

Works in Progress: Defining the Art of Wellness in Museums



Loneliness, Art Museums, and Health: Opportunities for Immediate Action

Keynote and
Creative
Activation



Dr. Jeremy Nobel

The Foundation for Art and Healing



Chris Doucette

The Foundation for Art and Healing



Creativity and Connection: Opportunities for Art Museums

Art Bridges Foundation
April 29, 2026

Jeremy Nobel, MD, MPH

- President, The Foundation for Art & Healing
- Faculty, Harvard Chan School of Public Health



What We'll Cover Today...

1



Loneliness, **a growing public health crisis**; eroding health & wellbeing for individuals and our communities

2



Exploring fresh approaches to addressing loneliness; **leveraging creative arts expression** to engage, activate and connect

3



Putting the puzzle pieces together; **art museum opportunities for immediate action** for addressing loneliness creatively

But first ... Hello!

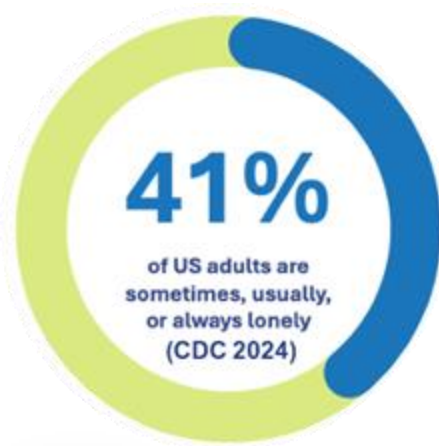
Jeremy Nobel, MD, MPH

- President and Founder of The Foundation for Art & Healing and Project UnLonely
- Faculty, Harvard School of Public Health; Harvard Medical School
- Author, *Project UnLonely: Healing Our Crisis of Disconnection*
- Poet, Image Maker

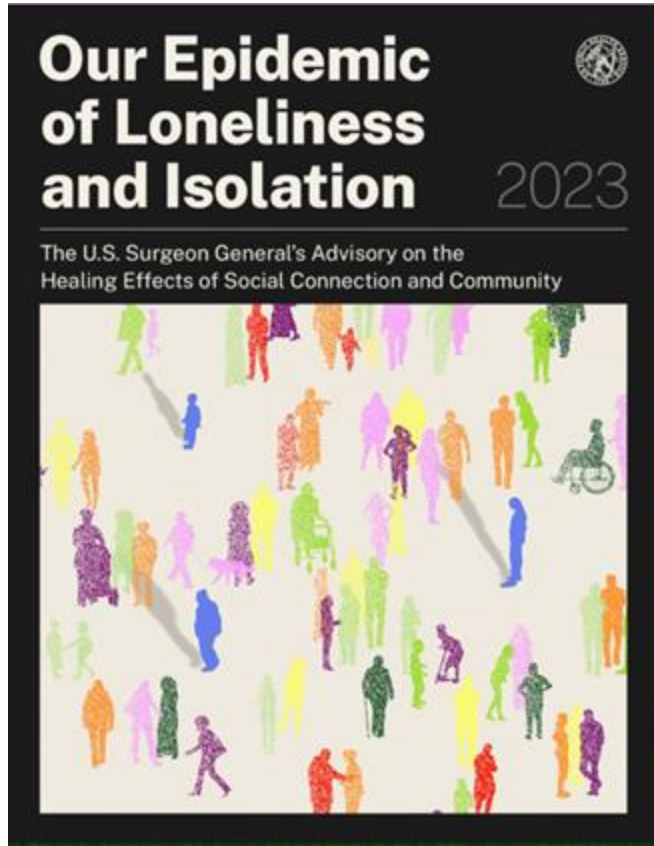


6 Years After COVID, the Community Loneliness Challenge is Accelerating

- Continued ***uncertainty*** (at work and at home)
- ***Many are struggling***; financially, with political divides, community violence, global instability, climate trauma, fear and distrust
- Stress, burnout and loneliness at ***unprecedented levels globally***

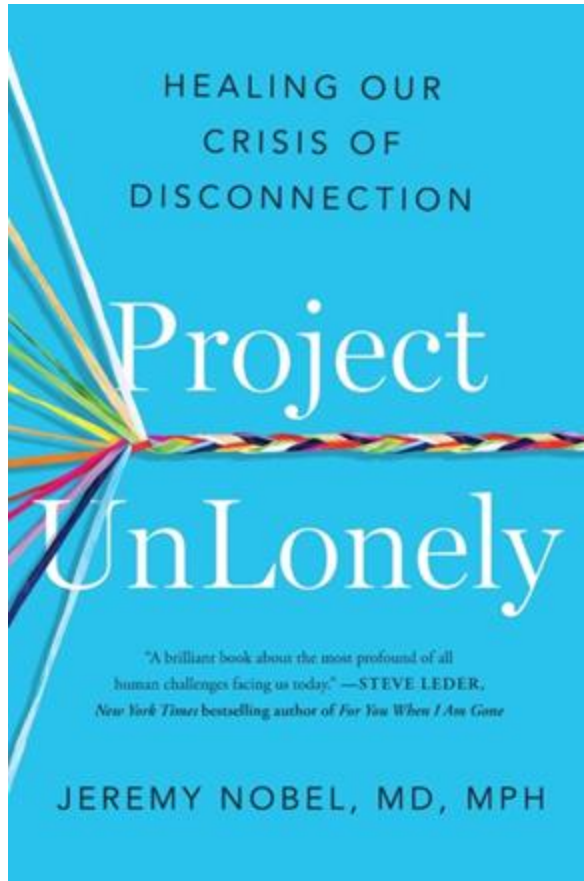


Any GOOD news?



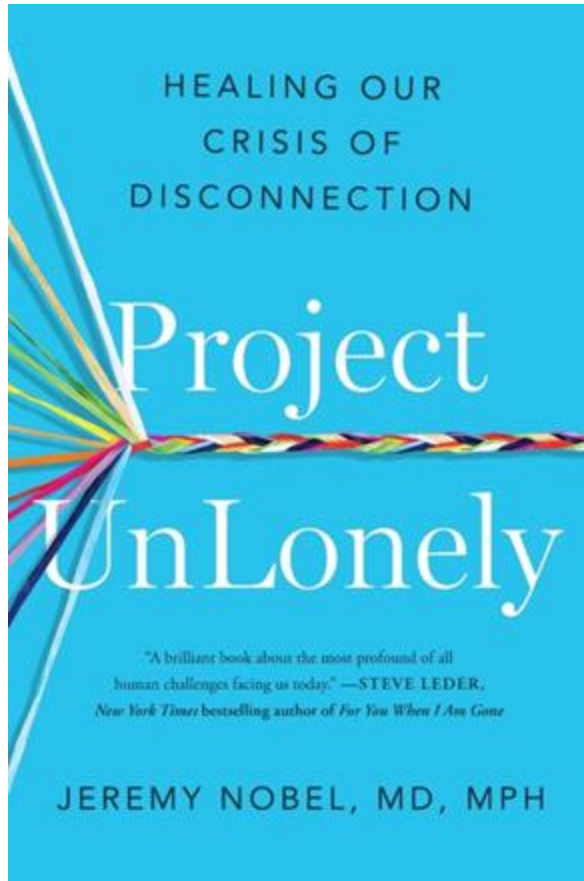
Here is the good news...
More people are aware and engaged, trying to address it!

Former U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy's 2023 advisory raised alarm about the devastating impact of the loneliness epidemic.



Goals of my book:

- Demystify and humanize loneliness, reduce the stigma that surrounds it
- Provide some useful observations and frameworks for designers
- Introduce creative expression as a way to engage, inspire and connect



My hope:

Individuals and organizations design their own Project UnLonely!

Loneliness is the perceived GAP between our desired and actual social relations.





Loneliness is **deadly** serious.

Loneliness raises the risk
for death by suicide,
particularly among men
(NIH)

Loneliness raises the risk
for heart disease, the #1
cause of death, by 29%
(NIH)

Loneliness affects 24% of
people worldwide, raising
their mortality risk
(Gallup)

The lonely brain drives lonely behaviors



Hyper-sensitive to threat



Non-rational/Emotional



Impulsive

New Idea: There Are Three Types Of Loneliness



Interpersonal • Psychological

“Does someone have my back?”

“Is there someone I can tell my troubles to?”



Societal • Organizational

“Am I welcome and valued?”

“Am I safe?”



Existential • Spiritual

“Does my life matter?”

“Am I disposable?”

The Real Threat: Loneliness Spiraling



Two Groups at Particular Risk for Chronic Loneliness Spiraling

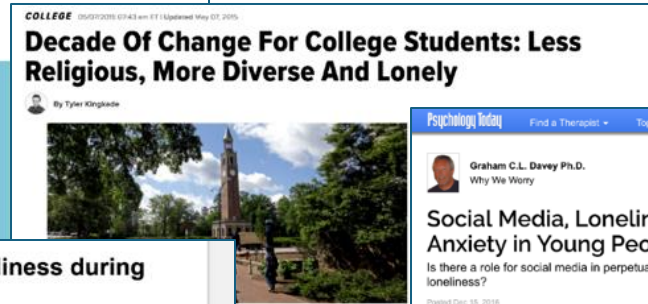
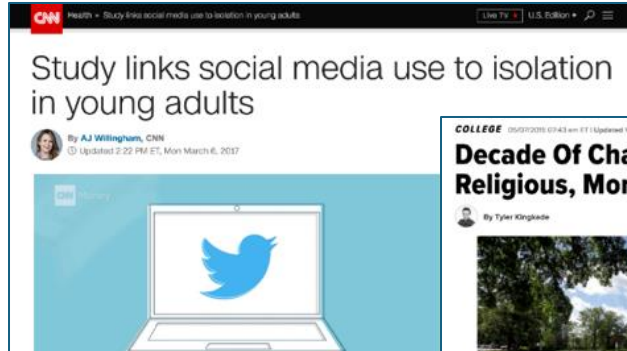


Young Adults



Older Adults

One thing that's clear: Loneliness is increasing on campus



Aging exacerbates loneliness' effects

- ▶ Greater impact due to
 - Poor health behaviors (notably poor sleep)
 - Frequency of stressful events
 - Biological dysfunction
 - Negative social cognition; cognitive impairment



Let me take a pause...

- ▶ Questions?
- ▶ Thoughts?
- ▶ Observations to share?

Loneliness and the Community

- A **diverse group** of individuals and circumstances
- A set of **complex and overlapping** drivers, concerns, and solutions
- Consequently, **no “silver bullet”**

Imagine loneliness as a signal, just like thirst.

What is loneliness asking us to pay attention to?



If loneliness is a signal that we need human connection, how is that achieved?



Lonely



Connected

Here's The (Not So) New Idea...

- Why has there never been a culture without art?
- Maybe the arts help us survive and thrive?



*Altamira, Spain
20,000 years old*

Art strengthens the skills we need to survive and thrive.

- Attention and focus
- Emotional processing
- Communication
- Connection



True health is **ALSO** about flourishing. The arts help us get there.

According to the **World Health Organization (WHO)**, health is "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and *not merely the absence of disease* or infirmity."



A powerful underlying principle:

The Arts Rewire Our Brains



The arts stimulate thoughts, moods,
and feelings that change our brains,
our bodies, and our behaviors ...
All impacting our health!

How The Arts Make Us Less Lonely



Impacts our brains



Encourages us to
share our own stories



Invites us to be part
of a larger story

**“We have art so that we
may not die of reality.”**

- Friedrich Nietzsche





PROJECT

UnLonely[®]

From the Foundation for Art & Healing

Three goals:



**Raise
awareness
of loneliness**



**Reduce the
stigma that
surrounds it**

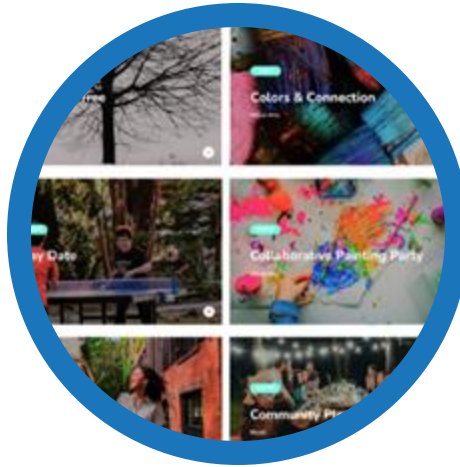


**Design, test
and distribute
arts-based
programs**

Project UnLonely Programs Offer: Creative Engagement at Three Levels!



Explore 150+ **short films** to reduce loneliness stigma



Access free **online activities** for creating and connecting



Deliver research-backed **workshops** in your community



Be curious



Make things



**Have
conversations**

A Community-Centered Approach

Enabling Impact, Health Equity and Scalability



Queens Museum Case Study

Fostering Creativity, Connection and Health in Queens

Older adults gathered for a **Community Colors & Connection** workshop designed to spark social connection, improving wellbeing.

Workshop components:

- Short film screening
- Creative response activity
- Guided conversation



Photo Credit: Queens Museum

Queens Museum Case Study

Highlights from the Queens Museum

100%

Felt more connected to others

92%

Felt truly heard by others

83%

Felt less lonely



“The most meaningful or impactful part was the creative process, when I drew with the crayons and shared it!”

– Workshop participant

What Changes Are Seen Through Our Programs?

