



New Perspectives, New Institution: Simple Ways Youth Can Broaden Your Organization's Outlook

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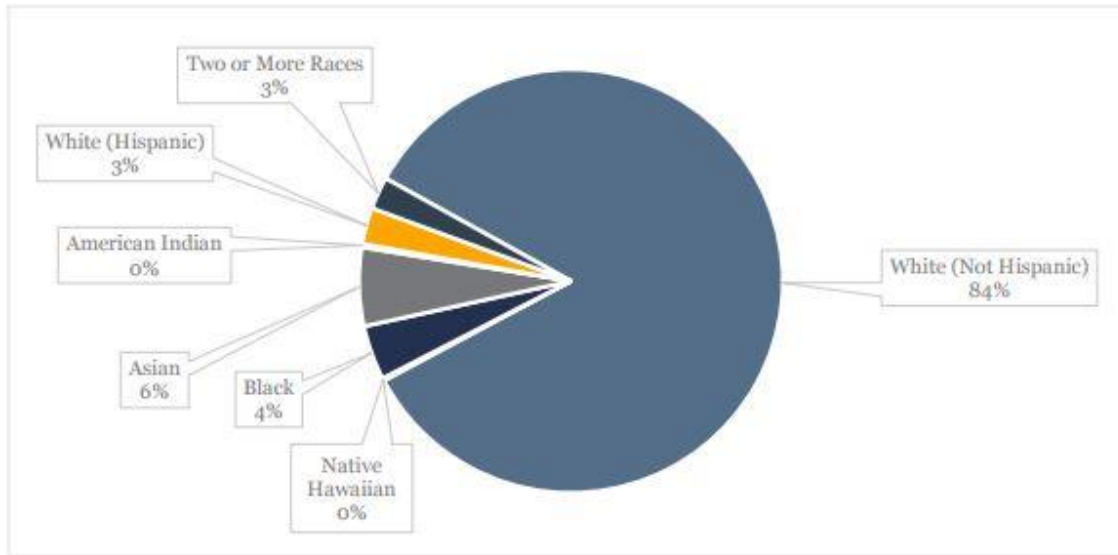
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We'll cover...

- The problem
- Why teens?
- Why is it important to make space for them?
- How it can be done (my experience)
 - Best practices
 - Lessons learned
 - Impacts
 - Road blocks
 - The future
- Your questions, ideas, and challenges

THE PROBLEM

Figure 6 Race and Ethnicity (Curators, Conservators, Educators and Leadership Only)



This bleeds into our...

- Collections
- Exhibitions
- Programming
- Marketing
- Fundraising

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Art Museum Staff Demographic Survey, 2015

- **Is lack of diverse representation and lived experience present in your organization?**
- **Do you think it's a problem?**
- **Would you like the future of your organization to look different?**

What can hold us back from inviting in different perspectives?

- My experience:
 - Employment:
 - There is low turn over in Education and Curatorial/Exhibitions
 - May not have the \$\$ to create a new position or positions are frozen
 - We're unable to increase the hourly or salary wage
 - Fixed mindsets (some colleagues, not all): some colleagues don't think it's a problem
 - I literally can't change who I am (DUH)

It's easy to feel boxed in.

Just because it fits...



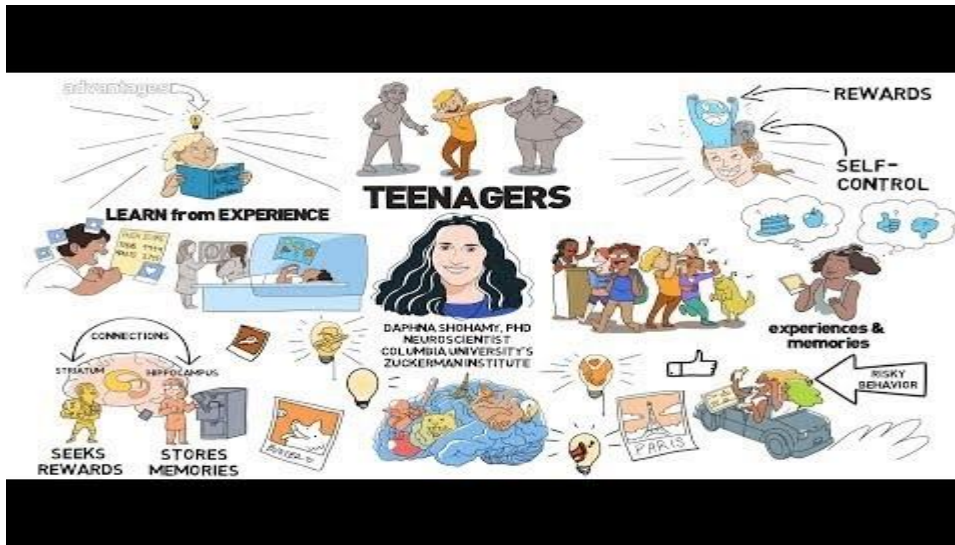
...doesn't mean you should sit.

