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FROM THE DIRECTOR

Nearly 27 years ago, Saint Louis Art Museum donors Adelaide and Daniel Schlafly had the foresight to establish, and later partially endow, the Romare Bearden Graduate Museum Fellowship. The Schlaflys wanted to ensure that early-career professionals who were underrepresented in the art museum field had an opportunity to gain work experience that would position them to pursue professional positions in arts museums nationally. In the years since, the Saint Louis Art Museum has hosted 27 Bearden Fellows, most of whom have gone on to work in the arts, museums, and academia.

Museum leadership is gratified by the impact the Bearden Fellowship has had on the field, and we are eager to share our experiences through this case study. This document, which was developed with support from the Diversifying Art Museum Leadership Initiative (DAMLI), funded by the Ford Foundation and Walton Family Foundation, is intended to provide guidance to museums and other organizations that seek to create new, or to refine existing, fellowships that lead to greater diversity in the field. We particularly hope that other institutions will find relevant and useful considerations that they can apply to their own efforts.

The Saint Louis Art Museum is grateful to the Ford Foundation and Walton Family Foundation for creating DAMLI and selecting our museum to be among a group of grantees that spans decades. Named to honor African American artist Romare Bearden (1911–1988), the Fellowship prepares outstanding museum professionals from historically underrepresented groups (particularly people of color) to work in and lead the field. The Fellowship aims to develop Fellows’ skills, networks, and expertise to advance them into an arts or cultural career of their choice.

With funding from the Ford Foundation and Walton Family Foundation’s Diversifying Art Museum Leadership Initiative (DAMLI), SLAM has developed this case study with RK&A for organizations considering starting a fellowship for museum professionals from historically underrepresented and diverse backgrounds, or for institutions looking to refine an existing program. The study aims to contribute to ongoing conversations about, and efforts toward, creating a more inclusive museum field.

Before 2015, there were few, if any, intentional and systematic examinations of diversity, equity, access, and inclusion (DEAI) in the museum field.1 A lack of racial and ethnic diversity among art museum staff, and in leadership positions specifically, was documented in an important study conducted by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in 2015 (Schonfeld and Westermann 2015). A second iteration of the Mellon study, released in 2019, again underscored imbalance in staff and leadership positions for women and people of color, yet it also signaled a slow shift toward increasing racial and ethnic diversity among staff (Schonfeld and Westermann 2015; Westermann, Schonfeld, and Sweeny 2019). In response to these conditions and findings, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation (starting in 2013) and the Ford Foundation and Walton Family Foundation (starting in 2017) have invested significant resources to support museum-led projects that study, augment, or pilot DEAI initiatives.

Achieving the goals of diversity, equity, access, and inclusion requires a complex and systemic approach. At an organizational level, museums can review and revise internal systems and processes through a DEAI lens—for example, they can refine hiring practices; diversify their boards; and create opportunities for staff to discuss, reflect on, and take action to address institutional DEAI issues. Museums might also conduct audience research to better understand who their institutions serve (and who they do not), how their communities perceive their institutions, and whether they might partner with organizations to connect in new ways with their communities. Museums can also create more paid work opportunities for emerging professionals to provide equitable access to museum careers and create a more diverse workplace. While there are many more ways museums can work toward achieving greater diversity, equity, access, and inclusion, this case study examines a paid fellowship program at the Saint Louis Art Museum.

Brent R. Benjamin
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INTRODUCTION

The Romare Bearden Graduate Museum Fellowship at the Saint Louis Art Museum (SLAM) began in 1991, and is among the earliest focused efforts in the art museum field to increase diversity, equity, access, and inclusion. Redefined as a graduate program in 1992, the Fellowship is one of few diversity-focused fellowships with a history that spans decades. Named to honor African American artist Romare Bearden (1911–1988), the Fellowship prepares outstanding museum professionals from historically underrepresented groups (particularly people of color) to work in the field. The Fellowship aims to develop Fellows’ skills, networks, and expertise to advance them into an arts or cultural career of their choice.

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The results of the two foundations’ grant programs are promising, yet it remains clear, based on the 2019 Mellon study, that much can still be done to increase diversity among museum leaders.