Attitudinal Improvements

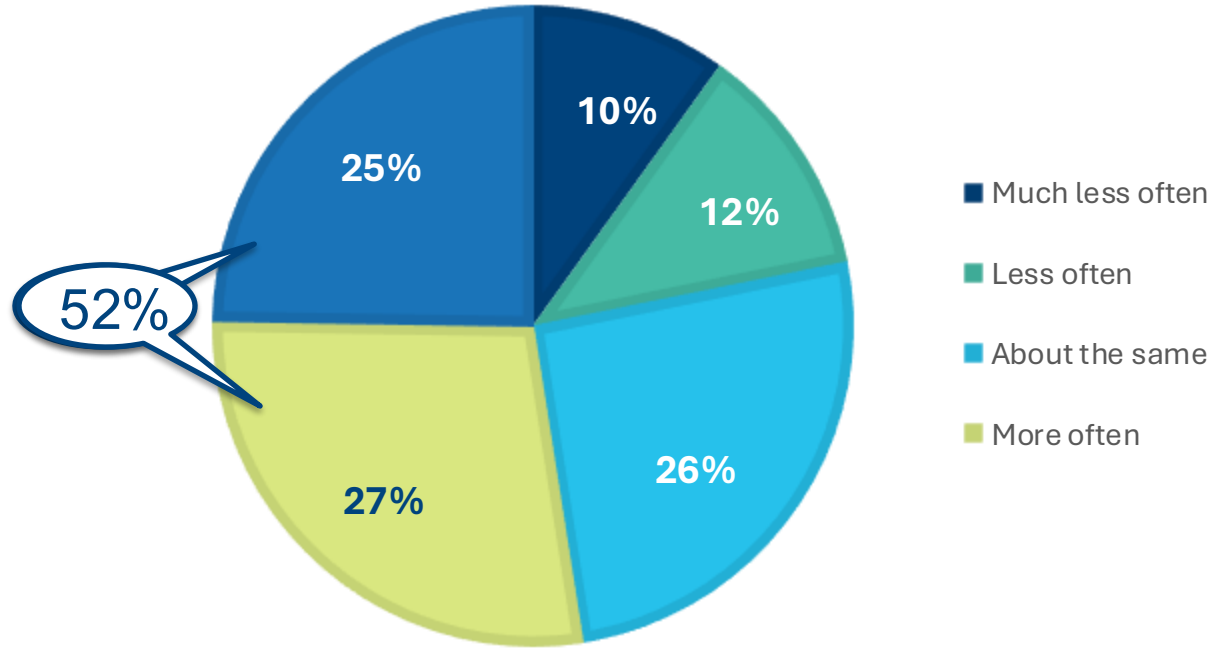
- Gaining social confidence
- Managing emotions
- Finding meaning and quality of life
- Building resilience

Behavioral Improvements

- Connecting in their community
- Engaging with friends
- “Exercising” their creativity
- Developing mindful practices



Surprising Benefit: Increased Activation in Other Programs!



Public Health Model: Key Drivers of Success



- **Effectiveness**

Demonstrated qualitative and quantitative outcomes



- **Scalability/Generalizability**

Broad outreach and suitable for diverse delivery scenarios



- **Sustainability**

Achieves the required economic and societal “value” to earn ongoing stakeholder support

Social Prescribing*: An Emerging Model for Addressing Loneliness



Detect



Link



Engage

*Islam MM. Social Prescribing-An Effort to Apply a Common Knowledge: Impelling Forces and Challenges. Front Public Health. 2020 Nov 27



Art Enjoyment as a Health Experience

A brief history of *social prescribing* in a *museum setting*

Started in 2018 at Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, where doctors could *write Rx's for museum visits*

First done in hopes of alleviating everything from *depression* and *anxiety* to *diabetes* and *high blood pressure*

It has *since been replicated around the world*, including the US (Massachusetts), France and Switzerland

Research suggests museum visits can *reduce stress* and loneliness, *improve mood* and *boost mental health*



Visitors *engage, reflect, have conversations with each other*, exploring Emily Carr: Navigating an Impenetrable Landscape at the **Vancouver Art Gallery**. Source: The Art Newspaper (March 2025)

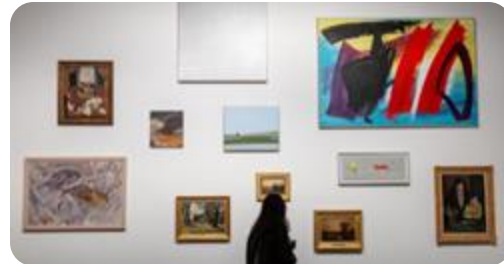
Art Museum Prescribing in the News

The Boston Globe



Mass Cultural Council and Art Pharmacy launch program to prescribe arts and culture for mental health

June 28, 2024



Art as therapy: Swiss doctors prescribe museum visits

March 12, 2025

The Guardian



Take two Van Goghs daily: the growing popularity of museum prescriptions

March 31, 2025

What Does Creative Expression Offer?

- A **fun** and **non-threatening** way to engage people of all ages and in any circumstance
- **Activates people**, emotionally and intellectually; giving people a chance to express who they are and what matters to them
- **Promotes** a general sense of **wellbeing and belonging**; changing attitudes and behaviors



Opportunities for Immediate Action

1

Expand awareness and education that **loneliness is a signal** and not a person's fault or a sign of inadequacy

2

Encourage personal story sharing through **creative arts expression**, exchange and conversation

3

Embrace **art museums** as community connection hubs, **confirming the arts** as vital to **health and wellbeing**

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Thank You!

Jeremy Nobel, MD, MPH
jnobel@artandhealing.org



Integrating Partner Loan Network Groupings: Curation to Logistics

Presentation



Dr. Javier Rivero Ramos

Art Bridges Foundation



Sarah Martin

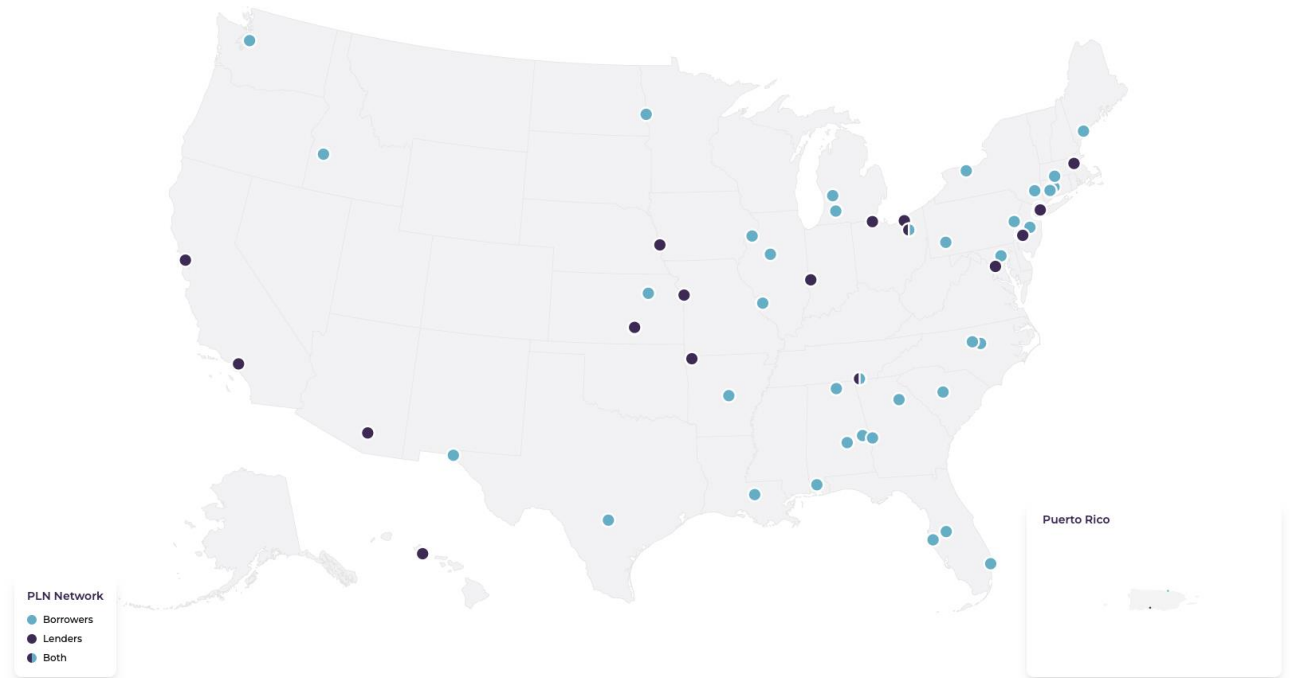
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What is the Partner Loan Network?

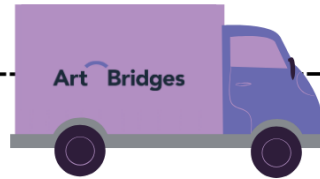
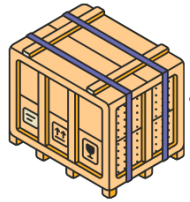


John Baldessari (1931-2020), *Beethoven's Trumpet (with Ear)* Opus #132, foam, resin, aluminum, cold bronze, and electronics, 73 x 105 x 72 in. Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas, 2010.6.

Partner Loan Network Map



How It Works



Lenders

- Art Bridges partners with lending institutions to select artworks from their collections to add to the Partner Loan Network program.

Artwork Preparation

- Art Bridges packages the artworks into groupings of 2-5 works.
- All artwork preparation and shipping is coordinated and funded by Art Bridges.

Borrowers

- Borrowing venues may select several groupings from multiple lenders.
- Loans from the program are a minimum of 2 years.
- Artworks can be hung together as a focus exhibition or dispersed through multiple galleries.



Funding Lenders

Phase 1

Funding supports curatorial development, including final checklists and object assessments, at a fixed rate based on the number of artworks and groupings.

Total number of groupings	Approximate number of artworks	Stipend amount
2-3	10-20	\$5,000
4-6	20-40	\$10,000
7-9	35-60	\$15,000

Phase 2

Once groupings and checklists are approved, Art Bridges provides \$500 per object to support preparation for travel.



Petah Coyne (b. 1953), *Untitled #1383 (Sisters-Two Trees)*, 2013 – 2023, The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Museum Commission and Purchase, 2023.12 on view at the Akron Art Museum.



Cecilia Beaux Spotlight from the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts on view at the Hunter Museum of American Art.



Funding Borrowers

- Loans from the Partner Loan Network are 100% free of cost.
- Packing, crating, insurance, and roundtrip shipping are fully funded and organized by Art Bridges.
- Borrowers are also eligible for Learning & Engagement funding.



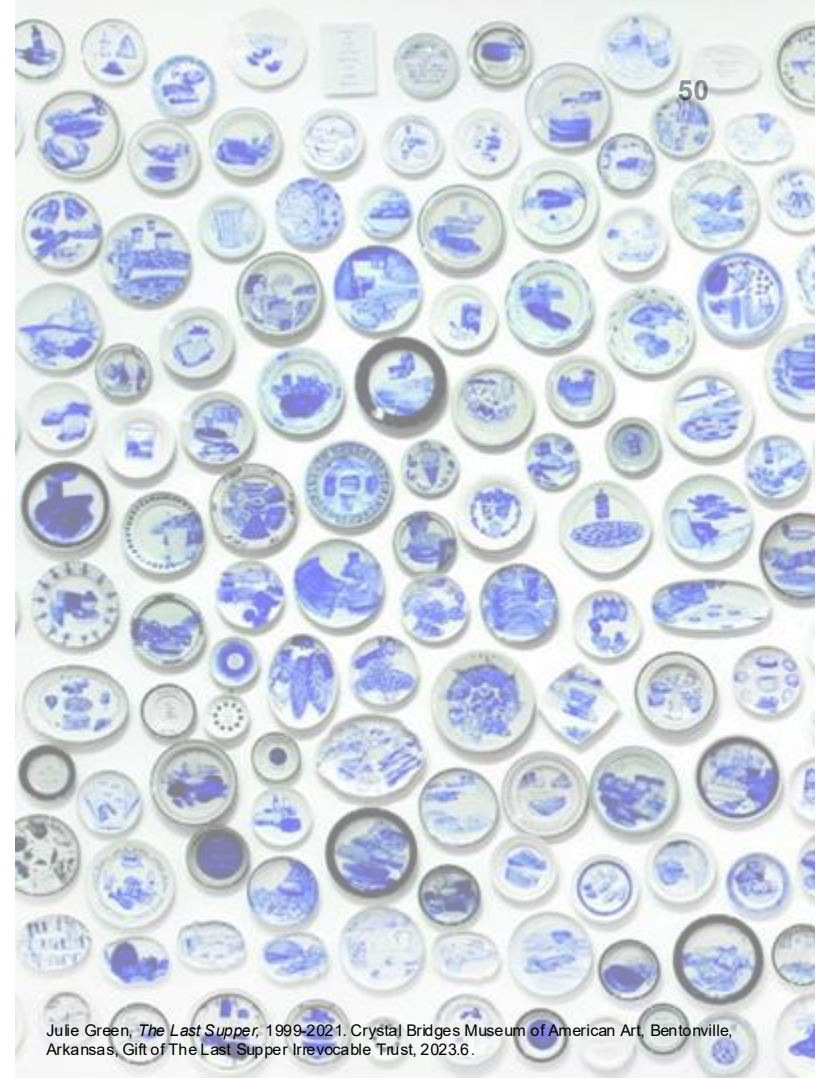
Mickalene Thomas, American, b. 1971, *Din, une très belle négresse 1*, 2012, Rhinestones, acrylic, oil, and enamel on wood panel, Collection of Joslyn Art Museum, Museum purchase, gift of The Sherwood Foundation.



Goals

Through the Partner Loan Network,
we work to:

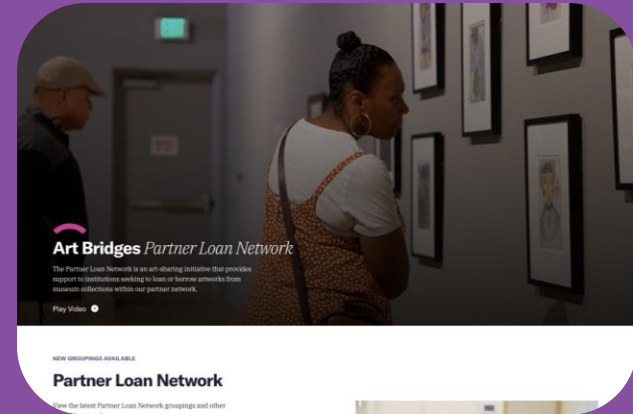
- Bring artworks out of storage and into new communities.
- Increase the diversity of artworks available in museums across the country.
- Help fill gaps in museum collections.





Learn More Today!

Visit the Partner Loan Network Online:



Lending Institutions

Total number of groupings	Approximate number of artworks	Stipend amount
2-3	10-20	\$5,000
4-6	20-40	\$10,000
7-9	35-60	\$15,000

Phase 2: Once groupings and checklists are approved, Art Bridges provides \$500 per object to support preparation for travel. In addition, Art Bridges covers all direct costs for crating, shipping, installation, deinstallation, and insurance.

