Learning with Provincial Museums Associations: Exploring Community-based Museum Studies

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Abstract

This paper examines the key tenets guiding the approach and delivery of programs and services offered by the Provincial Museums Associations. Utilizing the Alberta Museums Association and the Museums Association of Saskatchewan as case studies, this paper presents a brief history of each organization, its learning programs and services, and explores current approaches to community-based learning. It examines the relationship of museum studies to professional museum practice, with particular attention paid to the role of the museum practitioner. The range of programming is designed to meet the divergent needs and priorities of museum practitioners throughout the provinces. This paper locates the participants as both peer educators and educational resources and examines contemporary challenges, such as human and financial resources, changing demographics, and technology. The ideas and practices presented in this paper will assist theorists and practitioners in developing a strong understanding of the contemporary context through which the complex field of museum studies in Canada continues to mature. Museums are dynamic places. They attract employees and volunteers from many different backgrounds. Many of the people who work in our Canadian institutions come to museums with pre-existing skill sets, varied job histories, and diverse educational backgrounds. With all they bring to this practice, some museum professionals are not looking for traditional academic training, but for a different type of engagement. This is why the relationship of museum studies to professional museum practice in Canada cannot be fully understood without an exploration of the Provincial Museums Association’s historical and contemporary role.

Introduction

The Provincial Museums Associations (PMAs) offer unique learning opportunities for individuals engaged in museum practice. The relationship of museum studies to professional museum practice in Canada cannot be fully understood without an exploration of the PMA’s historical and contemporary role.

Building on the paper by Blackbourn and Fiori (2010), "Making Connections: Linking Audience, Curriculum and Organizational Effectiveness in Provincial
Certificate Programs,” which provided a comprehensive historical and professional context from the 1970s - 1990s, this paper will focus on the contemporary context and utilize the Museums Association of Saskatchewan (MAS) and the Alberta Museums Association (AMA) as case studies. It will explore the relationship of our museum studies programs to professional practice, with particular attention paid to the role of the museum practitioner and the community in which we are situated. Grounded in regional perspectives and directly responsive to the identified needs and priorities of its audiences, the PMA’s diverse programs reflect current museum theory and praxis in a contemporary political context.

Museums are dynamic places. They attract employees and volunteers from many different backgrounds. Many of the people who work in our Canadian institutions come to museums with pre-existing skill sets, varied job histories, and diverse educational backgrounds. With all that they bring to the practice, some museum professionals are not looking for traditional academic training, but for a different type of engagement. Each Association works with its respective membership to provide contemporary, community-based programs to suit the needs of diverse audiences and multiple institutions.

**Provincial Museums Association Learning Programs: Key Tenets**

The Provincial Museums Associations design, develop and deliver learning programs that are integral to the national fabric of museum studies and practices. The Associations are linked together by five key tenets of their learning programs; however, each plays an integral and highly specialized role in its respective province.

The Provincial Museums Associations ensure that the learning programs are accessible. Programs are provided on location, regionally and in-province, which acknowledges the limited financial and human resources of museums, particularly small ones. Intensive learning sessions (usually one to three days) are often subsidized, or grants are provided to facilitate accessibility. This focus is important; for example, in Nova Scotia, 38.3% of respondents with paid staff and 37.8% of volunteers indicated “the highest level of museological training among those staff is courses and workshops offered by a professional association” (Arbic.L. Consulting and Genesis Consulting, 2010, p. 27).

Community-based involvement is the second tenet shared by the Provincial Museums Associations. Involving the association’s members and sometimes the broader community in the design, development and delivery of programs ensures professional development opportunities respond to the current needs and priorities of the sector. Association staff consult and collaborate with members through formal methods (e.g. member surveys, evaluation of courses, specific committees, and focus groups) and informal methods such as conversations and meetings not designed for consultation purposes. All of the learning opportunities offered involve host sites, and most often, the majority of the instructors are professionals practicing in the province.