1. Developing a shared vocabulary is important when discussing diversity, equity, access, and inclusion. See Appendix A for the definitions used in this report.
The Romare Bearden Graduate Museum Fellowship

The Bearden Fellowship was established by SLAM to “create a pool of professionals of color to compete for art museum positions nationally” and contribute to the diversification of the field (Franklin 2018, 197). In 1996, donors Adelaide and Daniel Schaffy converted an already established fund to a permanent endowment to provide ongoing support for the Bearden Fellowship. The annual harvest from this endowment is supplemented by resources from the operating budget to ensure full support of the cost of the Fellowship. The Bearden Fellowship is a one-year program for individuals from historically underrepresented backgrounds. The Fellowship provides a comprehensive salary and benefits package, comparable to that of an entry-level museum position in the St. Louis region, as well as financial support for professional development and travel. Because SLAM recruits from a national pool of applicants, the Fellowship also provides financial support for relocation to St. Louis.

Bearden Fellows work closely with the director of audience development, in addition to departments across the museum—including education, curatorial, public programming, interpretation, audience development, and marketing—to gain hands-on experience in a wide range of roles. Projects are tailored to the Fellow’s personal interests, as well as to areas identified for personal growth and skill development. The Bearden Fellowship aims to help Fellows build a professional network through several program components: mentorship from and project work with SLAM staff across multiple departments, a residency at the Romare Bearden Foundation in New York City, a two-week overlap with both the outgoing and incoming Fellow, and structured outreach to Fellowship alumni. This annual outreach serves to maintain connections among Fellows, and to strengthen their connections to the program.

By the spring of 2020, the Bearden Fellowship had hosted 27 Fellows. Nearly one-quarter pursued a PhD after completing the Fellowship, and almost 90 percent continued to work in the arts, museums, or academia, including in positions at SLAM, the Art Institute of Chicago, the National Gallery of Art, the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, and many other arts and cultural institutions.

The Theory of Change exercise reiterated that the Bearden Fellowship is a long-standing effort with two desired outcomes: preparation of emerging professionals from historically underrepresented backgrounds for careers in museums, and provision of well-trained and capable candidates who are ready to advance in the field. The Retrospective Longitudinal Study findings indicate that the strengths of the Bearden Fellowship are in providing Fellows with exposure to a wide range of museum departments and in fostering strong mentoring relationships between individual Fellows and staff. A benefit to the museum is that Fellows have broadened the perspectives of staff members. Mutual benefits have grown over time, as staff have become more personally invested in the Fellows, increasingly working one-on-one. Fellows and staff believe that lengthening the term of the Fellowship could lead to enhanced success in Fellows’ matriculation, exploration, project completion, and networking.

The study identified other opportunities to strengthen the Fellowship and the Museum, such as providing training for SLAM staff to more effectively mentor new colleagues from underrepresented backgrounds. Finally, the study concluded that enhancing SLAM’s DEAI efforts would bolster the institutional culture and, ultimately, benefit Fellows and staff.

Key Findings from 2019 Fellowship Evaluation

SLAM’s three-year DAMLI grant funded an evaluation of the Bearden Fellowship and the creation of this case study. RK&K, a museum research and evaluation firm, conducted the evaluation, which consisted of three components: development of a Theory of Change; a Retrospective Longitudinal Study of the Fellowship experience; and an Environmental Scan of diversity-focused fellowships in the United States.

- **1. Theory of Change (TOC)**
  - **GOAL:** Define the desired outcomes of the Bearden Fellowship and articulate the theory of what it takes to achieve those outcomes.

- **2. Retrospective Longitudinal Study**
  - **GOAL:** Test the TOC by assessing the Fellowship experience from three perspectives: Bearden Fellows, SLAM staff, and external museum professionals.

- **3. Environmental Scan**
  - **GOAL:** Understand the broader landscape of diversity-focused museum fellowships in the U.S.

**METHOD:**
- **Interpretation of ideas and information from SLAM staff workshop**
- **In-depth interviews and online survey**
- **Research and review of existing fellowships, interview select program staff**

The Environmental Scan highlighted unique characteristics of the Bearden Fellowship: it is long-established, consistently funded, exposes Fellows to the whole museum, and involves graduate-level work.

Considerations for the establishment of, or improvement of, diversity-focused fellowships were raised or reinforced. Among them: 1. recruiting candidates requires an intentional approach; 2. applicant pools can grow when selection criteria are revised; 3. DEAI and mentorship training for staff can yield a more supportive environment for fellows and enhance their development; and 4. active networking within and outside the host organization supports fellows in developing an enduring personal and professional support system.