For borrowing venues, Art Bridges is committed to making art accessible by offering loans through the Partner Loan Network that are 100% free. In addition, borrowing venues are encouraged to apply for [Learning & Engagement](#) funding to support programming and community engagement.

Housatonic Museum of Art

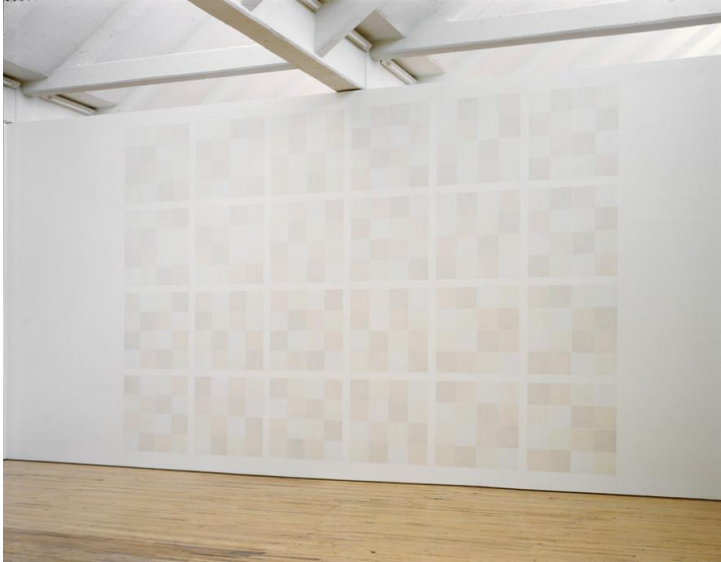


↑ Jack Whitten, *Burn Baby Burn*, 1969, oil on canvas, 42 x 49 in. Housatonic Museum of Art.



↑ Jane Freilicher, *Canal*, 1961, oil on canvas, 50 3/4 x 60 3/4 in. Housatonic Museum of Art.

Dia Art Foundation

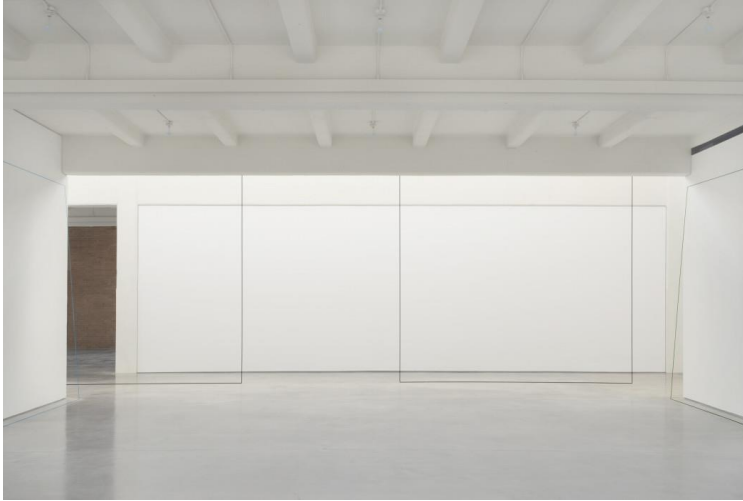


Sol LeWitt, *Wall Drawing #1085: Drawing Series—Composite, Part I–IV, #1–24, A+B*, 1968, graphite on wall, 189 1/2 x 249 in. Dia Art Foundation.

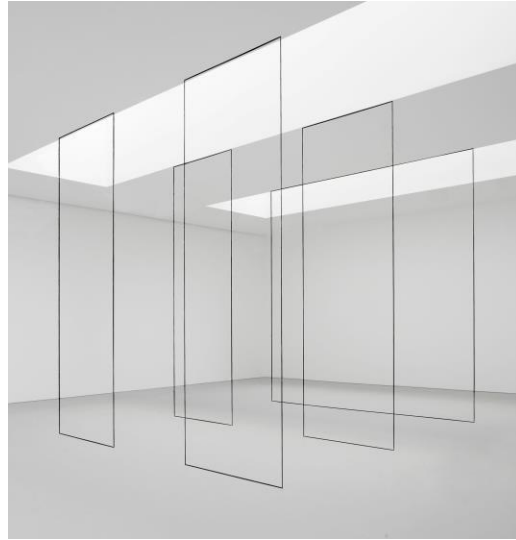


Sol LeWitt, *Wall Drawing #1085: Drawing Series—Composite, Part I–IV, #1–24, A+B*, 1968, graphite on wall, 189 1/2 x 249 in. Dia Art Foundation.

Dia Art Foundation



↑ Fred Sandback, *Untitled (from Ten Vertical Constructions)*, 1977, black yarn; 4 parts.



↑ Situational: spatial relationships established by Overall dimensions vary with each installation, Dia Art Foundation. the artist.



Museum Case Studies and Q&A



Margie Makowski

Allentown Art Museum



Abigail Simmons

Allentown Art Museum



Josie Jimarez-Howard

El Paso Museum of Art



Annie Saldaña

Museo de Arte De Puerto Rico



Dileyca Liz Cepeda Arias

Museo de Arte De Puerto Rico



ALLENTOWN
ART MUSEUM

Community Art Circles

Art + Wellness at AAM

Introduction to AAM

The Allentown Art Museum serves as an inclusive hub for cultural and social engagement and exchange. Through our collections, exhibitions, and educational programs, we foster meaningful dialogue and empower communities to learn, grow, and connect through accessible art experiences.



Foundation of Art + Wellness at AAM

- Art Can (2018)
 - Modeled after Meet Me @ MOMA and Michener Art Museum
 - Program Structure: In-gallery tour/conversation, artmaking, then share and reflect on the day
 - Art partners (volunteers and art therapy students) partner with visitors during the program
- Art Therapy Internship in collaboration with Cedar Crest College (2020)
- Developed Manager of Museum Accessibility Position (2023)
- Sensory Saturdays (2023-2024)
- Gallery Flow sponsored by Art Bridges (2025)
 - Program structure: Meditation, Story Circle, Lunch, Artmaking, Sound bath, then final Share and Reflect on the day
 - In partnership with neighboring orgs





Photo taken at RCI, during Art Circles.

With special permission from: Sherri Brokopp Binder, PhD, Executive Director & Kristin Baxter, Ed.D. (she/her) Community Building Center Director.
Dr. Kristin Baxter, Token, Kee, Sean, Kit
Seated: Karen, Ana, and Christina



Our partners & neighbors

Ripple Community

- Offers safe and affordable housing solutions and wraparound services as well as the Community Building Center: a safe, welcoming, free community drop-in day center for all. Ripple also offers daily activities, including art circles, poetry groups, support groups, yoga, street medicine, and two meals per day.

Daybreak

- Drop-in day center that offers access to lockers, showers, clothing needs, computers, and trained caseworkers available. The Conference Kitchen also offers three meals a day (Monday through Saturday) and provides healthcare resources.

Haven House:

- Psych rehabilitation services aimed to develop, enhance, and retain essential skills for independent living and community engagement. Services includes music & art therapy, individualized therapy, peer support groups, and social skills training.

Art + Wellness Fellowship

- In collaboration with Cedar Crest College's Art Therapy Program
- **Primary Role:** Bridging the connection between art as therapy and museums
- **Additional Roles:**
 - Research, plan, and facilitate art and wellness programs in collaboration with community partners
 - Collaborate with teaching artists, mindfulness practitioners, and other wellness professionals
 - Build relationships with organizations serving elders, adults with disabilities, adults recovering from substance abuse and addiction, individuals experiencing housing insecurity
 - Develop and implement evaluation tools to assess program impact and reach.
 - Share learnings and best practices through presentations, workshops, and conferences with students, educators, and future art therapists.



Art As Therapy

- We can offer our space, time, and expertise as educators.
- Lean into the expertise of our graduate art therapy students, professors, and partner organizations.
- What is the difference between art as therapy and art therapy?
 - Art as therapy uses artmaking as a tool for self care, self-expression, and emotional release, without necessarily guidance of a trained art therapist.
 - Less formal but still emphasizes the therapeutic potential of artmaking.
 - For example, using 5 senses to explore a work of art, make a mood collage, create sensory stones.
- Trauma-informed training to help equip us



Planning and Prepping

- **Initial Conversations with our Partners**

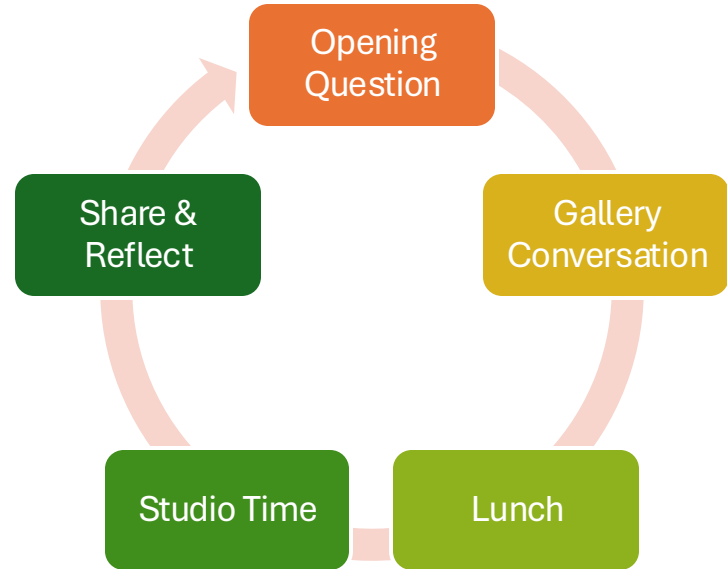
- Initial conversations began when our partners and neighbors reached out, wanting to collaborate.
- Gather feedback & goals: What are our partner's goals? How can we meet them and align?

- **Our Partners Shared their Focus:**

- Coexist with mental health and disabilities
- Challenge the stigma of mental health
- Strengthen social connections and community support
- Foster sense of belonging
- Learn and practice emotional regulation & coping skills, using art as a vehicle to strengthen these skills

Background of Community Art Circles

- Inspired by Art Circles at Ripple Community Inc. and art therapy groups at Haven House.
- Community Art Circles is a collaborative, monthly art program that takes place both onsite at AAM and offsite at partner organizations, with about 15 participants per program. The program follows a circle structure, with mindfulness and grounding practices embedded in the sessions during Opening Question, Story Circle, and Share & Reflect.
- Our partners in 2026 include Haven House, Daybreak, and Ripple Community.



Prepping and Planning

Identifying Our Shared Goals

Reach

- Deepen relationships and collaborations with our neighbors through art and wellness programming both onsite at the Museum and offsite at neighboring community organizations.
- Create an Art Care Toolkit to share with visitors and other organizations serving similar audiences, making art as therapy more accessible to a broader audience.

Enjoyment/Wellbeing

- Strengthen social connection and sense of belonging through opportunities to create together and connect the arts to our lives.
- Support emotional regulation through arts-based wellness programming that incorporates mindfulness and grounding practices.



Prepping and Planning

Identifying Our Shared Goals

Learning

- Support collaborative professional development through an Art + Wellness Fellowship with a graduate art therapy student by engaging in community-based programming that creates opportunities for skill-building, knowledge exchange, and institutional learning.
- Expand our collective understanding of how museums and community organizations can work together to meet the needs of specific audiences and communities through collaborative professional development with Cedar Crest Art Therapy program.



Getting To Know Our Neighbors

- **Partner Visits**

- AAM staff tour Ripple, Haven House, & Daybreak
- Observe art therapy groups, support groups, and other programming
- Meet individually with therapists, directors, key staff and volunteers

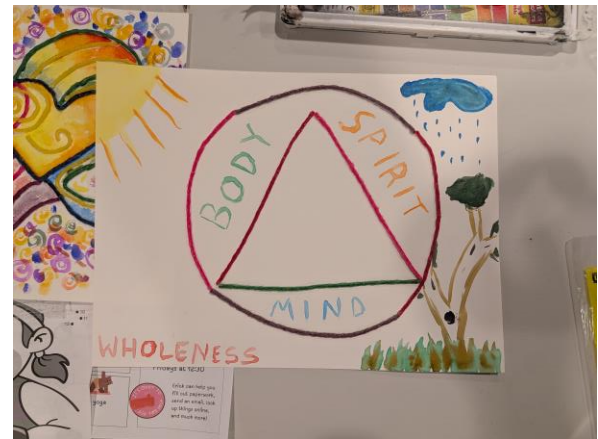
- **Building Relationships**

- AAM staff led Art Circle at Ripple and Open Art Studio at Haven House to get to know communities.
- How is art already part of these communities? We are learning what they are already doing so we can complement our partners.
- Reciprocal learning: We're not just stepping in to lead a workshop, but rather, learning about these communities and what they do.
- How can we build a sustainable, responsive partnership that meets the needs of the community?



Initial Offsite Pilot Programs

- **Where & When**
 - Ripple Community, March 18th, 11 AM-1 PM
- **Theme:** Symbols & Storytelling
 - Throughout time and across cultures, people discover personal meaning in visual art by reflecting on images, symbols, and personal experiences.
- **Structure of the Program**
 - Opening Question, Group Conversation, Artmaking, Share & Reflect
- **Project:** Watercolor Relief with Wikki Stix
- **Artwork Inspiration:** Chocolate Buddha #4, Keith Haring
- Gathered Feedback Post-Program



Created by and shared with permission from James Ashmore



Loan from a Private Collection.
Chocolate Buddha #4, Keith Haring

Post- Program Takeaways & Feedback

Materials & Approaches that worked well:

- Materials that are unique
- Artwork that tells a story
- Tactile experiences

Future Considerations:

- Mindful making –back to basics of color mixing, painting materials, mark making, and exploration of materials and artmaking with mindfulness embedded in the activity.
- The arrangement of materials and layout of space. How do these encourage conversation and engagement? (An Example: Story Circles & Memory Cafes-we arrange chairs in the gallery as a semi-circle facing an artwork, which encouraged conversation.)
- Lean into VTS as a way to welcome and share stories

Final Takeaway:

- Found that people enjoyed both the artmaking as much as the conversation (an opportunity to come together and create), which aligns with Enjoyment and Wellbeing Goal of strengthening social connection and sense of belonging through opportunities to create together.
- Develop assessment tools with Art + Wellness Fellow.