This approach has led to specialized provincial museum studies programs including...
Special Interest Groups (Saskatchewan), Cultural Stewardship Program (Manitoba), Heritage Training Fund (Yukon) and a Fly in Conservator (Nunavut).

Museum standards are the third tenet shared by the Provincial Museums Associations. Standards are guidelines and benchmarks and were developed by the associations for local communities and are guided by community consultation, global trends, and best practices in the profession. Both the Alberta Museums Association and the Museums Association of Saskatchewan began developing provincial standards in the early 1980s and published in 1989 and 1988, respectively. Learning programs are offered to the membership in order to facilitate the understanding and integration of standards into daily practices. In addition, in 2001 and in consultation with the First Peoples and Saskatchewan Museums Committee, MAS developed the “Standards for the Care of First Nations and Métis Collections” (most recent revision in 2008).

The fourth tenet is the diversity of learning opportunities available and delivered. Learning opportunities include certificate programs, conferences and symposiums, advisory visits, publications and resources, working groups and specialized workshops. These are developed and delivered to a wide range of learners that include entry-level, mid- and advanced career professionals, volunteers, staff and board members.

Addressing contemporary issues facing museums is the fifth tenet shared by the Provincial Museums Associations. Learning programs engage learners, facilitate discussion and provide practical tools for dealing with current issues, such as sustainability, accessibility, relevance, repatriation, digital collections and collaborations and partnerships. This emphasis on contemporary issues within allows the Associations to respond to the current political and cultural climate, as well as to ensure museums are accessing the resources and training required to function and flourish in an era of increasing globalization.

The five tenets link the associations; however, as noted, each organization is responsive to its respective communities and provides regionally specific, diverse and different programs. These tenets are not without their challenges, and some of these will be explored further in this paper. In a political and intellectual age where museum studies are “now less reverential... less confined to a single domain of inquiry... more heterogeneous and dialogic, engendering work in a variety of fields from a variety of subject positions, becoming ‘a major place of convocation’ for cultural and political debate” (Carbonell et al, 2004, p. 1), the role of the Provincial Museums Association increasingly remains an integral one.

**Alberta Museums Association**

**Organization Background**

The Alberta Museums Association is a professional organization, committed to promoting museum standards. “The Alberta Museums Association (AMA) began in 1971 as a non-profit society by individuals, both museum staff and volunteers, who
wanted to promote the development of Alberta's Museums. Today, the Association is a member-driven organization that serves the needs of its membership. It consists of an elected, volunteer Board, an Executive Director and a secretariat, each providing assistance, advice, information and counselling as needed by the membership” (Alberta Museums Association [AMA], 2010, About Us).

For the purposes of this discussion, the term professional is “linked to the provision of a public service requiring specialized knowledge, training in skills and methods and their underlying principles, shared or enforced standards of achievement and conduct, and a commitment to continued study” (Hayward, 2005, p. 20).

The Alberta Museum Community

The Alberta museum community is diverse, with institutions ranging from museums with large budgets and numerous staff, to seasonal, volunteer-run sites. Based on operating structure and funding, museums in Alberta can be divided into four main categories:

1. **Provincially Operated**: There are nineteen museums and historic sites operated by the government of Alberta (Government of Alberta: Culture & Community Spirit, Museums and Historic Sites, n.d.).
2. **Municipally Operated**: A number of museums are operated by, or receive significant ongoing financial support from, a municipal government source.
3. **Non-profit Society**: The majority of Alberta’s museums are operated by a non-profit or a historical society.
4. **Other Models**: A small number of museums are non-profit organizations operated under a slightly different model, some of which are connected to post-secondary institutions or foundations.

Individual members include museum professionals, volunteers, students, consultants and those affiliated with related cultural institutions. As of April 2010, the AMA has 376 Individual Members and 236 Institutional Members, 139 of which are Recognized Museums and 52 are Candidates in the Recognized Museum Program.