WHY TEENS AND WHY MAKE SPACE?

They're FUN!



They think differently than we do



[Teenage Brains: Wired to Learn - Columbia University's Zuckerman Institute](#)

- Pre-frontal cortex doesn't fully develop until age 25 – where our impulse control comes from
- More prone to risk-taking, beneficial to learning
- Brain activity looks different based on reward
- Synapses are being pruned – brain is specializing

Additional videos:

- [Fig. 1 - The University of California](#)
- [The mysterious workings of the adolescent brain - Sarah-Jayne Blakemore](#) (TED talk)
- [The Adolescent Brain – Dan Siegel](#)

Experiencing a different life than us

- Literally younger than us
- Live in a variety of neighborhoods
- Topics in the news are their reality
- Speak multiple languages
- Access to all the information all the time
- Many different interests

They are figuring out who they are – we can be a part of that journey

- Developing someone going into your profession/field
- Cultivating a future supporter or advocate for your organization or field
- Creating informed citizens

HOW CAN IT BE DONE?

A brief history...

- We've been engaging and growing the “next generation” of architects, landscape architects, planners, and designers since 1993 through a variety of multi-visit and one-off programs.
- We have an obligation to do the same for our future museum-goers.
- Shifted our Teen Council to be more about careers and leadership in museums rather than in the built environment (2016 to present).

Best practices

- FOOD – snacks or a full meal, doesn't matter
- Create a welcoming environment – physically and emotionally
- Don't try too hard – be authentic, but appropriate
- Start small and be okay with taking the long road
- Build buy-in from colleagues and include them
- Educate yourself
- Be responsive – be prepared to change your approach and expectations
- Clearly define what you want to learn from them, and what you have to offer in return
- Provide opportunities for ownership

Creating a welcoming environment



Providing opportunities for ownership



Co-emceeing a Teen Night.



We make our youth the photographers and keepers of social media at teen events.

Include and build buy-in from colleagues



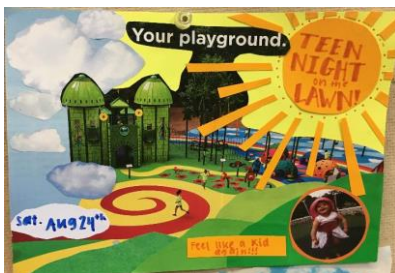
At the first meeting we invite teens to create one-pagers about themselves and we post in a central staff area.



Teen Council created invitation to our staff to attend their final meeting of the year. We presented colleagues with paper plate awards – teen driven.

Lessons Learned

- Baby steps – annoying, but necessary
- Truly embrace the process
- Meet your colleagues (and teens) where they are
- Adjust communication style and expectations (w/teens)
- Lay out clear expectations w/ colleagues
- Don't focus on numbers
- Persist – try something at least three times
- Find a format that works for you
- Invite others in and reach out to experts



Final design created by one of our graphic designers.



Impacts (on us)

- **VP for Exhibitions, VP for Visitor Experience:** Questions they ask and their thoughts they share related to the summer installations help us better consider teens as an audience and bring attention to some of the more present social issues.
- **Collections Team:** They look at our collections with fresh eyes and see things we don't, they ask questions that others might be afraid to ask. We've reshaped our tours as a result of the tours we've given to teens and kids.
- **Marketing + Communications Team:** Learning from their perspective has helped me understand the built environment better. They are able to break down complex ideas and share things that are interesting to them.
- **Graphic Designers:** It's made us think about how we want to communicate things to our audience, we're able to share our work with real people that are a part of our target audience.
- **Education Team:** Feedback for exhibition title went into data collection and front end research package for that project. Got different information from them that was helpful.
- **Volunteer Manager:** Working with them has influenced how I communicate and listen.