**Creating the Case Study**

This case study expands on the above key findings from the 2019 Bearden Fellowship evaluation. In planning the case study, RK&K met with a group of SLAM staff to determine which considerations would be most important for institutions planning to start a new fellowship, or refine an existing one.

See Appendix A for definitions of diversity, equity, access, and inclusion, as it is important to have a shared understanding of these key terms. Appendix B is a list of sources cited in this document.

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2. The Romare Bearden Foundation is not affiliated with the Romare Bearden Fellowship at SLAM except in name and through the annual residency. The residency at the Romare Bearden Foundation provides the Fellow an opportunity to develop experience working at an arts organization of a different size with a different mission.

3. A Theory of Change is a tool for planning, implementing, and evaluating a program or project. In essence, a Theory of Change identifies and makes explicit the ultimate goal and impact of a project, how project elements support the project’s short- and long-term goals, conditions necessary for a project to thrive, and underlying assumptions about how change happens (Norrton 1991).
CONSIDERATIONS

The following section presents seven considerations for starting and sustaining a fellowship program for museum professionals from historically underrepresented backgrounds. These considerations emerged from SLAM’s Bearden Fellowship evaluation process and from interviews with Fellows and SLAM staff. This case study presents “considerations,” rather than “recommendations,” as all museums continue to develop their DEAI priorities. As one of few museums with a long-established diversity-focused fellowship, SLAM aims to share what it has learned with other museums interested in developing diversity-focused fellowship programs.

1. DEFINE FELLOWSHIP GOALS AND DESIGN FELLOWSHIP STRUCTURE TO ACHIEVE THOSE GOALS

Defining Fellowship Goals

Clearly stating the institutional goals and intended outcomes for fellows creates important guideposts for planning and decision-making. For example, the Bearden Fellowship arose from a joint desire of SLAM and the Schlaffys to support “truly transformative inclusion” in the museum field by cultivating “future museum professionals from historically underrepresented groups or backgrounds by advancing the knowledge, skills, and networking capabilities that make careers in museums possible” (Franklin 2018, 194). This goal has guided the Museum’s work over nearly three decades as it developed and adapted its program over time. Those institutions who hope to start a fellowship for people from historically underrepresented backgrounds in museums should think deeply about what they hope to achieve with the fellowship, both for fellows and for the museum. Some questions for reflection might include:

- Who is the museum seeking to influence or benefit through the fellowship?
- What are the intended outcomes (short-term and long-term) for these beneficiaries?
- How will the fellowship’s structure and activities contribute to the intended outcomes?

Three foundational factors in structuring a fellowship are to determine: 1. the areas of focus for the fellows’ professional experience; 2. fellowship length; and 3. number of fellows. Each factor should be determined with the ultimate goals of the fellowship in mind. Fellowship length and number of fellows are discussed together because decisions about one often affect the other.

Area of Focus (Broad Versus Specialized)

Underrepresentation of diverse staff exists in many areas of art museums, not only in curatorial departments (Schonfeld and Westermann 2015). SLAM’s environmental scan found that about one-half of fellowship programs for individuals from historically underrepresented backgrounds in museums have a specific curatorial focus, and one-half focus more broadly on exposure to many museum departments. Providing a breadth of experience for fellows prepares them for many types of museum careers, and this breadth can be complemented by opportunities to dive deeper into areas of particular interest. The Bearden Fellowship offers its participants projects in many departments, including curatorial, public programming, interpretation, audience development, marketing, and fundraising (Franklin 2018, 194). The retrospective longitudinal study of Fellows found that exposure to careers across the museum has helped Bearden Fellows improve their understanding of their own professional goals. Moreover, the broad breadth of focus helps them feel more prepared for future employment because they better understand the range of possible museum careers. By experiencing work in many museum areas, Fellows explore and cultivate their interests, sometimes following unexpected pathways to a different area of focus. Whether a fellowship takes a broad approach or focuses on a specific aspect of museum work (such as curatorial activity) may depend on the museum’s goals for the fellowship, the fellows’ interests, and staff capacity to devote time to supporting fellows in one or more areas. SLAM decided that the Bearden Fellowship would provide broad exposure to museum careers for professionals with a graduate degree, while other programs, such as the Smithsonian Latino Museum Studies Program (see quotation on page 8), foster pathways to museum careers that do not require a graduate degree, or those that focus on a specific career path.
“[It is important] to specifically reach undergraduate Latinas and Latinos who are interested in noncuratorial museum professions. The truth is that our community is woefully underrepresented within the ranks of conservators, exhibition designers, collection managers, museum educators, exhibition preparators, and in digital culture, technology-proficient creatives who are shaping and will continue to shape the museum field. . . . These [non-curatorial] professions do not require a Ph.D., thus making these career paths more inviting and accessible to a greater number of our students.”