Standards

In an effort to promote professionalism in the Alberta museum community, the AMA developed the “Standard Practices Handbook for Museums” (SPH). The Handbook outlines standards for museum practice and provides advice on how they can be implemented. The SPH is divided into four units: Museums and Society, Administration, Collections, and Programming.

As a reference for museum practice, Hayward (2005, p. 7) indicates the aims of the publication are:
• To increase awareness within the museum community of acceptable, recommended museum practice in each of the major areas of museum work.
• To provide definitions, guidelines, instructions and examples that could direct the reader in undertaking a specific area of museum work.
• To help museums ensure that the activities they undertake are well-planned, appropriately implemented and thoroughly evaluated.

After the second edition printing of the SPH in 2001, the AMA began to reorganize its programs and services to support the units of the publication. While there have been shifts in the structure of the Association, the SPH remains as the framework of most AMA programs and services.

**Approach to Learning**

The AMA offers a holistic approach to professional development and provides opportunities for museum practitioners throughout the province. The Association offers many programs and services for its membership that are administered under the following program areas:

- Resources and Grants
- Communications
- Outreach
- Learning

Both the Resources and Grants Programs offer access to financial support for attending learning opportunities, including the AMA’s Professional Development Grants, grants advisory and workshops. The Resources program area also provides information on funding sources outside of the AMA that museums can access.

Communications supports all program areas through promotion and dissemination of information regarding AMA programs and services, as well as learning opportunities not developed directly by the AMA, such as the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI), courses and seminars offered by specialized groups. These groups cover relevant topics, such as fundraising and museum management.

The Outreach Program oversees the Recognized Museum Program, which (through a peer review panel process) designates and promotes Recognized Museums across the province, oversees the AMA’s library and offers advisory services. Informal learning is offered through the Outreach program area, and workshops based on member needs and requests are offered throughout the year. An annual Pre-Conference workshop, site visits, and engagement with community groups (including the many regional networks established around the province) are also a part of Outreach at the AMA.

The Learning Program encompasses formal learning opportunities such as the AMA Annual Conference, symposia and lectures, the Certificate in Museum Studies...
Program (CMS), and workshops provided by other organizations, such as CCI and the Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN).

**Formal and Informal Learning**

While all AMA program areas are connected and have their own emphasis on their approach professional development, Learning and Outreach offer a two-part approach. The first covers formal learning opportunities through the Learning Program, and the second offers informal learning opportunities through the Outreach program. The two are tied together through the common use of a needs assessment and evaluation process. Each program solicits feedback from the membership with the chance to offer input on future sessions/learning opportunities provided. As a result, the two programs inform and support each other to meet diverse member needs. These two approaches to learning can be explained as follows:

1. AMA Formal Learning opportunities are scheduled or reoccurring events that are often tied to a curriculum or other formal structure.
2. AMA Informal Learning responds to specific needs presented by one or more institutions. These are generally of short duration (one day or less).

**Formal Learning Delivery**

**Certificate in Museum Studies (CMS) Program**

While workshops offered by the AMA have varied since 1971, it is the Certificate in Museum Studies that serves as the foundation of the AMA’s formal learning program. The program developed over years of offering museum studies courses, with the foundation for the current program based in the SPH and through the research and development work done in conjunction with The Learning Coalition (TLC).

From 1986-1988, the AMA worked with Grant MacEwan University in the development of a Generalist Curator / Administrators of Small Museums Course. In 1988, the AMA began a Citation Program and in 1992 this program was expanded. When The Learning Coalition formed in 1999, education coordinators from Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Ontario collaborated to share information and resources and to investigate joint initiatives in order to move toward the standardization of courses across provinces. In 2004, the AMA’s courses transitioned from the previous Citation Program to the Certificate in Museum Studies Program. Participants were allowed transition time and were able to complete a designation under either program. The CMS Program was implemented in January 2004 and was developed to provide entry-level museum workers with an understanding of current theories and standards in museum practice. The Program encourages the use of standards for museum development and is aligned with the AMA’s “Standard Practices Handbook for Museums,” the AMA’s Museum Excellence Program and TLC’s “Guidelines for Developing Entry-Level Museum Practice Programs.”