Partner Loan Network Artworks

- PLN Artworks:
 - Arthur B. Davies, *Interwoven*
 - Arthur Dove, *October*,
 - Joseph Stella, *Dance of Spring (Song of the Birds)*,
- Foster moments of reflection, grounding, and connections with nature.
 - Peaceful subject matter also supports calm and welcoming environment
 - Galleries as restorative spaces for visitors
- Spark conversations surrounding community, belonging, and social connections, especially within Davies' *Interwoven*, relating to Social wellness
- Lively forms, colors, and details support slow and close looking, especially for mindfulness
- Sensory elements, particularly in Stella, can support curiosity and mindfulness
- Rich interdisciplinary program possibilities
 - Dove and Stella interested in connections between visual art and music, as well as relationship with the natural world.



Joseph Stella
Dance of Spring (Song of the Birds), 1924
Oil on canvas. Kemper Museum of Art

Trauma-informed Training for Educators



- **Core values of trauma-informed care:**

- Safety (physical and emotional)
 - How can we ensure everyone feels safe?
- Trustworthiness (make tasks, schedule, and expectations clear and maintain appropriate boundaries)
 - How can we build trust in our community?
- Choice (prioritize visitors' choice and control)
 - How can we prioritize choice? How can we remain flexible?
- Collaboration (share power with community members)
 - How can we authentically collaborate?
- Empowerment (prioritize community members' empowerment and skill building)
 - How can we support the wellbeing goals of our partners through arts?

- **Takeaways:**

- Find moments to practice mindfulness and grounding tools as coping skills, especially during times of transition (mindful breathing, music, and art therapy).
- Thank you for sharing
- Listen to strengths
- Stay neutral and consider the feelings behind behavior
- Keep in mind possible triggers: unpredictability, sensory overload, feeling vulnerable and frustrated, and confrontation
- Keep in mind core values

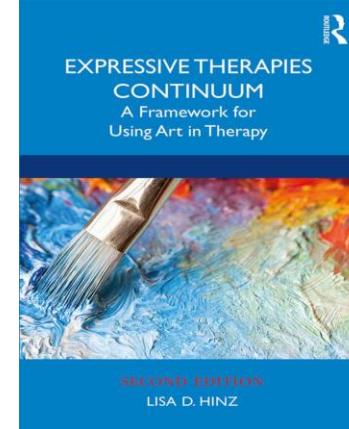
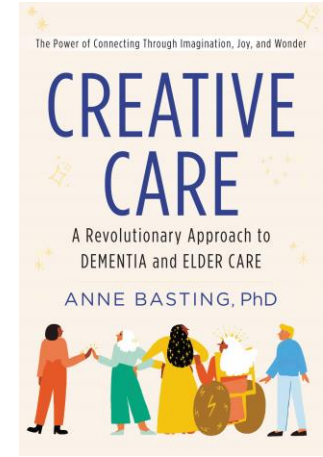
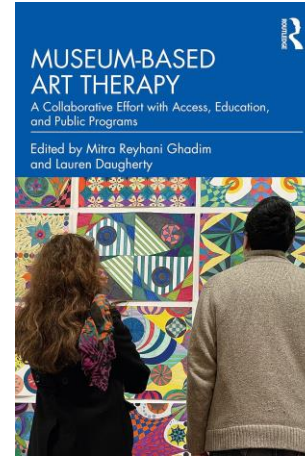


Future Plans

- **Community Art Circles at AAM**
 - 1st session at AAM begins July 2026
- **Art + Wellness Fellow**
 - Ongoing semester-based fellowship offered to ArtTherapy students at Cedar Crest College.
- **Art Care Toolkit**
 - An accessible toolkit with art as therapy activities, developed in collaboration with our Art + Wellness Fellow, available for all visitors to use and orgs serving similar communities.
- **Evaluation**
 - Develop assessment that is sensitive to the needs and background of community members, with support from our Art + Wellness Fellow and our partners.
- **Continued growth**
 - We hope to bring these tools into other programs and practices at AAM, not just as art and wellness programming but part of being "a good neighbor"

Resources

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- Ghadim, M. R., & Daugherty, L. (2022b). *Museum-Based Art Therapy: A collaborative effort with access, education, and public programs*. Routledge.
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- Plett, P., Gewurtz, R., Oudshoorn, A., Forchuk, C., & Marshall, C. A. (2024). Belonging through meaningful activity in the transition from unhoused to housed. *PLOS ONE*, 19(9). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0310701>



Thank you!!



Art + Wellness

■ A pulse where creativity meets mindfulness ■

El Paso Museum of Art

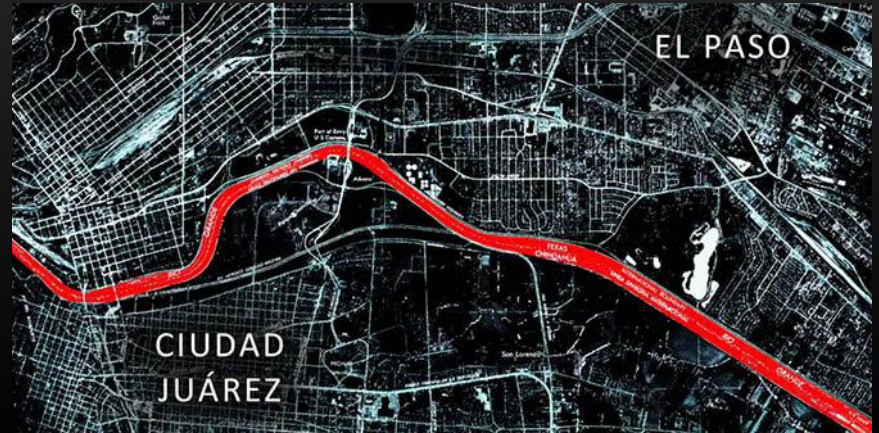
Our Unique Context

A Borderland Museum

Located at the U.S.-Mexico border, just minutes from Ciudad Juárez, we serve a **binational, bilingual community.**

- 67% bilingual
- Majority Hispanic population
- Constant cross-border movement

This context demands programming that is: **accessible, culturally responsive, and deeply human-centered.**



We asked:

What role can a museum play in supporting the well-being of its community?

The Opportunity

At EPMA, we are expanding the role of the museum to better serve our community:

- Supported by Art Bridges \$50,000 grant, to grow and sustain Art + Wellness programming
- From a place of observation to a space for connection, reflection, and wellbeing
- Using art as a tool to support mental health, reduce isolation, and foster belonging
- Creating accessible, welcoming environments for teens, older adults, and underserved audiences
- Strengthening partnerships to deepen impact across the city

Our Framework

Art as a Wellness Tool

Our work is grounded by the 4 pillars of the Art Bridges Tool Kit:

- **Emotional** - reflection, healing, mental health
- **Social** - connection and belonging
- **Cognitive** - critical thinking and mindfulness
- **Physical** - movement and embodied experiences



This ensures every program is intentional, not incidental

New Approach



From Passive Viewing → Active Well-Being

Traditionally, museums focus on:

- Observation
- Education

We are expanding that role to include:

- Emotional support
- Social connection
- Cognitive engagement
- Physical well-being

Goal



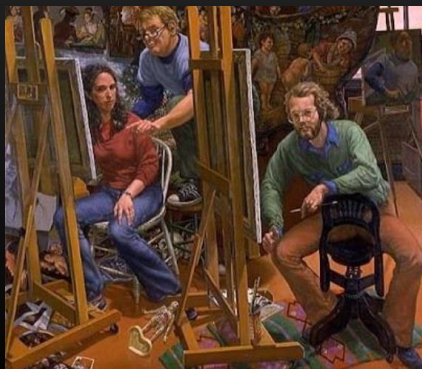
Increase access and accessibility for expression and social belonging

- Improve participation from teens and families
 - Provide tools for better social and emotional wellbeing to all visitors
 - Make the museum a space for connection

Emotional: Art as Healing

Creating Spaces for Reflection

- Using Art Bridges Partner Loans from the Hunter Museum of American Art to explore:
 - Anxiety (*The Painting Lesson*, Jack Beal)
 - Biophilia (*Sunset Intersection*, Robert Bechtle)
 - Spirituality (*Day of Solstice*, Daniel Sprick)



Emotional: Wellness Programing

- Monthly Themed Wellness Workshops
- Working with local holistic medicine practitioners and licensed mental health counselor
 - **Plentitude**
 - Grief Facilitators, Reiki, Sound Healing
 - Holistic Therapies for Mental Health
 - **Theron Nicholson M.A. Rehabilitation Counseling**
 - Artist, Licensed Mental Health Counselor, EMT
 - Experience in Art Therapy
- Target Audiences
 - Young adult men cohort: address machismo/toxic masculinity in the community
 - Families

Social: Art as Connection

- **Building Community Through Creativity**
 - Focusing on those most at risk of isolation
 - **Older Adults**
 - Return regularly
 - Form friendships
 - Build community through classes
 - **Teens**
 - Launching *Teen Takeover*
 - Addressing loneliness and mental health
 - Creating a space that feels *theirs*



The museum becomes a **third place**—not home, not school, but somewhere they belong

Social: Older Adults Programs



- A welcoming space for regular connection
- Creative classes that encourage self-expression and sharing
 - Ceramics, Painting, & Fiber Arts
 - Accessibility Improvements: standing throwing wheels, better seating
- Growing participation
 - Expanded program by increasing class offerings
- Meaningful friendships

Social: Teen Takeover Programs

- Teen Takeover launching to support teens experiencing mental health challenges and loneliness
- Pilot (May 8, 2026):
 - Youth Expo in partnership with Aliviane (behavioral health and substance use prevention organization)
 - Focus on wellness, community-building, and creative engagement
 - Collaborative activities with partner organizations
 - EPMA will lead Art Slow Looking Tours as part of the experience



Art & Wellness

• Breathe • Create • Connect •

Cognitive: Art as Thought

- Strengthening critical thinking and intellectual growth
- Deepening reflection through engagement with art
- Bolstering connections with neurodivergent and neurodegenerative groups



Cognitive: Wellness Guide



- Give visitors tools to look at art through a wellness lens
 - Breath work and grounding exercises
 - Mindfulness & Slow Looking
- Accessibility
 - English, Spanish, & Large Text
- Iterations
- Evaluation

Physical: Wellness Beyond the Mind

- Expanding wellness as a fully inclusive experience.
- Integrating movement and physical awareness through:
 - Sound Baths
 - Tai Chi
 - Balance Workshops
 - Yoga



Designed for Access



- Removing barriers to participation
- Actively reshaping the museum experience
 - Bilingual offerings
 - Large-text guides
 - Sensory-friendly spaces
 - Adaptive equipment in studios

Even our building—once perceived as unwelcoming—is being reinterpreted through intentional hospitality

A Living Ecosystem

Powered by Partnerships

We collaborate with:

- Mental health professionals
- Community organizations
- Hospitals
- Artists and educators



Together, we expand impact beyond our walls

A New Role for Museums

At EPMA, art is more than something to look at

It is:

- A tool for healing
- A catalyst for connection
- A bridge across communities



This is what it means to be a museum in
service of its people

Thank you!



MUSEO DE ARTE DE PUERTO RICO

The Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico (MAPR) is a nonprofit visual arts museum with a history of over 25 years.

Mission

MAPR welcomes all people to explore the diverse artistic legacy of Puerto Rico, connecting it and our visitors to nature, community, global culture, and each other. We research, preserve, and exhibit this art and are a catalyst for creativity, experimentation, lifelong learning and the free exchange of ideas.

We do this through:

- Opening up to the *community*.
- Becoming a *sustainable* organization.
- Embracing the new through a focus on *experimentation, innovation, and collaboration*.
- Internationalizing* the Museo



MAPR WELLBEING: A SPACE TO RECONNECT

The Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico positions itself as a living, open, and accessible space where art functions as a transformative tool for emotional wellbeing. Through a three-pronged approach focusing on traditional museum audiences, Puerto Rico's creative community, and internal stakeholders, MAPPR Wellbeing: A space to reconnect, builds on the museum's ongoing commitment to creativity and care. It creates safe spaces for older adults (60+), at-risk youth, artists and creatives, and museum employees to relieve stress, process emotions, foster teamwork, and support emotional balance. Through creative engagement, the program advances personal growth and healing together, extending the museum's impact to broader and more diverse communities.



HOW DID WE GET HERE?



CEDE: *Guarida en el Museo (Refuge at the Museum)*: Wellness sessions for creatives in collaboration with Centro de Economía Creativa.

Education: Collaboration with San Juan Capestrano Hospital and Access for All events focused on wellness and mental health.

The MAPR's Wellbeing Program is launched to serve our communities at large. Through three departments we serve artists, youth-at-risk, elders, and MAPR employees.

Creative Community Development Center (CEDE)

Educational Innovation Center (CIE)

Human Resources (HR)

2025

2024

2026

Invitation from Art Bridges to take part in "Works in Progress: Defining the Art of Wellness in Museums".

A core team is selected to develop the broader MAPR's Wellbeing Program.



PAUSA (PAUSE)

WELLNESS SESSIONS FOR ARTISTS

Goals of program

- Provide artists monthly sessions for two years where they can reflect on individual and collective socioemotional hardships through the interpretation of a work of art.
- Provide artists a variety of creative outlets and lifestyle tools that promote emotional stability and self-regulation.
- Foster connection and belonging among local artists.

Outcomes

This program is focused on addressing the following categories, based on the Art & Wellness Checklist:

- **Emotional**: 60% of artist's report feeling more emotionally stable with a good work-life balance due to reduction of stress, improved self-regulation, and improved mood.
- **Social**: 60% of artist's report feeling safe, connected and seen, there is a stronger sense of belonging because there is a recurring community that supports each other.
- **Cognitive**: 60% of artist's report a stronger sense of self-confidence, increased empathy and effective communication skills.