– Eduardo Díaz, Director of the Smithsonian Institution Latino Center (Díaz 2019, 5)

Length of Fellowship and Number of Fellows

The Bearden Fellowship is a one-year program that hosts one Fellow at a time, with several weeks of overlap between the outgoing and incoming Fellows. The overlap is intended to create a smooth transition by allowing the outgoing Fellow to introduce continuing projects to the incoming Fellow, and by helping the Fellows build a peer network. While Bearden Fellows interviewed in the retrospective longitudinal study described positive experiences from the Fellowship in its current one-year term, two-thirds of Fellows and staff interviewed suggested that lengthening the duration of the Fellowship could provide additional benefits. Fellows and staff speculated that lengthening the Fellowship would give Fellows more time to acclimate to museum procedures, more deeply explore their interests, see more projects to completion, and expand their professional networks. In particular, lengthening the Fellowship could provide more time for Fellows to build relationships with leaders in their chosen area of interest, a process that is challenging during the one-year term because Fellows are orienting themselves to a new work environment and learning to juggle their many project responsibilities.

Fellowships can vary in length from as short as a few weeks to several years; however, most last one or two years. Deciding on the term of a fellowship involves weighing several factors, such as the funding available each year and the number of fellows the program plans to support. For example, a program with limited funding may only support one fellow every other year, allowing funds to accumulate during the alternating year.

A program with adequate funding to support one fellow per year could consider supporting a single fellow for a two-year term (providing more experience for a single individual), or two fellows for one year each (serving more individuals over time). Programs with funding to support more than one fellow will need to weigh the benefits and drawbacks of hosting fellows in a cohort (with all starting and ending the fellowship together) versus staggering fellows’ start times (e.g., creating an overlapping period for first- and second-year fellows). Museums must consider their resources and goals to determine what they will offer to create the best experience for fellow(s).

“[If the Fellowship was longer and had a longer overlap period between incoming and outgoing Fellows,] you could really have a cohort instead of just the people you meet at different events and previous Fellows you talk to on the phone. It would be a really wonderful support system to have someone in the building who has been doing what you are doing. That would be a wonderful benefit.”

– Bearden Fellowship alumna
2. ALIGN FELLOWSHIP SUPERVISION TO FELLOWSHIP GOALS

Supervising Department

The supervisory structure for a fellowship program has enormous influence on the direction and success of the Fellowship. For example, SLAM found that although its Fellowship intended to provide broad exposure to museum work, in the early years of the program, Fellows worked on education projects most often, because the Fellowship was supervised by that department. Fellowship projects gradually became more broadly dispersed among departments by the mid-2000s, after the program structure and priorities were reevaluated and realigned by a new Bearden Fellowship manager.

When deciding which supervisor to oversee the fellowship, museums will want to consider staff capacity. Moreover, whether the fellowship aims to provide a specialized focus or exposure to a range of museum duties, the supervisor will need to coordinate with staff outside their area as they design tasks and projects for the fellow, as most museum work involves cross-departmental collaboration. It is also advantageous to build enthusiasm for the fellowship with museum leadership (see quotation next page). Institutional buy-in for the fellowship (beyond the supervisory structure managing the fellowship) can enhance the fellow's experience in many ways, including expanding opportunities for projects and building a broad base of enthusiastic colleagues and mentors.