Organized around the four units of the SPH, the CMS Program is comprised of eight core courses offered on a for-credit basis, which upon the successful
completion of a related assignment results in achieving the Certificate in Museum Studies.

The CMS Program is framed around four broad areas of focus: museums and society, administration, collections, and programming, which are covered in eight courses:

- Museums and Society
- Museum Management
- Museum Governance
- Collections Management
- Research
- Preventive Conservation
- Public Programs
- Exhibits

**CMS program format**

The CMS courses are delivered in a two-day format throughout the province, hosted by museums and other heritage organizations. Guided study tours incorporated into the two-day courses offer opportunities for hands-on learning, networking and peer exchange. Participants are encouraged to bring specific issues forward for discussion and collaborative debate.

**CMS program participants**

While initially designed for entry-level participants, the individuals who access the AMA’s programs often include seasoned museum professionals, academics and those who are moving into museum positions with other pre-existing skill sets, varied job histories and diverse educational backgrounds.

Course instructors are experienced individuals in museum and heritage fields who bring a wealth of knowledge to the CMS Program. These individuals are, in most cases, practicing in Alberta.

**AMA Annual Conference**

The AMA Annual Conference is the premiere professional development opportunity offered in Alberta for museum professionals. It is developed for individuals at all levels of practice and offers the opportunity for members to come together on an annual basis for peer exchange and networking. The Conference program varies from year to year, and aims to address contemporary issues of museum practice. It accomplishes this through a themed format and includes presentations by one or more international experts, sessions by presenters from across Canada and Alberta, lectures, panel sessions, workshop sessions and educational tours.
Other Learning Opportunities

Symposia and lectures are offered on a semi-regular basis, and while they are open to all levels of AMA membership, they are usually more academic and topic focussed. As such, they are usually geared toward mid-career professionals.

The AMA established the Leadership Working Group in 2006, and when the group’s findings were released in 2007, it was apparent that there was a need for more advanced professional development designed for mid-career professionals. Furthermore, the AMA recently conducted mid-career focus groups to assess the needs of mid-career professionals and is working toward fulfilling these needs. In the coming year, the AMA will be working in collaboration with the Getty Leadership Institute at Claremont Graduate University (GLI at CGU) and the University of Alberta Museums to offer NextGen: Canada, a program designed to develop leadership abilities for Canadian museum professionals.

The Museums Association of Saskatchewan

The Museums Association of Saskatchewan (MAS) is a non-profit, collective organization, founded in 1968 and based in Regina. Its current mandate is “to serve museums in Saskatchewan and work for their advancement” (Museums Association of Saskatchewan, 2010, About Us). An integral part of the organization’s purpose is to provide education and professional development learning opportunities to museum practitioners throughout the province.

The first training seminar was held in 1969, and in 1980, the first Training Coordinator was hired. In 1985, MAS began offering a Certificate in Community Museum Studies, established Networks (which link rural, volunteer-run museums together) and formed Special Interest Groups (designed for mid-to-advanced career museum practitioners involved in a particular area of practice, interest, or a specific museological field). These three programs remain an integral part of MAS’ learning programs. In 1992, the Association established the First Peoples and Saskatchewan Museums Committee - a committee which brings together First Nations, Métis, Inuit and non-Aboriginal cultural groups to discuss issues, direct training needs and priorities. In 2009, MAS launched the Museums and Sustainability Initiative. This Initiative focuses on designing and delivering programs and services that incorporate the four pillars cultural, social, economic and environmental sustainability. Programs include a Greening the Museum Google Group, The Art of Grant-Writing workshop and future plans for a publication around cultural vitality and museums. Museum practitioners utilize MAS’ website as an informal learning tool and in response, MAS continually searches out and posts reports, links, and on-line resources on the topics such as sustainability. In Saskatchewan, there are no formal post-secondary programs in museums studies and MAS provides continuing education for both staff and volunteers (Museums Association of Saskatchewan, 2005, 5). The Association is uniquely poised to address the needs of diverse audiences because of its established reputation, breadth and scope of programs and services, and its embedded consultation and evaluation processes.
The Saskatchewan Museum Community