PAUSE

WELLNESS SESSIONS FOR ARTISTS

Format

10 sessions per year @ MAPR's galleries & garden or partner space

Impact

To serve at least 15 artists per session x 10 sessions a year, for a total of 150 artists per year. ~3 selected artists will be part of a core cohort for long-term case study.

Evaluation

The program follows a structured format that will allow us to collect the same data for 2 years, thus measuring long-term impact. We are currently working with Art Bridges in developing the formal evaluation survey.

Methodology

Pre & post surveys per session, annual survey of all participants, and interview of core cohort.



PAUSE

WELLNESS SESSIONS FOR ARTISTS

101

Workshop breakdown (~2 hours)

- **15 minutes:** Pre-survey and grounding meditation
- **30 minutes:** Engagement with a carefully selected work of art (from the PLN, MAPR collection/ temporary exhibits or from the collection in partner space). This work of art is meant to prompt the conversation into a particular trauma and/or socioemotional challenge, but participant feedback will guide the rest of the session.
- **45 minutes:** Peer-to-peer creative arts session guided by a practicing artist. An array of mediums and techniques will be explored throughout the sessions, such as textile art, creative writing, collage, dance, movement, ephemeral art, photography, theater, gardening, etc.
- **30 minutes:** Expression circle and creation share outs. Along with the offering of coping tools and mechanisms guided by a socioemotional holistic coach. Post-survey and networking.

THE ART OF WELLBEING:

MAPR'S EMPLOYEE PROGRAM

102

Goal of program

To encourage the employee's active participation in wellness initiatives that promote a healthy work environment by offering employees tools for self-care, emotional balance, teamwork, creativity, personal growth, and greater confidence to manage and control their emotional, mental, and physical state.

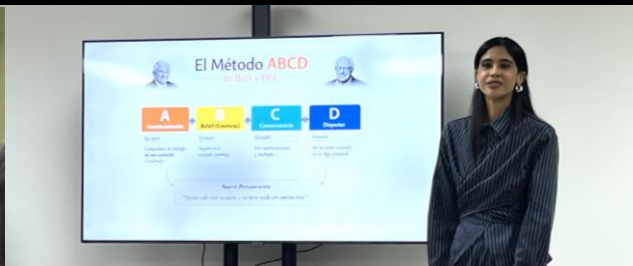
Format

- 2 team-building activities per year
- 4 seminars per year
- 2 creative workshops per year (using PLN artworks)

Outcomes

This program is focused on addressing the following categories, based on the Art & Wellness Checklist:

- **Social**: Improved work environment due to increased innovative collaboration amongst diverse and multigenerational teams who work together toward common goals.
- **Emotional**: Improved individual wellbeing accompanied by reduced emotional fatigue, burnout and stress due to emotional regulation, tension, and stress management skills.
- **Cognitive**: Optimized communication amongst teams due to self-awareness skills that allow individuals to identify areas of opportunities, and face challenges in their daily work environment.



YOUR OASIS AT THE MUSEUM:

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT PROGRAM

103

Goal of program

Develop community bonding, fostering creativity and emotional wellbeing.

Audience

Older adults (60+): In collaboration with *Justo a la medida* and *Red por los derechos de la niñez y la juventud*.

Youth at risk (13+): In collaboration with *RIMAS Foundation*.

Format

3 cohorts a year for each audience. Each cohort is composed of 20 participants, and they are offered 3 sessions.

Outcomes

Older adults: To feel heard and seen using art as a transformative tool.

Youth at risk: To see the museum as a safe space to express themselves and be listened to, also using art as a transformative and cathartic tool.



THANK YOU

Annie Y. Saldaña Matfas

Manager of the Creative Community Development Center

asaldana@mapr.org

Dileyca Cepeda

Development Coordinator

Dcepeda@mapr.org





WORKSHOP

Designing for Flourishing: Understanding and Evaluating Flourishing in Your Museum

Dr. Katherine Cotter

Director of Research with the Humanities
and Human Flourishing Project
University of Pennsylvania





Designing for Flourishing: Understanding and Evaluating Flourishing in Your Museum

Katherine N. Cotter

Humanities and Human Flourishing Project

University of Pennsylvania

What is Flourishing?



Why is Evaluating
Flourishing Important
for Art Museums?

How Can You Evaluate
Flourishing in Your
Museum?



Workshop Roadmap

MUSEUMS, LIBRARIES, AND CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS
PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND
AND CELEBRATE WHO THEY ARE, WERE, AND MIGHT BE.

Jeffrey K. Smith
The Museum Effect

What is
Flourishing?



What is Flourishing?

Well-Being

- Feeling good and high quality of life
- Functioning effectively
- To be cultivated and preserved

Ill-Being

- Presence of negative states or disorders
- Impaired functioning and quality of life
- To be prevented or mitigated

In your museum, what does flourishing look like?

How does flourishing relate to your museum's role in people's lives?

Dimensions of Flourishing



Physical



Cognitive



Emotional



Social

Physical Flourishing



What Does Research Say?

- Reductions in stress levels
- Lower pain for those with chronic pain
- Enhanced overall quality of life

Cognitive Flourishing



Empathy
Self-Esteem



Mental
Illness
Rumination

What Does Research Say?

- Reductions in anxiety
- Lower risk of dementia
- Higher feelings of meaning in life

Emotional Flourishing



Happy, Joy

Wonder,
Awe



Sad, Bored

Angry, Tense

What Does Research Say?

- Increased subjective well-being
- Greater positive emotion
- Increased feelings of engagement

Social Flourishing



Belonging
Connection



Loneliness
Isolation

What Does Research Say?

- Decrease social disconnect
- Enhanced feelings of community
- Lower feelings of loneliness

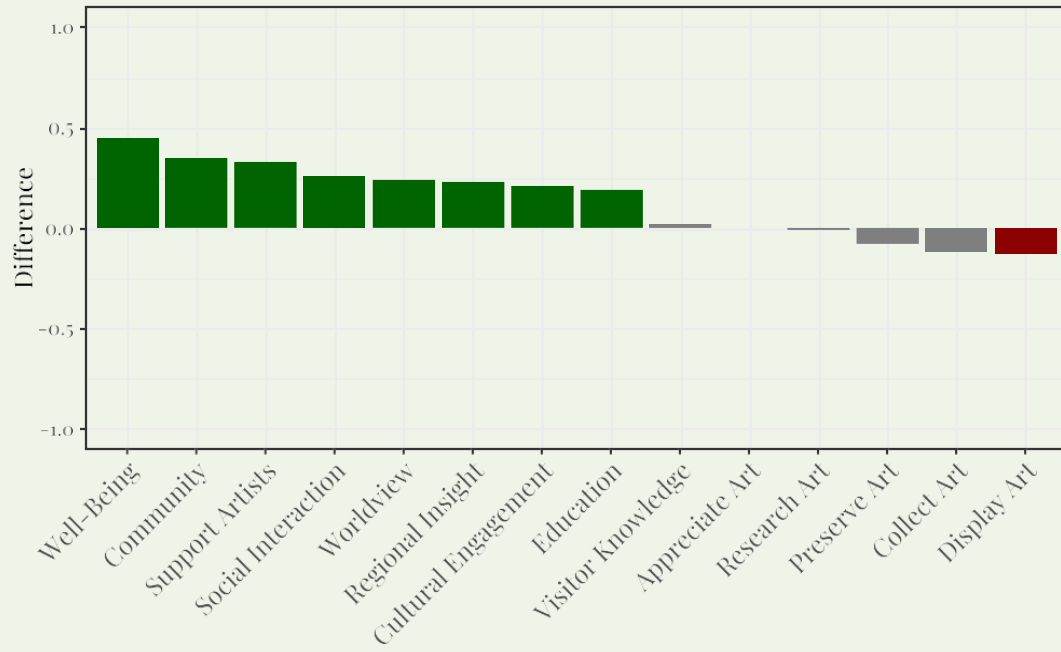
Which dimensions of flourishing feel most aligned with your museum's purpose, history, or current priorities?

Which flourishing dimensions or outcomes feel most aspirational?

Why is Evaluating
Flourishing Important for
Art Museums?



Art Museum Professionals View Flourishing as Vital



Flourishing outcomes
to address:

- Empathy
- Closed-mindedness
- Self-acceptance
- Self-doubt
- Social disconnect

What institutional values, priorities, or goals will evaluation of flourishing support?

How does flourishing fit into your museum's responsibility to the public?

Driving Strategic Decision-Making



Aligning Outcomes with
Values



Informs Resource
Allocation



From Attendance to
Impact

Supporting Advocacy and Fundraising



DEMONSTRATE PUBLIC
VALUE AND SOCIAL IMPACT



INTEGRATES STORYTELLING
WITH EVIDENCE



STRENGTHEN FUNDING AND
POLICY ARGUMENTS

In what ways can evidence of flourishing impacts help your museum?

How might evaluation of flourishing help your museum learn about itself?

How Can You Evaluate
Flourishing in Your
Museum?

```
graph LR; A[Research Question] --> B[Develop Methodology]; B --> C[Collect Data]; C --> D[Analyze Data]; D --> E[Share & Leverage Findings];
```

Research
Question

Develop
Methodology

Collect Data

Analyze Data

Share &
Leverage
Findings

1. Research Question

Who

What

Outcome

*Show Me
Your Wound*
Example

Who

- Adult visitor

What

- *Show Me Your Wound* exhibit

Outcome

- Xenophobia
- Empathy

Theory and Mechanisms of Change



Theory of Change

The overall pathway from engagement to outcome



Mechanisms of Change

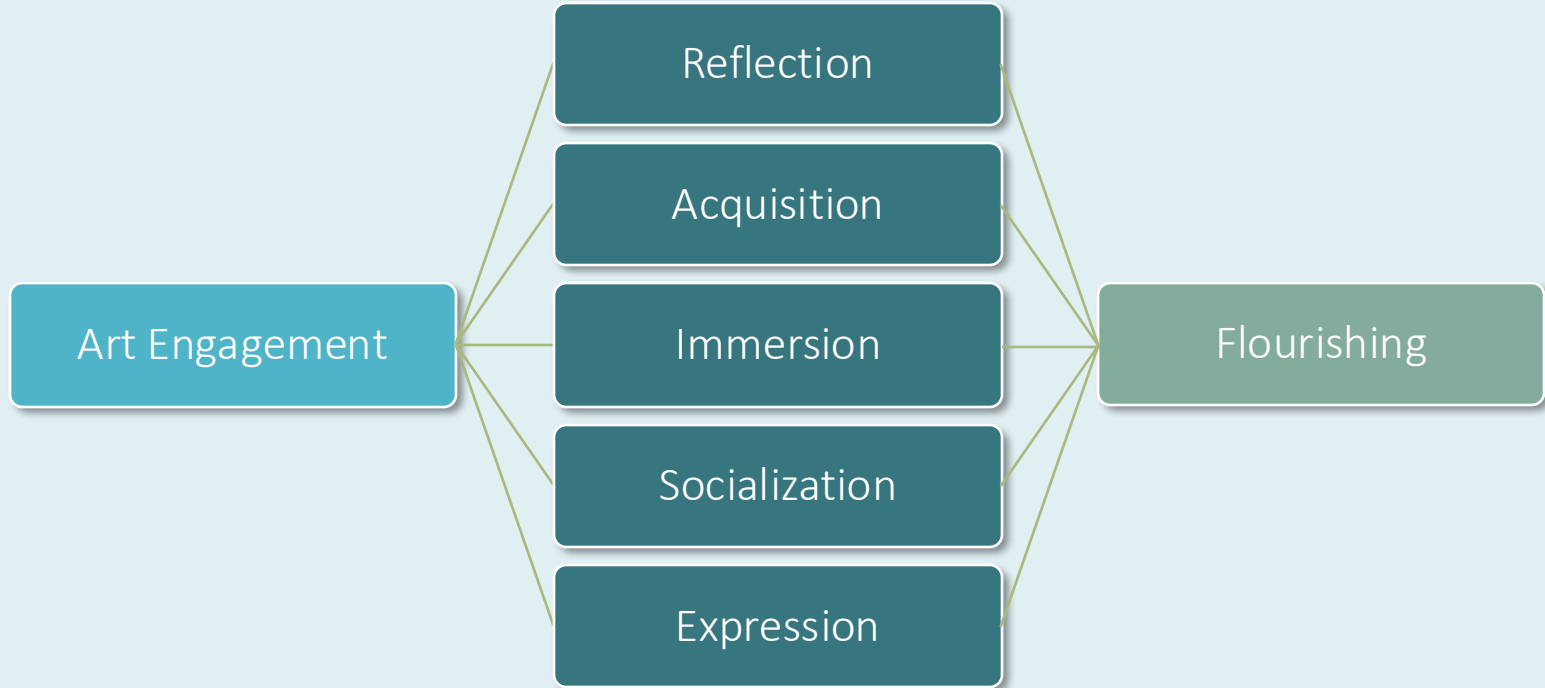
The individual processes that make the pathway work.