Supervisors and Mentors

Fellowships require at least one primary supervisor to oversee all parts of the program and to make sure the fellowship is running smoothly. At SLAM, in addition to managing logistical aspects of the Fellowship, the Fellowship supervisor (a person of color) becomes an important mentor for each Fellow, a role that requires significant time investment. It is important to realistically consider how much time the supervisor will devote to overseeing the fellowship, especially when the supervisor’s job includes other responsibilities beyond fellowship management. The supervisor will need to devote time to recruitment, selection, onboarding, mentoring, project management, performance evaluation, and completion of fellowship events, programs, and other objectives (e.g., peer and professional network development).

Mentorship is a key aspect of any fellowship experience. In a highly competitive and network-driven field, mentor relationships offer career advice, professional growth, and career opportunities. Mentorship takes on additional import for professionals from historically underrepresented backgrounds, and can be particularly powerful when the mentor is also someone from an underrepresented background who can relate to the fellow. The mentor relationship can foster awareness of and insight into the cultural knowledge required to navigate museums’ institutional and interpersonal dynamics.

Most art museum fellowships incorporate mentoring. SLAM’s environmental scan found that the mentor relationship and expectations are not always explicit or clearly defined. Walton Family Foundation representatives found that there are “challenges to mentoring when staff themselves are not representative of a participant’s background” (Dean, Holley, and Jacobs 2018). SLAM is conscious of these challenges and recognizes there is more work to be done. Bearden Fellows would benefit from staff receiving clear guidance on the goals of the mentor relationship and how best to support the fellow through the fellowship, particularly in the context of helping the fellow succeed at the museum as someone from an underrepresented background.

The American Alliance of Museums (AAM) offers several recommendations for preparing museum staff as colleagues and mentors, including ongoing unconscious bias training, cultural competency training, and self-awareness work (American Alliance of Museums 2018). Training for all staff, not just for the mentors, is important for cultivating museum-wide support of DEAI efforts and increasing awareness of factors such as unconscious bias that can negatively affect fellows’ (and everyone’s) experience in the workplace.

“...The Bearden Fellow selected for the 2004 year was a college art administration major. ... [She] was interested in a project in the museum director’s office, which would prove pivotal for the future of the Bearden Fellowship. Though always supportive of the Bearden Fellowship, museum director experienced firsthand the exceptional talent of [the fellow] and as a result became further committed to the Bearden Fellowship program. The visibility of the Bearden Fellowship catapulted, while varied assignments and experiences became institutional priorities for the Fellows.”

– Renée Franklin (Franklin 2018, 201)
We heard from past Fellows and interns that mentoring was an area of inconsistency, and our interns have different life experiences than our staff, so we needed to incorporate mentorship training with an equity and inclusion lens.

― Art Institute of Chicago (RK&A 2019a)

3. COMMIT FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Fellowship Pay and Benefits

Paid opportunities to gain experience in the museum field are essential to building a pipeline of museum professionals from underrepresented backgrounds, yet until recently, such positions were rare. Bearden Fellow alumni, SLAM staff, and museum professionals interviewed as part of SLAM’s retrospective longitudinal study emphasized the important effect that paid opportunities, like the Bearden Fellowship, have on expanding access to the museum field. The Bearden Fellowship provides a salary and benefits package comparable to that of an entry-level museum position in the St. Louis region, and offers a relocation stipend to help Fellows moving from out of the area. Relocation stipends are particularly important for fellowships that recruit from a national pool of applicants.

Other Resources

In addition to adequate funding for fellows’ pay and benefits, other potential expenses include overhead for office supplies, recruitment expenses, and funds to support additional professional development opportunities. A dedicated workspace and appropriate equipment are necessary resources. Consider whom the fellow will work most closely when deciding where the fellow’s workspace will be located. Placing the fellow near colleagues they will work with frequently not only builds in efficiency, but also it helps the fellow to become part of the team. Additional expenses may include advertising for the fellowship, printing business cards for the fellow, and travel and registration fees for conferences or professional development opportunities. Museums should estimate the resources needed for the fellowship to assess whether the institution can financially sustain a successful program.

Funding Over Time

Consistent funding enables long-term program planning, evaluation, and growth. SLAM’s environmental scan of peer institutions’ fellowships found that many fellowships for individuals from underrepresented backgrounds in museums are still relatively new (i.e., established less than five years ago) and are funded by time-limited grant programs. Though a helpful start, museums with time-limited funding must anticipate how to sustain fellowship funding before the term of the grant ends. For example, the Bearden Fellowship is funded in large part through a sustained commitment from the operating budget, supplemented by modest support from a restricted endowment. A desired outcome of the program evaluation and case study is to secure increased endowment funds for the fellowship to ensure its perpetuation.