The Future of NBM's Teen Council

- Better integration with our staff – Teen Council/teens are seen as stakeholders, they are sought out for their input and involved multiple times in a project
- More active role in being ambassadors of the Museum – expanded volunteer opportunities and engagement with visitors
- Get to see more roles w/in Museum, like finance or managing rentals
- A forum for exploring hot topics w/in the field



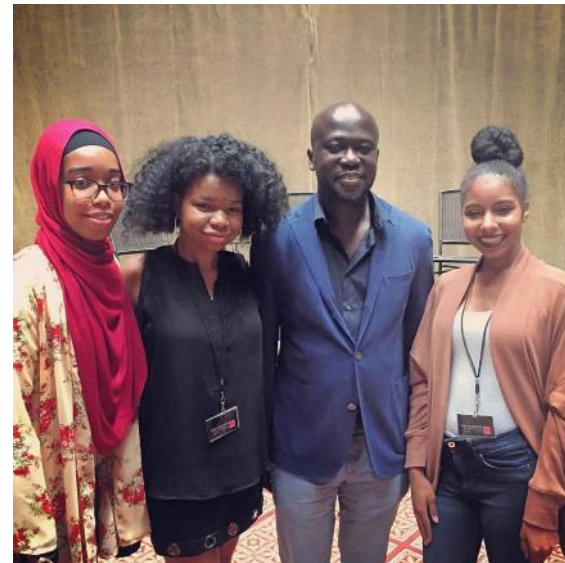
Being invited into exhibition development early on – not just right before or after it opens.



Get to attend more museum-wide parties and events.



More meaningful interactions with our staff and our board members.



More VIP meet-n'-greet opportunities.

Youth engagement is a major aspect of programming at the National Building Museum. **Throughout the week, teens from all over the DMV gather in Studio 231—a safe environment where we can maintain an open mind and let our creative juices flow. Together, our voices diversify that of the museum's, making the space more welcoming for all.**

Museums are designed to teach, especially to our young generation that will go on to spread their influence. Only when the voices of this group are heard and taken into account can a museum be truly beneficial. The NBM's teen council, one of three main teen programs, offers exactly this opportunity. **As a participant of this program, I was fortunate to unveil the operational processes of a museum, form a close bond with a diverse group of teens as well as staff mentors, and experience the joy of seeing our efforts come to life in a museum setting.**

Walking through the doors of Studio 231 for the first time, I was greeted by the smiling faces of my peers from different races, socio-economic backgrounds, and geographic origins, all united with the same determination to use our creativity in making an impact. Our similar interests which align with the purposes of the museum set the sturdy foundation for our cooperation. Through our experiences meeting with various museum staff members and partaking in discussions regarding upcoming exhibitions, we provide innovative feedback from a youth perspective while adding in our own take on things based on our own experiences. **The diversity in our council is essentially the epitome of the teens in our community, allowing our inputs to cumulate into the perfect plan of getting more youth engaged with the museum.**

“Teen Night,” our main focus of the year, allows the teen council to invite the youth in our community into the museum for an evening of fun and exhibitions. We aim to convey that they are welcomed at a museum, they can have fun while enhancing their knowledge, and that they belong there. By doing so, we hope that they can go on to spread this same passion to more people. Any event of this size requires tremendous effort and calls for collaboration. From the activities-planning to food and music selection, to flyer design, to carrying out the event on the final date, the council members strengthen our relationships with the museum staff as well as with each other, fostering a deeper connection with the museum. The success of this event is genuinely the best motivation for future continuation of our efforts.

Whatever the setting, the youth is the hope for the future. What better way to get more young people involved than through utilization of help from teens themselves? Working in close association with a diverse group of teens who possess similar interests and are dedicated to their pursuits can effectively advocate inclusivity. It is time for more institutions to realize the myriad of benefits that comes with youth engagement.

Yiming Chen

(Teen Council member since 2017)



YOUR TURN!

Questions, Ideas, Challenges?

- Questions for me?
- Share ideas and challenges with someone next to you.
 - Talk through some approaches.
- What is one thing you can take back to your organization?

THANK YOU!

Lauren Wilson

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NBM Teen Programs on social media

- Instagram: @studio231
- Facebook: Studio 231 Programs