Art
Engagement

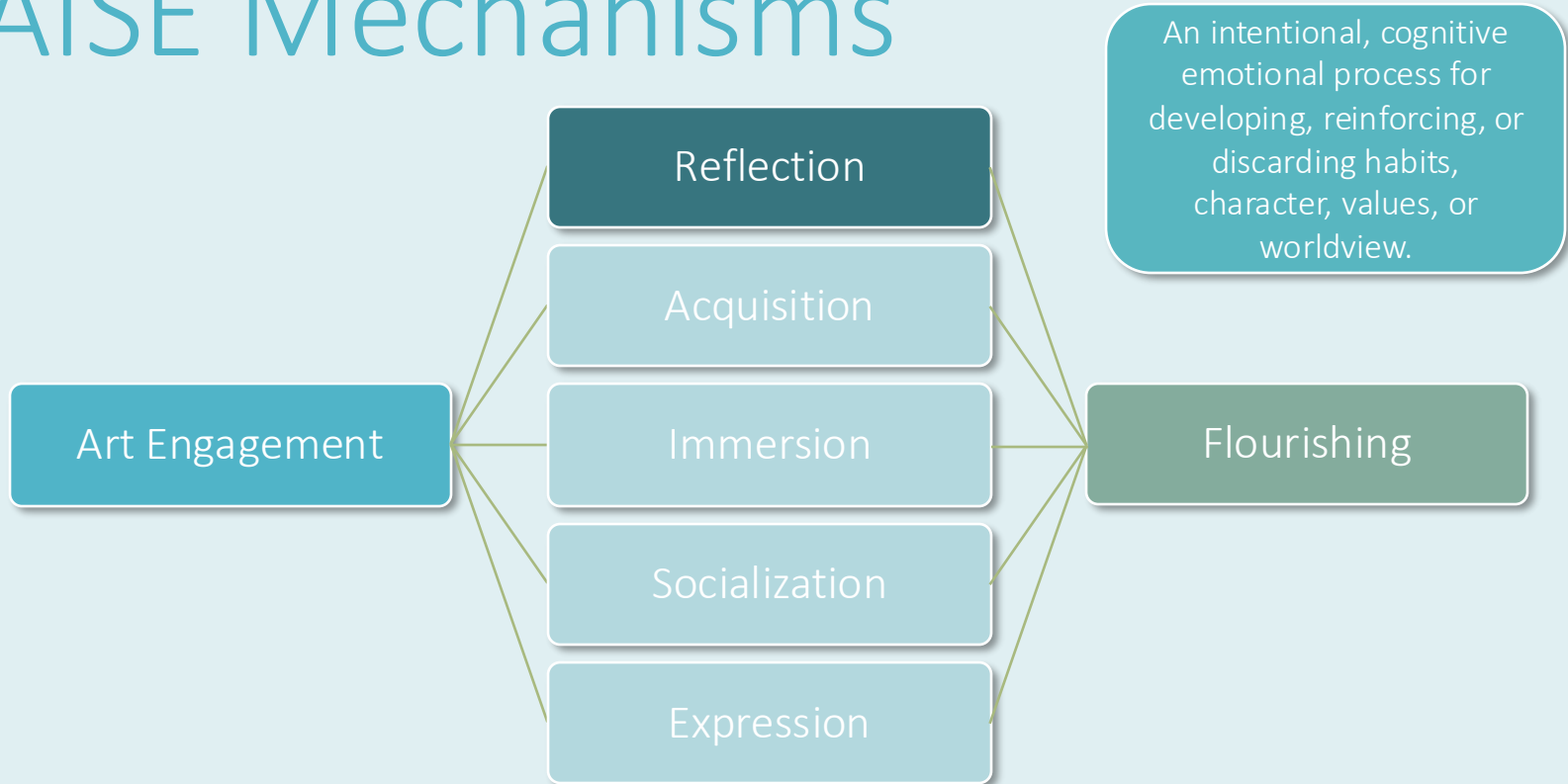


Flourishing

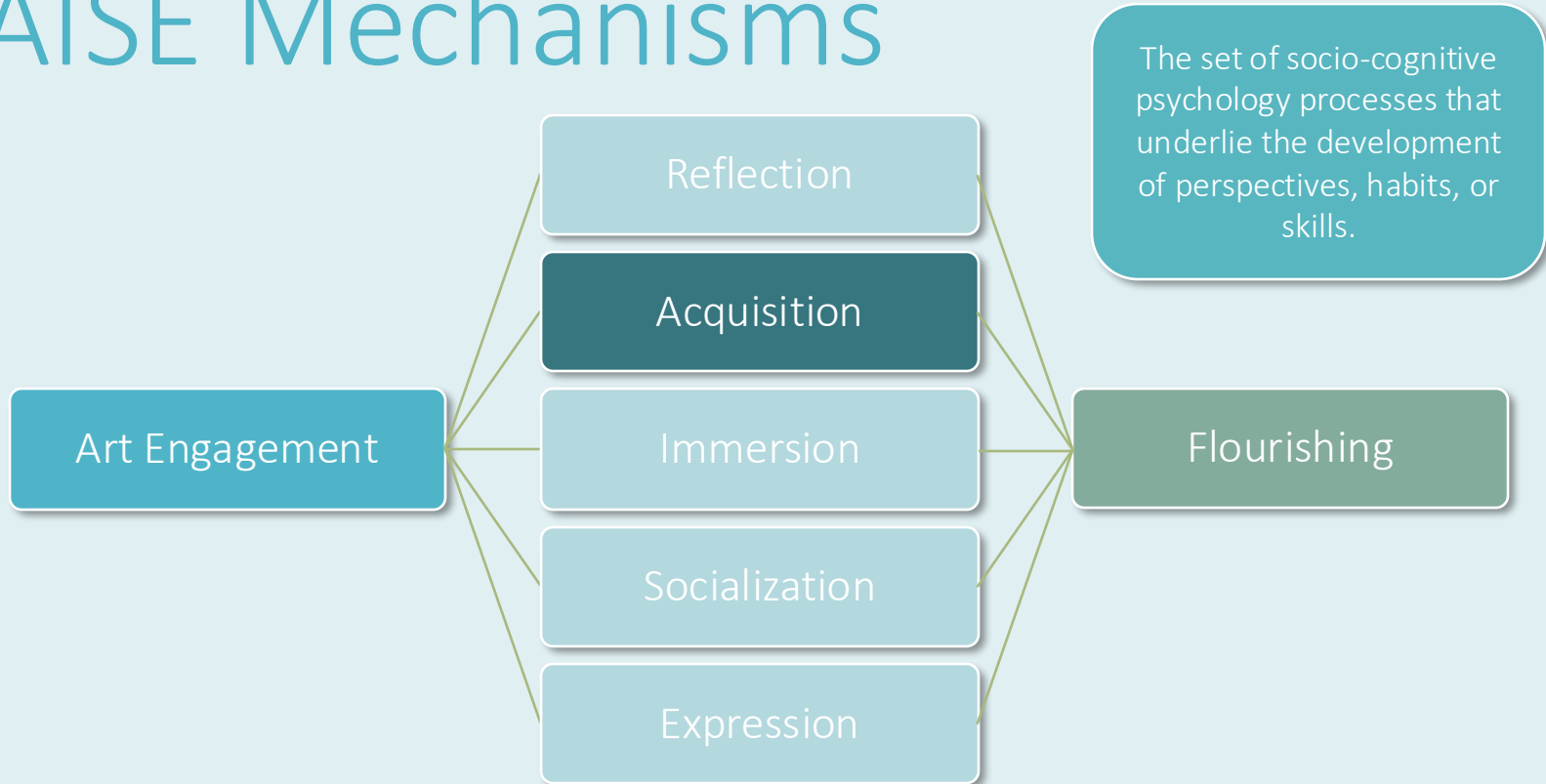
RAISE Mechanisms



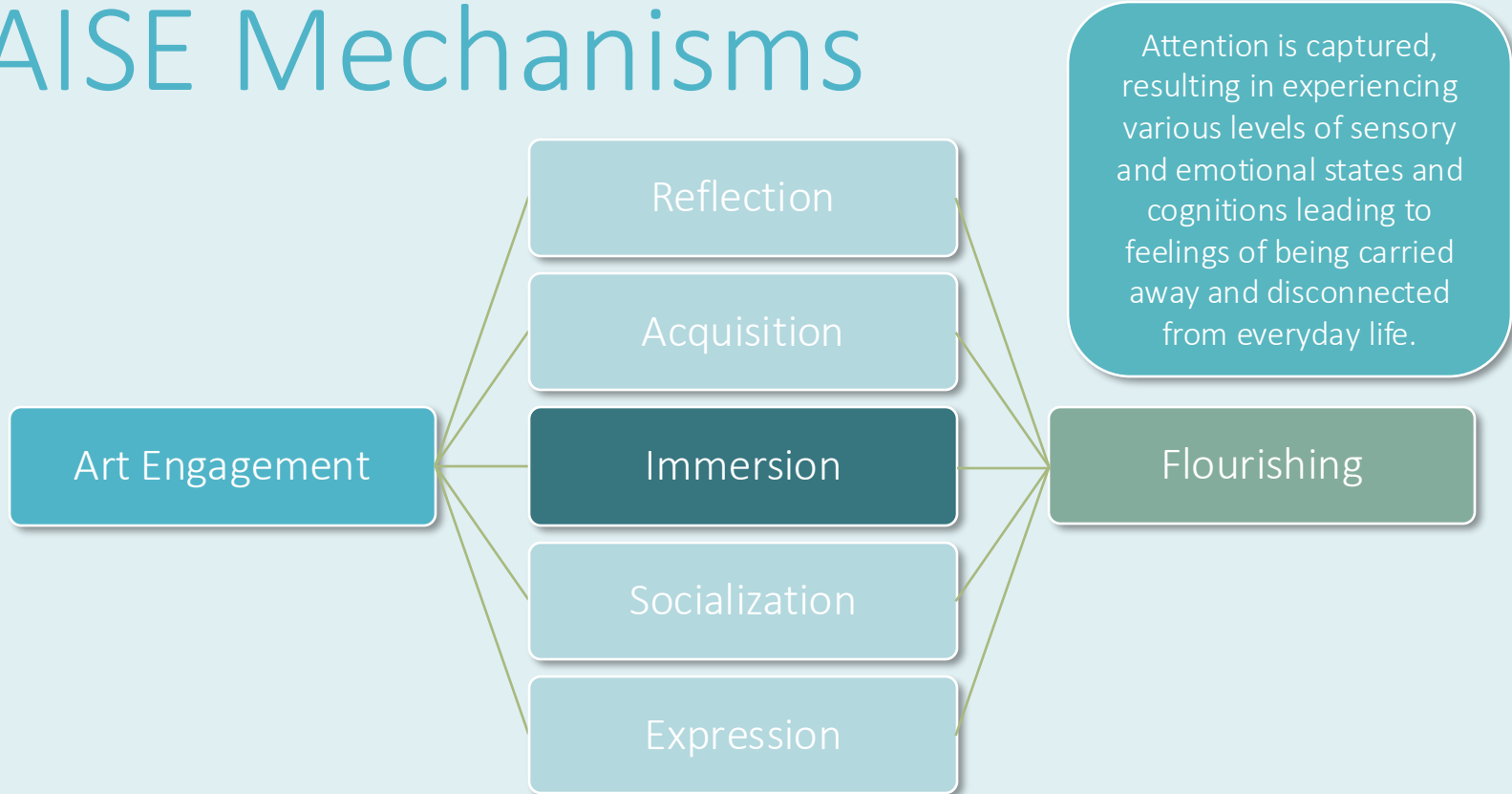
RAISE Mechanisms



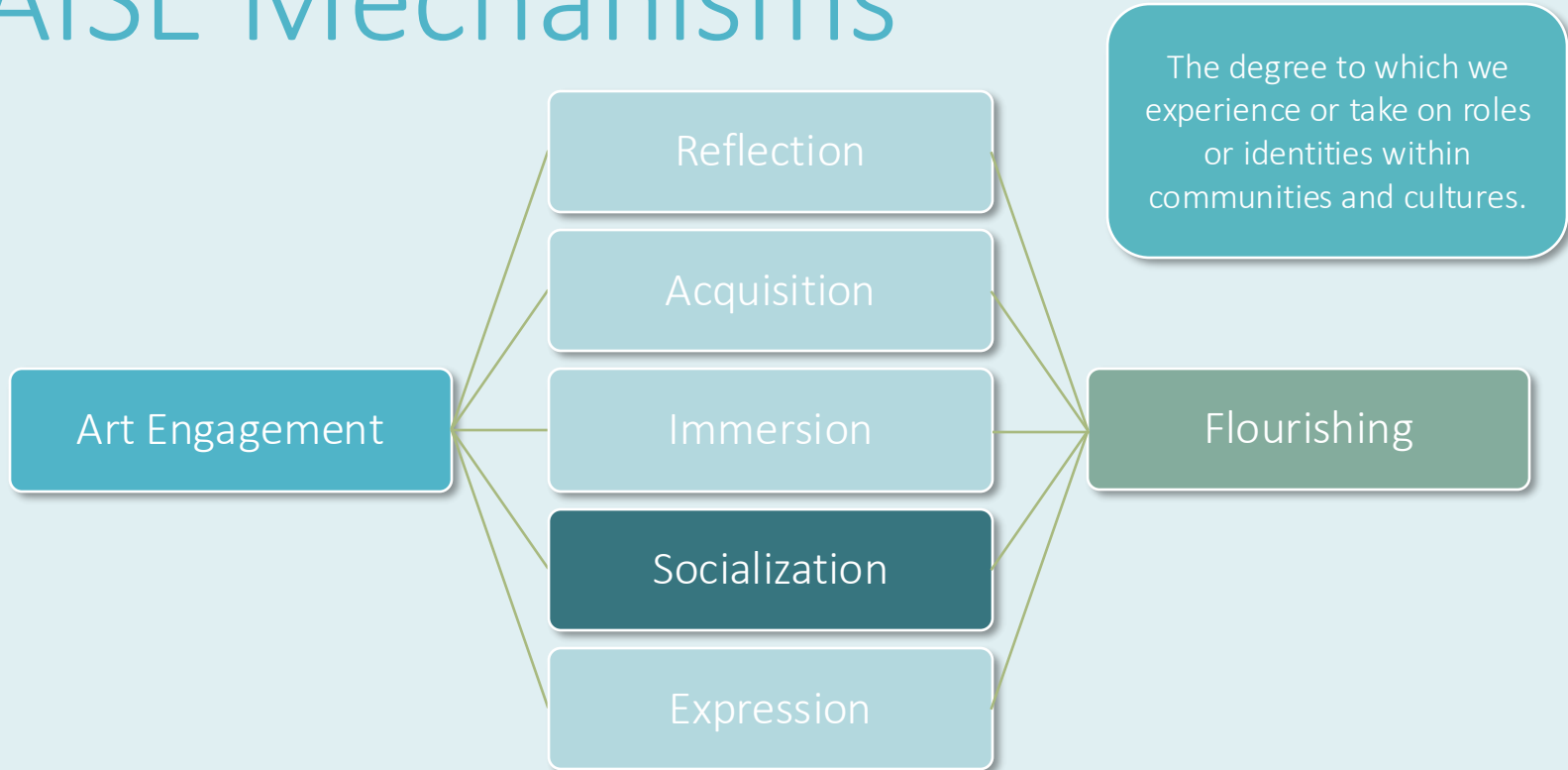
RAISE Mechanisms



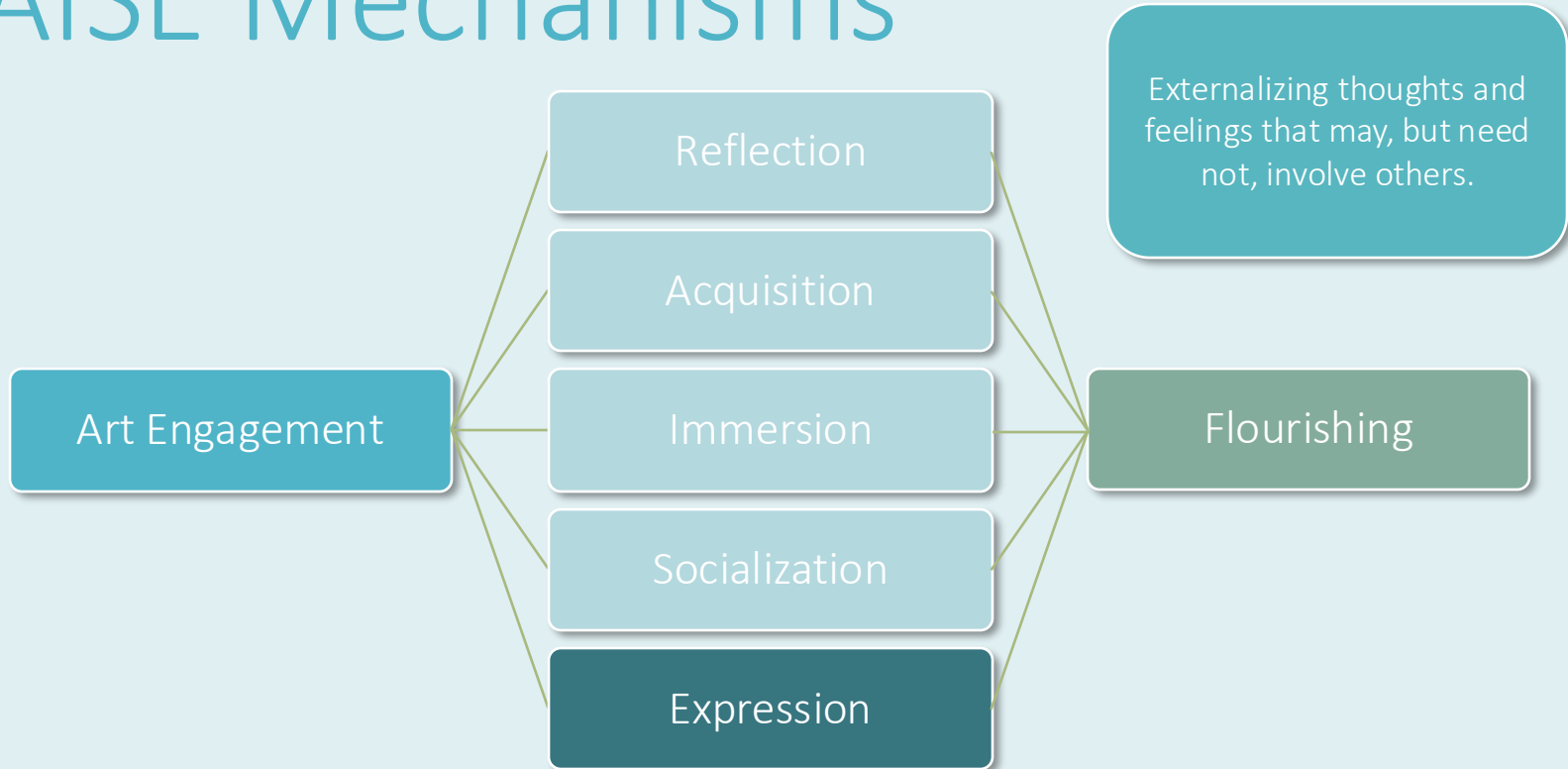
RAISE Mechanisms



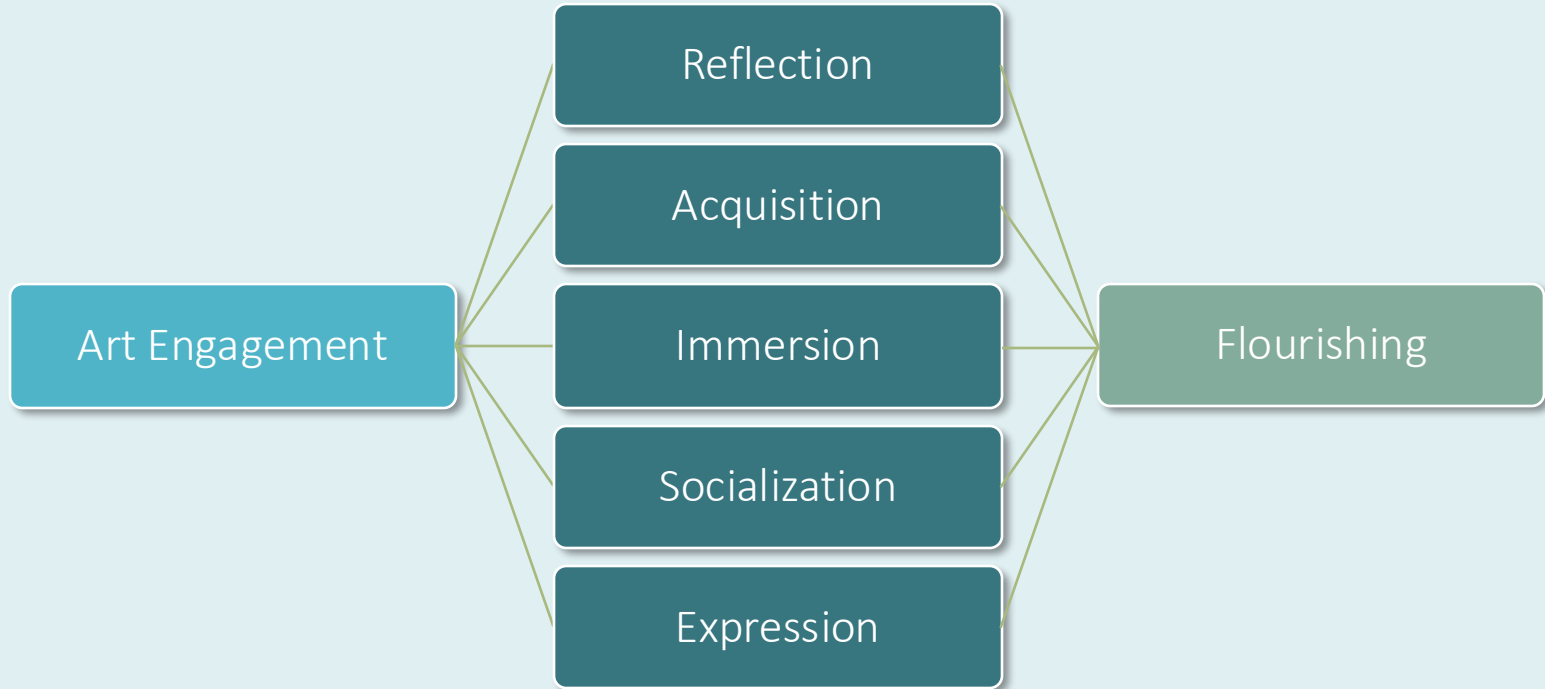
RAISE Mechanisms



RAISE Mechanisms



RAISE Mechanisms



2. Develop Methodology

Assessment
Design

Types of Data

Measurement
Options

Assessment Design

Relationships?



Single time point

Changes?



Multiple time points

Comparisons?



Single or multiple time
points

Types of Data

Quantitative Methods

- Responses are represented numerically
- Many existing quantitative scales exist

Qualitative Methods

- Open-ended questions
- Could be survey responses, focus groups, interviews

Other Things to Assess

How relaxed do you feel? 1 – 7

Core Art Museum Survey for Well-Being

Did your experience impact your well-being? How?

Debrief program experiences

Demographic information

Past art experiences



Download AB Art +
Wellness Toolkit here



Show Me Your Wound Example

Assessment Design

- Pre- and post-exhibition visit to assess change

Type of Data

- Quantitative survey measures

Measurements

- Xenophobia scale
- Questionnaire of Cognitive and Affective Empathy

Core Art Museum Survey of Well-Being

Psychological Distress

Social Connection

Meaning

Empathy

Positive Self-Regard



Download
survey here

Psychological Distress

During my visit...

I felt depressed

I felt the future is hopeless

