been found to be an effective way to pass along knowledge and processes. Research into the ways that new ideas emerge from group creativity (Sawyer) stresses the improvisational nature of the process within a clear structure, such as a jazz ensemble creating variations within a given melody and harmonic key. This process of knowledge transfer and group creativity will underlie the nature and spirit of the two-day colloquia which will include both serious and social opportunities to form lasting professional friendships in the convivial atmosphere of Marblehead's seaside historic community.

"Colloquium" is Latin for "conversation" and it comes from *colloqui*, to talk together. In analyzing the conditions for group flow experiences, Keith Sawyer quotes Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, whose research into individual flow "found that the most common place people experienced flow was in conversation with others." (Sawyer 2007)

Sawyer stresses the need for the conditions that will support *group flow*, a concept that he develops from Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's parameters for successful individual flow experiences. In addition to respect, listening skills and other principles, group flow requires concentration, and benefits from familiarity among the participants. For this reason, the agendas of the colloquia in Marblehead will balance social interaction and concentrated creative sessions.

The settings, pacing and agendas of the Institute's *Marblehead Colloquia* will be designed to inspire and support creative group flow. Marblehead is a delightful, historic seaside retreat, and the Institute's work will be based in the historic village with its walkable streets and large selection of meeting spaces. Daytime creative sessions, supported by the latest tools of information gathering and analysis, will allow the group of colleagues to concentrate on the research findings and their implications in a way that would be



impossible in their home offices. The atmosphere will be informal, un-rushed, (yet structured), non-hierarchical, friendly and frankly, fun to attend and inspirational in its impact. In addition to formal sessions, participants will engage with each other in a variety of stimulating settings around Marblehead. Associate Investigators will look forward to coming to this attractive place to do important work in the company of respected peers.

THE WHITE OAK INSTITUTE'S CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

CORE BUSINESS

Research-based museum innovation: Conducting research, analyzing data, exploring the implications with creative groups of museum professionals, and distributing the findings.

PASSION

Contributing to museum innovation.

BEST IN THE WORLD

Qualitative understanding of quantitative museum data.

ECONOMIC DRIVER

Relevant, accurate and meaningful new knowledge applied to practical tools that help museums serve their purpose and the public more effectively.

VALUES

- Love of Museums
- Collaboration & Friendship
- Accuracy & Clarity
- Innovation and Enrichment
- Relevance
- Excellence
- Pleasure in our Work

- Inspirational Dialogue
- Interdisciplinary
- Sustainability
- Comprehensiveness
- Global Connectivity
- Flow & Concentration
- Green Approaches



BUSINESS MODEL

The White Oak Institute is a non-profit organization built on grants and contributed assets and intellectual property. Operating revenues for the Institute come principally from grants from public agencies and private foundations for research projects. During the start-up years, White Oak Associates is contributing the Institute's operating costs, with help from a few donations. The existing White Oak Associates Inc. will continue to plan and produce museums for museum clients. John W. Jacobsen and Jeanie Stahl will manage the White Oak Institute and serve as its principal investigators. Offices, conference center, library and support staff will be at 17 Essex Street, Marblehead, MA, 01945

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<http://portal.unesco.org/culture>



ACTUAL AND POTENTIAL STUDIES

	Status
1. Red Dinosaurs to Green Exhibitions	Published in the <i>Exhibitionist</i> , 4/09
2. Museum Attendance: Trends & Factors 1985-2005	
3. Models of Diversity Initiatives and Their Impact	
4. Mindful Flow Experiences: Where are They Happening, and What Conditions Support Them?	
5. Digital Giant Screen Theater Specifications: What is the Best Format for the Museum Field's Unique Needs?	Funded by the NSF (NSF-ISE 0946691)
6. Good to Great Museums (a study like Jim Collins')	
7. Human Resources: How do Organization Charts Affect Impact?	
8. Cross-Museum Industry Operating Data Standardization (with AAM)	IMLS Award No. 2010-047
9. Earned Revenue: Trends & Impact 1985 - 2005	
10. Quantifying Museum Impact in Six Service Sectors	MMI Initiative
11. Museum Exchange Compatibility Protocols: Collections Databases, Digital Media; Traveling Exhibitions etc.	
12. Learning Demand vs. Learning Supply: How many SF of Museum [Gallery] Space can a Community Support?	
13. Inventory of Hands-On Interactive Exhibits (with Joe Ansel)	
14. Review of Business Models Internationally and Their Implications	5SCWC Session
15. Flow of Museum Management Decision Making and the Role of Different Kinds of Knowledge.	
16. Design for Learning: What Spaces and Forms Encourage Which Kinds of Experiential Learning Behaviors?	
17. Establishing Key Performance Indicators for Sectors of the Museum field	ACM/IMLS Grant