“When unpaid labor becomes a hallmark of an employment pipeline, access to that pipeline is limited to those who can afford it.”

― Nicole Ivy (Ivy 2016, 38)
4. SEEK A WIDE RANGE OF APPLICANTS AND DEFINE QUALIFICATIONS BROADLY

Recruiting Channels

Reaching potential applicants to a museum fellowship for professionals from underrepresented backgrounds requires a thoughtful and intentional approach. At the Saint Louis Art Museum, art history is the most common area of academic study among Bearden Fellows, yet it has also welcomed Fellows whose areas of concentration include education, studio art, business management, museum studies, and ethnic studies (Franklin 2018, 203). SLAM’s retrospective longitudinal study revealed that most Fellows surveyed had heard about the Bearden Fellowship through an online search of their own, or from an academic advisor, suggesting that online promotion and active dissemination to higher education representatives are critical for fellowships that recruit undergraduate or graduate-level applicants. SLAM also recognizes the importance of helping recruitment contacts at universities, community organizations, professional associations, etc. understand that museum professionals are not only curators. They also work in development, leadership, conservation, and many other departments, and these skills intersect with numerous college majors (Franklin 2018, 203).

Making sure that recruitment contacts themselves are aware of the varied careers available in museums can help deliver the fellowship announcement to a larger pool of potential applicants.

SLAM’s environmental scan confirmed that outreach to universities is key (with focused attention on faculty and administrators in liberal arts departments, campus art galleries or museums, diversity-focused student organizations, and career fairs). Some fellowship program representatives interviewed for SLAM’s environmental scan also noted success forming relationships with community organizations that serve people from historically underrepresented backgrounds in museums or partnering with local pathway programs.1 Fellowships aiming to attract national applicants must consider propagating the fellowship announcement beyond general museum associations (e.g., the American Alliance of Museums or the Association of Art Museum Directors), to include outreach to national organizations that specifically serve people from historically underrepresented backgrounds, such as historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), the Association of African American Museums, the National Association of Latino Arts and Cultures, or the Native American Arts Council, as well as regional and local organizations and associations.

Selection Criteria

Conventional hiring practices, that are unexamined through a DEAI lens, may favor candidates with credentials from prestigious universities, competitive degree programs, or specialized internship experiences. The biases that inform such practices limit the pool of potential fellows. Sometimes people without specific qualifications may become discouraged from pursuing a museum career (Sweeney and Schonfeld 2018).

SLAM’s environmental scan found that, in their application and selection practices, institutions with successful fellowships for individuals from historically underrepresented backgrounds make concerted efforts to recognize the range of experiences that can contribute to the formation of a desirable candidate (e.g., skills-based hiring versus heavily weighing a graduate degree). It is also important to note that, as pointed out by Nicole Ivy, “first-generation college students, students from rural and urban impoverished communities, and students who are working parents may not be able to . . . carry sizable amounts of debt” that can result from a college or graduate education (Ivy 2016, 57). Discussing the rationale for certain qualifications such as specific degree requirements or other selection criteria can help the program clarify, with intention, which elements are essential and which can be adjusted to welcome a wider pool of potential applicants.

“Recruitment is the hardest part . . . When you think of the people in art, art history, and related studies, these programs aren’t attracting the types of students we are trying to pull into our fellowship.”

— Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art (SLAM Environmental Scan, RK&A 2019a)

1. For example, Enrich Chicago (a collaborative cohort committed to ending racism in arts organizations at all levels, enrichchi.org) has partnered with the Chicago High School for the Arts (ChiArts) to sponsor an Arts Administration Pathways Club, which aims to develop the next generation of aspiring arts administrators.
5. PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR FELLOWS TO FOSTER NETWORKS OF SUPPORT

Professional Networks

Mentorship is an important aspect of any fellowship experience. Cultivating a network of established museum professionals and leaders in the field is key to the development of successful careers for fellows from historically underrepresented backgrounds. At SLAM, Fellows meet colleagues through their project assignments, and are also encouraged to get to know staff across the museum and learn about their jobs. Additionally, Fellows participate in a two-week residency at the Romare Bearden Foundation in New York City that introduces them to work in a private arts foundation setting. During the residency, Fellows are also encouraged to plan meetings in the city—sometimes with help and introductions from SLAM and Foundation colleagues—with museum professionals who share their interests.

