

Engaging your Community Pilot Project A Case Study

April 29, 2016



Art Gallery of Mississauga

300 City Centre Drive,
Mississauga, ON
L5B 3C1

<http://www.artgalleryofmississauga.com>

Structure: Non-Profit

Staff: 8

Volunteers: 200

Mission

Engage. Think. Inspire. This phrase opens the dialogue at the AGM. The Gallery connects with the people of Mississauga through the collection and presentation of relevant works from a range of periods and movements in Canadian art. Expressing multiple ideas and concepts, this visual art translates into meaningful cultural and social experiences for all audiences. The AGM employs innovative education, artist projects and other forms of dialogue to advance critical enquiry and community connection to the visual arts.

The Gallery carries out its Mandate to *bring art to the community and the community to art* in accordance with professional museum practices set to North American standards¹.

Timeline – 6 months

September 16, 2015	Pilot Project Starts
September 26, 2015	Working Group Orientation
October 8, 2015	Self-Assessment
April 2, 2016	Community Consultation
April 12, 2016	Action Plan Meeting

Working Group Composition & Orientation

The Director of the Art Gallery of Mississauga (AGM) was still very new to both the Gallery and the city when this process began and took advantage of the opportunity start her tenure by listening to and engaging with both internal and external perspectives on the past, present and future of the Gallery's programs.

¹ *Our Mission*. Art Gallery of Mississauga. <http://www.artgalleryofmississauga.com/about.html> Accessed 4/12/2016.

The Working Group at the AGM was originally composed of three volunteers, one community member from a partner organization, and two staff members, but an additional staff member was hired part way through the project. The group was a mix of people who had long relationships with the gallery and some who were very newly involved, but all members were enthusiastic to make sure that the AGM builds on its successes and engages with the diversity of audiences in Mississauga.



During the Orientation meeting, the group discussed the triggers and objectives that led the AGM to pilot the process outlined in *Engaging your Community: A Toolkit for Museums*.

Reason for Applying:

The Art Gallery of Mississauga strives to 'bring art to the people and people to the art' through its energized and dedicated community outreach programme. Moving forward, the AGM desires to develop new, sustainable and long lasting relations with the First Nations Communities, specifically the Mississaugas of the New Credit as well as the rich and diverse immigrant communities that make up over 50% of our cities population. Our intention, with the assistance of this project and other initiatives, is to better understand the role of a Public Gallery in the context of a population unlike any other in Canada. Mississauga is the 6th largest City in Canada and exists today on lands that were the ancestral home of the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation. With over 96.5% of our population speaking a language other than English or French as their mother tongue, it is no surprise that Peel Region has the highest proportion of immigrants in the GTA. Mississauga is also a young city with Peel residents as the youngest in the GTA with a median age of 36.9 years. Mississauga is also a city of income extremes with a strong dependence upon social housing and food services alongside more Fortune 500 headquarters than any other city in Canada. Our goal is to create relationships and programmes that reflect the rich diversity and unique community that is Mississauga.

Desired Outcomes:

In order for the AGM to move into this next chapter in a sustainable and relevant manner, we require certain systems in place to assist us in assessing our impact on the community. We aim to be better connected and more relevant on a grass roots level. Moving forward, our existing relationship with key stakeholders and community groups will be as important as how we participate with new and 'outside the box' social service agencies and grass roots organizations. With all of these factors, it is essential that the AGM develop an action plan in order to continue to build relevant and beneficial relationships with the community, social services providers and inside

and 'outside the box' stakeholders which serve to support the rich and quickly growing demographic in Mississauga.

Self-Assessment

During the three hour self-assessment meeting, the AGM Working Group evaluated the museum’s current state of community engagement and identified areas of strength and improvement.

In the following five strategic areas, the Working Group evaluated the gallery’s current services and activities:

	1 <i>Early Stage</i>	2 <i>Developing</i>	3 <i>Moderately Developed</i>	4 <i>Well-Developed</i>	5 <i>Exemplary</i>
Mission & Planning					
Audience & Community					
Community Perception					
Community Experience					
Community Involvement					

By brainstorming on current programs, the Working Group found that the gallery was already actively reaching out to a variety of audiences with activities that are designed to be inclusive and low or no cost but could be improved in future through formal evaluation. For those who already engage with the AGM, the gallery is perceived as friendly and inclusive through the actions of its staff and volunteers.