As of April 2010, MAS’ member base included over 200 member museums and a total membership of over 400 (including individuals and associates). The membership includes institutions with operating budgets from $5000 to $1.5 million dollars and encompasses many types of museums (e.g., historical museums, art galleries, a zoo, a science centre) with different forms of governance and varying levels of community and internal support.

Practitioners come from multiple museums and include personnel working in arts, culture and heritage organizations, government, educational institutions, as well as independent museum professionals. This includes volunteers, paid staff, board members, summer staff, individuals who are currently involved with museums and those interested in being involved in the arts, culture and heritage sector. From doing ‘everything’ to ‘just fixing the building,’ these learners are part of a community that is quite diverse. In the past, MAS identified two main audiences for its museum studies and developed programs for each: 1) vocational - career, often paid, professional staff, mid-to-advanced museum studies and 2) avocational - volunteers, introductory and entry-level museum studies. However, demographics are changing and the Association continues to adjust its programs and services in order to be responsive.

Building Community Capacity through Learning

The Association approaches the design, development, and delivery of museum studies through a framework of building community capacity. Authors Chaskin, Brown, Venkatesh and Vidal (2001) define community capacity as: “the interaction of human capital, organizational resources, and social capital existing within a given community that can be leveraged to solve collective problems and improve or maintain the well-being of that community. It may operate through information social processes and / or organized efforts by individuals, organizations, and social networks that exist among them and between them and the larger systems of which the community is a part” (p.7).

To this end, MAS’ education and professional development programs and services are an integral part of our organized efforts aimed at building capacity and strengthening commitment to a healthy and vibrant museum community. The Association focuses primarily on two particular community capacity building strategies outlined in Chaskin et al (2001): leadership and organizational development. These strategies will be further delineated through the explanation of two specific programs in the following section.

The Association draws on contemporary and key academic research and practices, as well as integrating current philosophy and critique into existing programs and services. Programs are designed to challenge the status quo and assist museums in adapting to changes in their environment and in museum studies and practices. In addition, MAS emphasizes the role of the community and supports the role of museum practitioner as both a peer educator and educational resource. Utilizing in-province expertise in many of our programs, the Association draws on
Building Community Capacity through Museum Studies

The Museums Association of Saskatchewan offers a range of programs and services to build and sustain community capacity through learning, leadership and organizational development. This paper will present a detailed examination of two programs: the Network Knowledge Exchange and the Special Interest Groups.

Network Knowledge Exchange

The Network Knowledge Exchange (NKE) program began in 2006 and is linked to the established museum Networks. Networks are regionally-defined groupings of MAS member museums. Each network is unique with its own individual identity and ways of working. As well, each network meets regularly to share information and ideas, discuss issues and concerns, as well as working together on joint projects. Each Network appoints a volunteer Network Representative to coordinate its activities and to liaise with MAS staff and board. The eleven Networks began in 1985 and encompass a total of 133 museums (60% of the MAS membership) and engage over 150 museum practitioners, primarily senior, rural and volunteers throughout the province. The role of Representative is an opportunity for members to enhance leadership skills and build increased social networks with other museum practitioners in the specific region and throughout the province.

The Network Knowledge Exchange was developed from an expressed need of the members of the Networks to participate in practical, on-site, vocational training focusing on technology, challenging and contemporary museum concepts and tools that these museum practitioners can integrate easily into their own museum practices. The goal is to provide entry-level training that is directly responsive to the collective challenges of the community. The program is community-based; each year, the topic is decided by the community members (specifically the Reps of each Network) and developed by MAS. The two-hour session is delivered once a year to each network. In a province of great distance and variant weather, accessible, on-site opportunities are a necessity.