The museum field is highly connection-driven (Sweeney and Schonfeld 2018). Museums may promote and arrange formal or informal opportunities for fellows to meet staff within the organization and museum professionals outside the organization. For example, a formal networking opportunity might be a series of inter-institutional programs during which fellows have a chance to meet established museum colleagues and local professionals from other cultural institutions. Informal networking through informational interviews with colleagues is another effective way to expand fellows’ professional circles (Sweeney and Schonfeld 2018).

Peer Networks

Creating a peer network, particularly one of peers who also come from historically underrepresented backgrounds, can foster an enriching and sustaining sense of community and support among fellows. At SLAM, the program accepts one Fellow at a time, with a short overlap between the incoming and outgoing Fellows. This overlap serves to smooth the transfer of ongoing projects, and it often is the starting point for a bond between the Fellows that lasts well beyond their shared time at SLAM. Moreover, the current Fellow reaches out to all past Fellows to learn about their experiences in the Fellowship and their career paths after completing the Fellowship. This further develops peer and professional networks; another benefit is that this practice helps track the career outcomes of past Fellows over time.

Institutional fellowships can vary widely in structure (some accept one fellow at a time, while others engage multiple fellows simultaneously), and this has implications for developing a peer network. Fellowships with a cohort of fellows provide a built-in peer network; those that engage one fellow at a time may need to think creatively about how to connect their fellow with peers. Some museums that host multiple simultaneous fellowships can create a peer network by connecting fellows across the institution, through structured meet-ups or workshops. Alternatively, museums with only one fellowship at their institution could look to connect that person with fellows at local institutions with shared interests (e.g., museums or cultural institutions in the area) to establish the potential for a peer network that transcends the host organization.

A Saint Louis Art Museum organized group art tour visits Swann Auction Galleries in New York City. 2007. Photo by Ingram Studio


“One of the biggest strengths [of the Bearden Fellowship] was the access to all of the different head curators. I felt like, at any point, I could talk to anyone in the museum about whatever project I was working on during that time, or about my career.”

– Bearden Fellowship alumna

6. As noted in the Introduction (footnote 2), the Romare Bearden Foundation is not affiliated with the Romare Bearden Fellowship at SLAM except in name and through the annual residency. The residency in the Romare Bearden Foundation provides the Fellow an opportunity to develop experience working at an organization of a different size with a different museum.
6. CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT THAT EMBRACES DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES

Trends indicate that art museums are hiring more people of color, yet equity (in terms of the representation of diversity in the visual arts) remains on the horizon (Westermann, Schonfeld, and Sweeney 2019). As a result of its most recent strategic plan, SLAM continues to increase representation from artists of color in the collection and exhibitions, and to prioritize the participation of African American audiences in both on-site and off-site programming. Recently collected audience data shows that non-white patrons now account for 30 percent of SLAM visitors. However, internal efforts to increase diversity and equity among staff and leadership are ongoing, and the findings of the Bearden Fellowship evaluation underscore the importance of expanding this work within the institution.

Attracting and retaining professionals from historically underrepresented backgrounds in museums hinges, in part, on creating a welcoming work environment where individuals feel comfortable bringing their “whole self” to work and confident their contributions are valued (Pitinsky 2016). Creating such an environment takes commitment from staff across the museum to address systemic and unconscious biases that affect fellows’ everyday experiences. SLAM’s longitudinal study found that some Fellows feel that they were expected to speak for all people of color in group dialogues, or that they faced assumptions that they would only be interested in artists, artwork, or programming that, on the surface, directly relates to their presumed racial or ethnic background (e.g., only African American artists), or they sense that they are asked, by default, to serve as ambassadors to local communities with which they have no prior relationship.

Positive change can be introduced at the structural level by embedding DEAI principles into museums’ core operations (American Alliance of Museums 2018). One way museums can infuse DEAI into their institutional culture is to develop an organization-wide diversity plan to, among other things, set diversity goals for board and staff representation (American Alliance of Museums 2018), and address how decisions are made and shared across the organization (e.g., where decisions are siloed and who else could be contributing to the dialogues that shape the decisions?) (Sweeney and Schonfeld 2018).