The Working Group was in agreement that a communications plan defining the gallery's targeted audiences was in the development stage but would increase the AGM's ability to engage new audiences such as Indigenous communities, artists, and curators. The group members cited developing the AGM website as an important way to improve the way that the gallery implements its mission.

The group was also in agreement that the AGM’s existing connections and collaborations continue to enhance public experiences but that reaching out to more community organizations would increase underdeveloped audiences. Increased community outreach at established events and festivals throughout Mississauga could also increase audience and community engagement.

Community Consultation - Visioning Session

The consultation was originally set for late January 2016 but was moved to April 2 due to potential organizational changes at the Art Gallery of Mississauga. The AGM had started talking with City of Mississauga officials about a feasibility study to consider an expansion. The AGM decided to explore how the Engaging your Community consultation could contribute to the feasibility study and strategic plan as it was an opportunity for community members to reflect on the gallery’s existing space, activities and services as well as ideas for the future.

After several talks between the AGM, the OMA and the facilitator, an agenda for the consultation was confirmed. It borrowed some elements of structure and content from *Engaging your Community: A Toolkit for Museums* while incorporating new content that AGM requested. Most importantly, while some of the activities were modified, the intention of the consultation remained the same: for the AGM to hear and learn from a wide range of community members. It was important to create opportunities for participants to provide organic input into the vision of the Art Gallery of Mississauga in 2020 including opportunities, strengths and potential programs and services.



The facilitation plan had the following structure:

- Registration and refreshments
- Welcome from Mayor Bonnie Crombie
- AGM Land Acknowledgement.
- Opening Remarks welcoming participants and framing the activities and the objectives of the consultation.
- Ice breaker activity to warm up the room and set the stage for an interactive consultation.
- Presentation on Mississauga’s project demographic changes to 2020.
- Group discussion activities to reflect on current AGM programs and services as well as an initial round of suggestions for future AGM programs and services.
- Presentation of promising programs and services from other arts organizations.
- Individual brainstorming and group prioritization of bold ideas for new programs.
- Voting on bold ideas.





- Closing.

On a snowy Saturday, approximately 200 community members participated in the three hour consultation hosted by the AGM Working Group in the Civic Centre atrium just outside the gallery space. It was a large, diverse and engaged group representing many organizations and stakeholders in Mississauga. Attendance numbers were so much higher than expected that extra tables, chairs and coffee had to be set up.



To document the process and to add to the visual impact of the day, the AGM invited illustrator Steve Manale to create a visual record of the process.

The consultation provided excellent information to the Working Group. Community members selected fourteen top bold ideas to help the AGM bring art to the community and the community to art. The ideas that received the most votes were:

1. Pop ups that bring large programming in current infrastructure (ie: libraries, malls, buses) with call to local artists,
2. Changing the Structure: Making community and art inseparable,
3. Artist mobile studios/gallery.



Action Plan

After comparing the results from the self-assessment meeting and the community consultation, the AGM Working Group identified areas of alignment and misalignment which informed their selection of four ideas to move forward with: Re-branding starting from the mission, Changing the Structure: Make Art and Community Inseparable, a Destination Experience/ Space (with a link to the Credit River), and pop-up sites/satellite spaces.

The feedback from the Community Consultation helped to create an action plan that the working group can get started on right away, but it also provided some robust information and community connections that the AGM will use in the creation of its new strategic plan.

Impact

The Engaging your Community pilot project provided a supportive opportunity for the Art Gallery of Mississauga to reach out to the large and diverse community of Mississauga and to start an authentic conversation about art and the role of the gallery in the city. The interest that the community showed in participating in the consultation helped the AGM to realize what an asset and trusted leader the gallery is in the community and how many opportunities there are for future partnerships.

The Engaging Your Community process has given the AGM is confidence that their strategic plan and facility feasibility study will set a course for the future that reflects and incorporates the voices of Mississauga's diverse communities. The personal connections that were created within the working group and at the consultation will ensure that future programming includes both the input and active participation of community members as well.