I felt anxious

I was nervous

I felt stressed

Depression

Anxiety

Stress

Positive Self-Regard

During my visit...

I felt I was deserving of love and kindness

I was able to accept the thoughts and feelings I had in response to the art

I felt comfortable with who I am

I believed I can make a contribution to the world

I felt capable of achieving my personal goals

Self-Acceptance

Self-Efficacy

Social Connection

During my visit...

I felt like I had a place in the world

I felt valued

I felt like I was a part of a community

I felt connected to the people around me

I felt a deep connection to people in my life

I was thankful for people in my life

I felt lonely (*Reverse scored*)

Value

Community Connectedness

Relationship Quality

Meaning

During my visit...

My life experiences made more sense

It was easy to find connection among experiences in my life

I felt my life had purpose

I felt inspired to set new goals

I felt like my life had value

I felt that what I add to the world is important

Coherence

Purpose

Mattering

Empathy

During my visit...

I was emotionally invested in other people

I felt concerned for the welfare of other people

I was emotionally indifferent to other people (*Reverse scored*)

I was curious about other people's thoughts and feelings

I tried to imagine how I would feel if I was experiencing what was depicted in the art

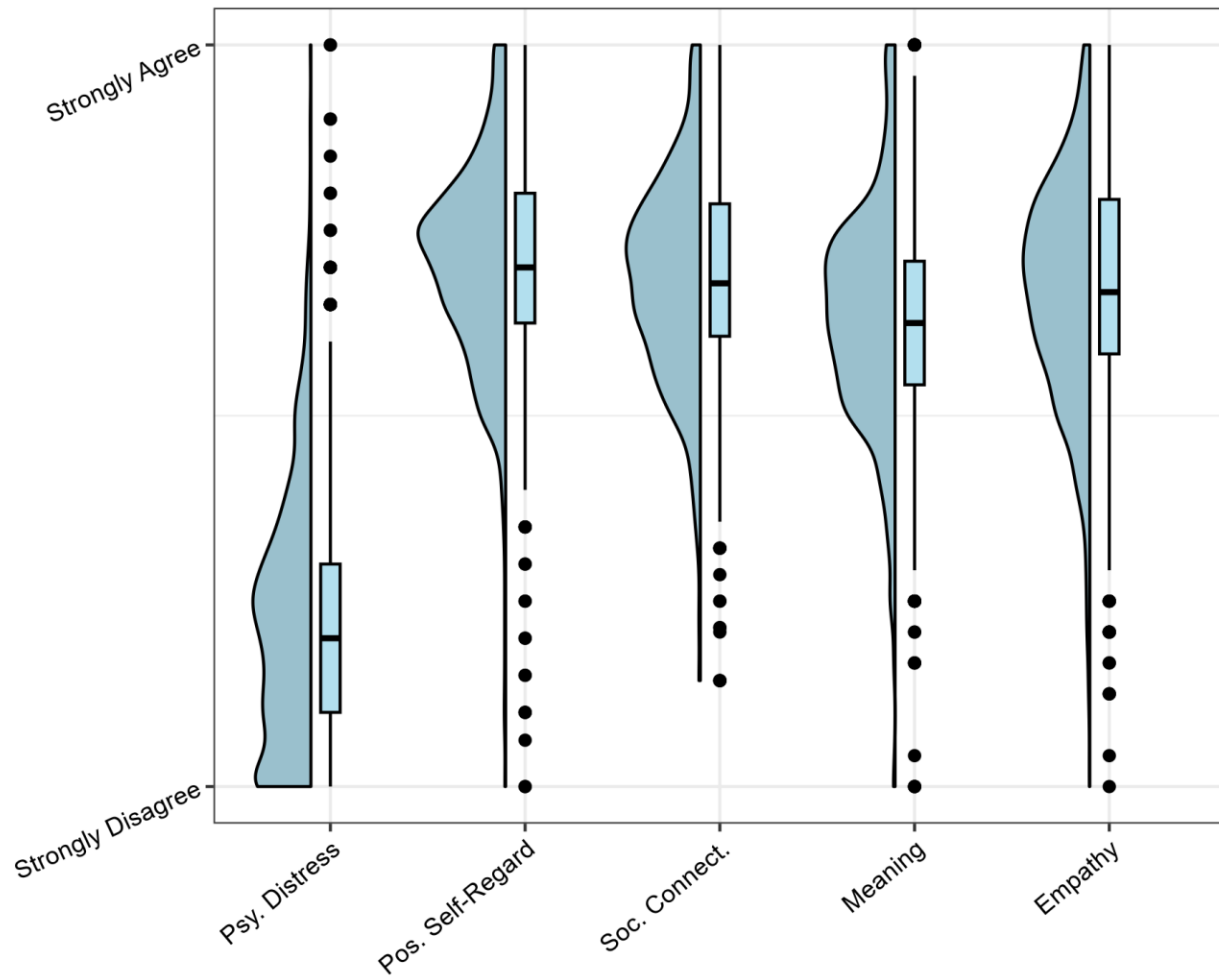
I was interested in trying to understand people who are different from me

Affective
Empathy

Cognitive
Empathy



What Can We Learn
Using These Metrics?



