

echo

Ideas that Resonate

THE ART IMPACT

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Invite local art councils or community art groups for coffee and brainstorming. Allow your staff to participate in this listening and learning opportunity, then ask them the following:

1. Why would you see it beneficial to integrate more art into our organization?
2. If we did, what could that look like and what kind of impact might it have?

This activity could be a wonderful start to new partnerships and ideas that no one has thought of.

WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO...

Our thought partners and presenters: Craig Ivanyi, Executive Director of the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum; Diane Villa, Director of Communications and Marketing of the North Carolina Zoo; and Steve Runnfeldt, Curator of Design of the North Carolina Zoo.

TWO ¹ LEADERS OF ART

As leaders of art in the zoological setting, there is no denying the **impact art has on the North Carolina Zoo and the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum**. The North Carolina started their art master plan in the mid 90s and has over 50 curated art pieces. These pieces allow donors to select and commission work that fits not only their vision but also the Zoo's. The Desert Museum's art institute started in the late 90s and offers over 245 classes and exhibits annually for more than 700 students. Their organization experienced more than 20 percent growth in the last 5 years, as it brings in a diverse group of people to connect with nature through the visual arts. For both Zoos, **art is a creative and effective tool that can be used to connect people to our mission of planetary stewardship.**

The intent of art is to create curiosity, thoughtfulness, and enjoyment. This isn't so far off from our goals. Our two presenting organizations shared stories of how art created connections for audiences that otherwise may never come to the Zoo. For example, the use of anatomically correct and life-size animal statues at the North Carolina Zoo is a phenomenal way to fascinate people and invite them to touch and connect. The Desert Museum has activities that teach you how to paint or draw while learning about the conservation work happening right outside the door and has created empathy for many in Tucson. No matter the form, Diane Villa with the North Carolina Zoo says, "[art] evokes all sorts of wonderful emotions."

2 ART'S IMPACT

A benefit of an art collection is its flexibility. We know rotating or seasonal exhibits often draw additional attendance and so do rotating art experiences. We can also change the art to freshen up or diversify our guests' experience.

Art doesn't come without its own challenges. There is a cost to having, installing, and maintaining art. Large collections can take significant resources to maintain. There are also important safety considerations, such as ensuring bronze statues don't sit in the sun so that guests aren't burned when they interact with it. Also, your internal team might not be on board with investing in art. The Desert Museum's staff in the 90s didn't see this as a good direction and even today can create tension around funding matters. **Despite its challenges, art is a tremendous way to leverage underutilized facilities, widen our audience and increase impact.**

3 THE PRACTICAL FACTS

GATEWAY TO HOT TOPICS ⁴

Organizations have different stances on controversial topics. Art has a unique way of inviting people into the conversation without being on-the-nose about it. There are artists that effectively use art, nature, and animals to engage the public in these difficult conversations. **"It's the job of the artists to start the conversation and get people thinking,"** said Brian Greco, animal welfare scientist for AWARE Institute. What if art was a mechanism to talk about global conservation issues like poaching, deforestation, and wildlife trafficking?

As conservationists, we are aware of the complexity of these issues. As organizations, we sometimes shy away from inviting the public into these issues for fear of response, governance structure, or donor push-back. Craig Ivanyi with the Desert Museum mentions, **"People connect more deeply when they believe something is art, not just a regular walk through."** Art could help make these conversations more approachable.

There might be a fear that art programs might compete for funding with our regular education and animal needs. In the case of the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum and the North Carolina Zoo, dollars didn't compete with regular programming, and instead enhanced and contributed to it. Although these two organizations have very different funding structures, both have benefited financially from having art programs.

For the Desert Museum, **the art programs have brought in more private dollars than any other initiatives** and provide significant annual funding for the Zoo's operational budget. It requires a clear understanding and conversation for your donor relations team, and it's well worth it.

ART ⁵ FUNDING

ECHO Digital is hosted monthly to create opportunities for passionate zoo professionals to connect with innovative ideas from outside the zoo field as well as with other zoo colleagues around the country.

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