Network Representatives determined the 2009-10 sessions would focus on knowledge and skills necessary for advocacy. In a climate where the arts, culture and heritage sector is underfunded, requires greater visibility, and must garner consistent community support, advocacy is essential. The session focussed on MAS’ newly created resource, The Advocacy Guide, developed in collaboration with Dr. Gloria DeSantis, Department of Justice Studies at the University of Regina. In an interactive, group-oriented session, participants were provided with the Guide and a case study...
and worked to develop a basic advocacy strategy. Many of the practitioners in attendance were aware of advocacy, but lacked formal training; this session provided participants with an opportunity to learn new skills, access new resources and relate advocacy to local, rural issues facing museums. Participant evaluations indicate the tools presented in the workshop will be taken back to museums and utilized in future planning. Social capital, human capital and organizational resources combine to create a provincial network of museums with increased capacity to develop and enact advocacy plans.

**Special Interest Groups**

The Special Interest Groups program, which began in 1985, encompasses approximately 137 museums and engages over 150 museum practitioners. In contrast to the Network Knowledge Exchange, the primary, but not exclusive, audience for these groups are paid museum professionals, who are mid-to-advanced career and work in mid-to-large sized museums.

A Special Interest Group (SIG) is a group of people involved in a particular area of practice, interest, or a specific museological field. There are currently seven SIGs: Collections Management, Conservation, Exhibits, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, Managers / Directors, Programmers and Saskatchewan Family of National Historic Sites. Each Special Interest Group defines its own statement of purpose which includes goals and priorities. Each group chooses a Representative who provides leadership and serves as a liaison between all group members and MAS staff. Representatives and assigned MAS staff meet twice per year to discuss issues common to all Groups and provide direction for programs and services. Opportunities have included discussion groups and specialized workshops, such as MAS’ Arts, Culture, and Heritage Research Symposium (2009), The 8 Parameters of Visitor Experience (2009) and a Practical Guide to Adhesives for Conservators (2008).

The broad goal of the program is to provide a forum through which collective problems can be solved and resources can be shared, thus increasing community capacity through organizational development. The improvement or maintenance of the well-being of each Special Interest Group is emphasized; however, understanding and responding to common goals and priorities of all Groups are also key to building a strong and healthy museum community. In a province where museum practitioners often work in isolation, participation in these groups provides a unique opportunity for connection and exchange of information. Face-to-face meetings have traditionally been the mode of interaction; however, groups are beginning to explore online networking tools such as Google Groups to facilitate collegial and professional exchange.

In 2010, in response to a request by the Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC), members of the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Special Interest group met with Jameson Brant, CMC’s Aboriginal Training Program in Museum Studies Coordinator, to discuss issues and training needs for Aboriginal individuals in museums. The session explored contemporary issues such as accessible training, repatriation,
protocols, cultural awareness and sensitivity, collections management and conservation. It was a unique opportunity and the feedback from participants indicated a need to continue dialogue and further support Aboriginal individuals with specialized museum studies training.

A Healthy and Vibrant Community

These two programs are a clear example of formalized processes through which the Association works with the provincial community to design, develop and deliver professional development and education programs and services. Program evaluation processes indicate participants are engaged in learning and consistently acquire new skills and knowledge to share with colleagues within their own institutions. Museums practitioners consistently provide feedback for new programs, improving content and delivery methods and increasing program relevancy. The Association strives to be responsive to contemporary needs and priorities and adjust programs and services as necessary.

The Association aims to foster a healthy and vibrant museum community by focusing on building community capacity through social networks, leadership and organizational development. Developing and delivering community-based museum studies, museum practitioner’s professional practices are enhanced, the museum community’s sustainability is improved and standards are more fully integrated into museums. These endeavours are not without their challenges - the next section will explore this further.

Challenges

In offering museum studies to audiences that are varied, divergent and spread throughout the province, our Associations face a range of challenges.