Mechanisms of Change and Flourishing

Psychological Distress

- Engage in immersive experiences
- Express thoughts and emotions

Positive Self-Regard

- Engage in deep reflection
- Connect with others and self

Social Connection

- Express thoughts and emotions
- Connect with others and self

Mechanisms of Change and Flourishing

Meaning

reflection

- Connect with others

Empathy

reflection

- Connect with others

Flourishing Predicting Outcomes

Visit
Satisfaction

- Lower psychological distress
- Higher empathy, social connection

Feel Better

- Lower psychological distress

Flourishing Predicting Outcomes

Feel Like
Better
Person

- Greater sense of meaning

Change
in Self

- Greater sense of meaning,
empathy

3. Collect Data

Recruiting
Participants

Data Collection
Methods

Required
Resources

Recruitment

Exit Intercepts

Post-Program
Invitation

Passive Data
Collection

Data Collection Methods

Survey

Focus Group or Interview

Observations of Behaviors

Required Resources



Physical Resources



Personnel Resources

Show Me Your Wound Example

Recruitment

- Visitors entering museum or foot traffic outside museum

Collection Method

- Quantitative survey delivered via tablet or smartphone

Resources Needed

- Recruitment personnel
- Tablets for surveying

4. Analyze Data

Quantitative
Data

Qualitative
Data

Quantitative Data

Conclusions that are represented numerically

Tells us *whether* and *how much*

Do outcomes vary across visitors, programs, or time?

Are differences or relationships statistically meaningful?

What factors predict stronger flourishing outcomes?

Qualitative Data

Conclusions are represented narratively

Tells us *how* and *why*

What does flourishing look like from the visitor perspective?

What impacts are unanticipated or surprising?

How do people view museums as spaces for flourishing?

What Is More (or Less) Likely to Change

More Immediate

- Emotional Well-Being
- Restoration
- Social Connection

Requires Consistency

- Psychological Health
- Empathy
- Meaning Making

*Show Me
Your Wound
Example*

Data Type

- Quantitative survey data

Key Results

- Small decreases in xenophobia
- Increase in online simulation
- No change in perspective taking

5. Share and Leverage Findings

Engaging Stakeholders

Implementing Changes

Advocacy for the Museum

*What feels most **exciting** about evaluating flourishing in your museum?*

*What feels most **uncertain or challenging** about evaluating flourishing in your museum?*



Thank You!

Katherine N. Cotter

kncotter@sas.upenn.edu

Humanities and Human Flourishing Project

University of Pennsylvania



WORKSHOP

Applying Evaluation to your Art Bridges Project

Max Fey

Art Bridges Foundation

Research and Evaluation Manager

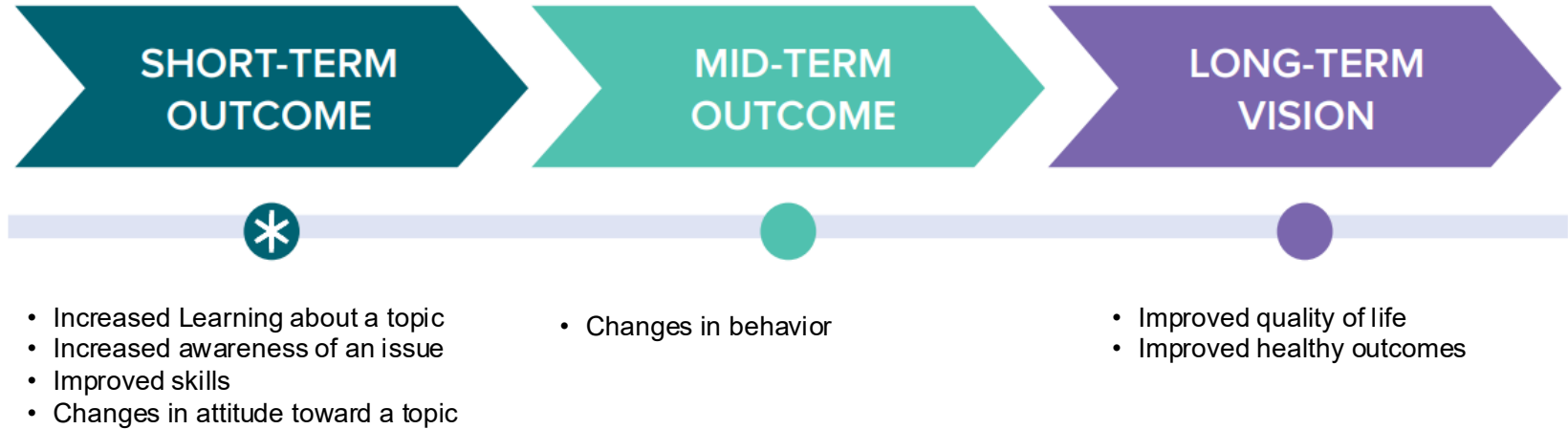




Evaluation Workshop Agenda

- 1. Framework and examples of how to create goals**
2. Framing evaluation for the Art & Wellness Award
3. Breakout group activity

Outcome by Project Timeline





Concrete Example: Orlando Evaluation Project

Evaluation Background

To assess whether the Orlando Museum of Art's Reflections program met its key objectives, the museum's team worked with Art Bridges staff to discuss program goals and develop evaluation materials, including weekly and final reflections and an anxiety inventory to assess wellness outcomes. Participants were recruited via flyers and social media.



KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

By participating in the program, do attendees:

1. Gain new knowledge about art?
2. Develop new skills on how to reduce stress?
3. Perceive a mental and emotional benefit from engaging in the program?
4. Reflect upon their cancer journeys?
5. Feel a greater sense of connection to themselves, others, and the museum?



Evaluation Design

State Trait Anxiety Inventory

Before and after each of the four sessions, participants completed the State Trait Anxiety Inventory, a validated 20-item, self-report assessment device that measures state and trait anxiety.

Weekly Reflections

After each session, participants completed a brief survey reporting their level of agreement with a series of statements about the program. They were also asked to share feedback about what they liked and what they would change.

End-of-Program Reflections

After the final session, participants completed a brief survey reporting their level of agreement with a series of statements about the program's stress reduction techniques.



Goal Metrics

At least 90% of participants will strongly agree/agree that the program allowed them to:

- Feel a greater sense of empathy for and support from others whose experiences are similar to their own
- Develop new skills on how to reduce stress
- Objectively reflect upon their cancer journeys and be more effective in expressing their thoughts through discussion and journaling
- Perceive mental and emotional benefit from participating
- Gain new knowledge about art
- Feel a greater sense of connection to oneself, others, and the museum

Actual Metrics

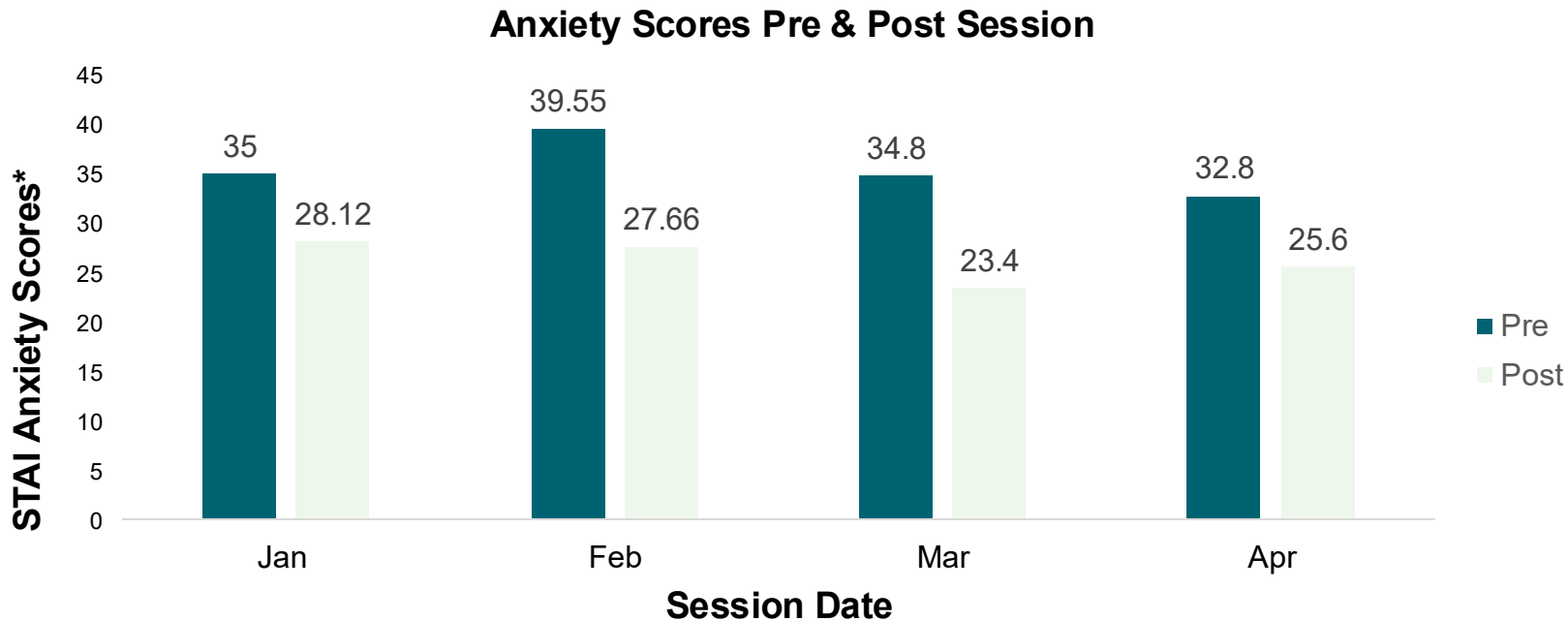
Close to or more than 90% of participants strongly agreed/agreed that the program allowed them to:

- **89%** Feel a greater sense of empathy for and support from others whose experiences are similar to their own
- **96%** Develop new skills on how to reduce stress
- **89%** Objectively reflect upon their cancer journeys and be more effective in expressing their thoughts through discussion and journaling
- **93%** Perceive mental and emotional benefit from participating
- **96%** Gain new knowledge about art

*There was not a close-ended question about the sense of connection to oneself, others, and the museum, but qualitatively, participants seemed to experience this.



... and after each session, their anxiety scores decreased.





Evaluation Workshop Agenda

1. Framework and examples of how to create goals
- 2. Framing evaluation for the Art & Wellness Award**
3. Breakout group activity



Evaluation for Art & Wellness Award Projects

- Identify at least one planned program or initiative
- Identify at least one wellness pillar:
 - **Social**
 - **Emotional**
 - **Cognitive**
 - **Physical**
- Pre/post assessment via the Core Art Museum For Well-Being survey instrument



Evaluation Workshop Agenda

1. Framework and examples of how to create goals
2. Framing evaluation for the Art & Wellness Award
3. **Breakout group activity**
 - **With your group discuss:**
 - What are you hoping to achieve with your wellness project(s)?
 - What projects are you planning to do, or would you like to do?
 - What audiences do you hope to reach?



Evaluation Timeline for Art & Wellness Award

On your own

- Prepare for application submission
 - Programming
 - Goals and outcomes with associated wellness pillar(s)

Follow-up call with Art Bridges

- Provide feedback and thought partnership:
 - Programming
 - Goals and outcomes

Application submission and evaluation plan

- Once you submit your application, our Research & Evaluation team will support in building out a survey rooted in Core Art Museum Survey for Well-Being and implementing an evaluation plan.



Next Steps and Closing



Parting Questions

1. What is one thing you can do in the next week to advance the planning of your art and wellness project(s)?
2. What is something you are still curious about and want to explore?



Next Steps & Timeline

Continue these conversations with colleagues!

Draft Application due June 15, 2026

- Partner Loan Network grouping
- Programming
- Goals and outcomes with associated wellness pillar(s)

Follow-up call with Art Bridges by June 30, 2026

- Review draft and provide feedback and thought partnership
- Programming
- Goals and outcomes

Final application due July 31, 2026

- Once your application is submitted and reviewed, funds will be released.
- Our Research & Evaluation team will support in building out a survey rooted in Core Art Museum Survey for Well-Being and implementing an evaluation plan.



Art & Wellness Project Application

Partner Loan Network Grouping

Project Information

Provide the name of the object grouping checklist(s) you are requesting

Exhibition Title (if applicable)

Proposed On View Date

Proposed Deinstall Date

Requested Delivery Date

Requested Pick-up Date

Will the artworks be deinstalled and off view for any period of time? Provide those dates, if applicable. How will the artworks be displayed in your museum?

- Focused Exhibition
- Multiple Galleries
- Grouping Displayed Together

Briefly describe the project. (10,000 character limit)

Briefly describe why you selected this grouping(s) for your museum. (10,000 character limit)

Briefly describe how the selected artworks are relevant to your local community. (10,000 character limit)

Which new audiences, outside of your general audience, do you hope to engage with these loans? If other, please provide details.

Programs/Projects

Activities

Activity Name

Briefly describe the activity

Activity Start Date

Activity End Date

In what way(s) is this activity new/innovative for your organization?

- Explores new content
- Uses a new format
- Uses accessibility affordances/ features for the first time
- Is a pilot program
- Involves new community partners
- Creates capacity
- Expansion of audiences

What is the estimated in person attendance?

Which of these categories comprise the key audience (s) for this activity only?

- Adults (18-65)
- Adults (65+)
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian or Asian American
- Black or African American
- Families
- Hispanic or Latinx
- LGBTQIA+
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Program/Project Evaluation

Outcomes, Goals & Metrics

Describe the outcomes, goals, and metrics for your project. Select an Outcome from the options below. Then, enter your associated goal and metric (how and what you will measure). Art Bridges' projects require at least one outcome, one goal, and one metric. Please submit a maximum of 3 outcomes.

Impact Outcome

- Learning
- Perception
- Access
- Reach
- Enjoyment/Wellbeing
- Diversity
- Awareness
- Other

Goal (4000 character limit)

Metric (5000 character limit)



Application Information

- **Application Primary Contact** is the person who completed the initial art and wellness convening application and will work with your team to fill out this form.
- **Project Information** should include the Partner Loan Network grouping that your museum plans to exhibit and an explanation of how the artworks are relevant to your community, particularly in relation to your art and wellness projects.
- **Activities** should highlight details of the art and wellness projects that will be supported through the Art & Wellness Award.
- **Outcomes, Goals, and Metrics** should focus on your art and wellness projects. Please include one or more of the four categories from the Art & Wellness Toolkit (emotional, social, cognitive, and physical) when outlining goals in this section.

*All programs supported through this initiative must be free of cost. Funding may be used for contract labor but not full-time or part-time staff salaries or overhead costs.



Questions?

Email us at:

amanda.driver@artbridgesfoundation.org

jess.smiley@artbridgesfoundation.org