Our Associations are faced with a changing demographic in the museum community. For example, programs such as the certificate program may have been traditionally designed for one audience (volunteers) but are now seeing an influx of another (academically-trained, paid staff). Responding to changing audience and learner expectations in a multicultural environment is essential, however, one of the challenges is to ensure programs not only meet the needs of academically-trained audience but remain accessible to the needs of entry-level practitioners who arrive at museums without academic training and/or museum experience. In addition, there remains an ongoing need to develop diverse mid-career and more advanced level opportunities. Balancing the diverse needs and priorities of divergent audience, while providing consistently excellent programs and services to all, remains both a priority and a challenge for the Associations.

Utilizing new technologies in our programs and services is an exciting opportunity for our Associations. Museum practitioners are increasingly requesting and expecting courses and resources to be available on-line; however, this movement towards the on-line environment can be costly financially and in terms of human resources. While both MAS and AMA have offered education in an online format in
conjunction with other institutions, they do not currently offer programs online. Issues such as privacy, terms of use, copyright, variance in accessibility, physical infrastructure (e.g., rural areas may be without dial-up; museums may not have computers), and computer literacy levels and internal organizational resources must be examined and addressed.

This leads us to another challenge: human and financial resources. The Associations provide a vast array of programs and services; however, with a staff, employed full or part-time, of seven (AMA) and five (MAS) it remains a challenge to respond to all requests and priorities given the diversity of our respective memberships. MAS relies primarily on grants for financial security and aims to increase its fund development strategies and own financial sustainability. The AMA relies on the Government of Alberta for over 85% of its annual funding and this fiscal year is faced with a 13.75% reduction in the government allocation. Our organizations are constantly striving to become more efficient and effective in how we manage all areas of our operations, including learning and professional development. In addition, our organizations must be cognizant of the constraints, human and financial, that museum practitioners and museums face throughout our respective provinces.

The Associations have built effective and responsive evaluation and tracking processes into all programs and services; however, there are specific challenges associated with evaluation and tracking. MAS faces a particular challenge in terms of data collection: from 1991 to 2007, the Association facilitated the Museum Grant Program (MGP) and was able to track success through data collection (for example, those who took active part in professional development consistently scored higher on grant application). However, this program is no longer administered by MAS and the organization may need to invest in a systematic evaluation and tracking tool that will allow the organization to more clearly understand its impact, member information and areas for improvement. For the AMA, all programs have some kind of evaluation, including an evaluation as part of the Institutional and Individual Professional Development Grants Programs. In addition, AMA does periodic focus groups that inform the programs we provide. Our challenge is in responding to these requests from a very diverse audience.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the five key tenets guiding the approach and delivery of programs and services offered by the Provincial Museums Associations. Utilizing the Alberta Museums Association and the Museums Association of Saskatchewan as case studies, we have shared a brief history, approach, and explanation of specific programs of each organization. We have examined the relationship of museum studies to professional museum practice, with particular attention paid to the role of the museum practitioner.

The Provincial Museums Associations are unique and integral to the historical and social context of museum studies in Canada. In today’s climate, the PMAs provide programs that focus on accessibility, community-based initiatives
involved in a particular area of practice, interest, or a specific museological field and promotion of high standards and professional practices. Each organization supports diverse learning needs of our divergent museum community and acknowledges the museum practitioner as an expert, leader and resource. Our programs emphasize contemporary museum studies and practices, and focus on the relevance and responsiveness to current issues and challenges. We aim to build capacity of our provincial museum community by focusing on strategies to develop individual and institutional leaders.

Our programs and approaches are not without challenges; however, creating new collaborations with academics, practitioners and other stakeholders, while being flexible enough to adjust to contemporary needs and priorities, it remains a challenge to build capacity in a quickly changing social and political climate, which we are committed to solving. We need to “move beyond the inertia of the status quo, weighed down as it is with passivity and habit” (Janes, 2009, 137) and move forward into an inclusive future.

References