“Inclusion requires an institutional orientation toward listening. It requires a willingness to invest in equity just as enthusiastically as we invest in our operations. Although personal work is a crucial part of the process, museum equity is ultimately sustained through change at the structural level. By prioritizing inclusion in their core operations, museums can ensure that progress is not just cosmetic or temporary but embedded into the systems that make them function.”

– AAM DEAI Working Group
(American Alliance of Museums 2018, 10)

7. CONTINUOUSLY REFLECT ON AND EVALUATE THE FELLOWSHIP TO IMPROVE FELLOWS’ EXPERIENCES

Focused reflection on and evaluation of the fellowship enables staff to adapt and improve the program over time, as needs and goals for fellows evolve. Staff who oversee the Bearden Fellowship at SLAM take time each year to reflect on the Fellowship. SLAM uses two ongoing approaches to evaluate the Fellowship: tracking alumni career outcomes and inviting each outgoing Fellow to provide a written reflection on their experience. Tracking career outcomes is important to understanding whether a fellowship program succeeds in adding to the museum field at large by training and championing professionals from historically underrepresented backgrounds (or whether alumni abandon the museum field). From this perspective, the Bearden Fellowship has been successful in creating a steady cohort of diverse professionals who continue to work in museums or in related arts and cultural sectors (Franklin 2018). The written reflections from the Fellows provide feedback about their experiences over the duration of the Fellowship. The assignment is open-ended, allowing Fellows to speak about their individual experiences, including aspects of the Fellowship that are successful and how the Fellowship might be improved. SLAM staff carefully review this feedback and continue to refine the Fellowship experience each year.

Museums with fellowships for professionals from historically underrepresented backgrounds should carefully consider what they want to learn from an evaluation, and how the museum will act on the information gathered. A few topics that may be particularly important to evaluate have been mentioned in previous sections of this case study. They include:

- The extent to which fellows explore and hone their professional interests
- The extent to which fellows develop meaningful mentor relationships, with attention to professional experiences as a person from a historically underrepresented background
- Opportunities to develop professional and peer networks
- Fellows’ perceptions of the museum’s culture and opportunities to share both positive and negative experiences
- Fellows’ comfort in being fully themselves at work
- The extent to which fellows’ experience a culturally sensitive work environment at the museum

Nick Cave (2014–15) presents a gallery talk on Currents 109: Nick Cave at Dia: Center. Benjamin is the Mellon Senior Coordinator of Programs and Audience Engagement at Colby College Museum of Art, 2014. Photo by Katherine Bish
APPENDICES

Appendix A: A Shared Language for DEAI

The American Alliance of Museums’ (AAM) DEAI Working Group observes that clarity in language is key to creating a shared understanding of the issues and challenges of DEAI in the museum field and to developing a shared vision for the path forward by making each word’s meaning apparent and specific. (AAM 2018, Annie E. Casey Foundation 2015). This document uses the AAM DEAI Working Group definitions below (AAM 2018, 8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diversity</th>
<th>All the ways that people are different and the same at the individual and group levels. Even when people appear the same, they are different. Organizational diversity requires examining and questioning the makeup of a group to ensure that multiple perspectives are represented.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Equity</td>
<td>The fair and just treatment of all members of a community. Equity requires commitment to strategic priorities, resources, respect, and civility, as well as ongoing action and assessment of progress toward achieving specified goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility</td>
<td>Giving equitable access to everyone along the continuum of human ability and experience. Accessibility encompasses the broader meanings of compliance and refers to how organizations make space for the characteristics that each person brings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>The intentional, ongoing effort to ensure that diverse individuals fully participate in all aspects of organizational work, including decision-making processes. It also refers to the ways that diverse participants are valued as respected members of an organization and/or community. While a truly “inclusive” group is necessarily diverse, a “diverse” group may or may not be “inclusive.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix B: Works Cited


McCraven, Victoria (2020–21) is the Saint Louis Art Museum’s 27th Romare Bearden Fellow. McCraven is the first Fellow to engage audiences completely with virtual programming, due to the pandemic. 2020. Photo by Ingrum Studios.


Victoria McCraven (2020–21) is the Saint Louis Art Museum’s 27th Romare Bearden Fellow. McCraven is the first Fellow to engage audiences completely with virtual programming, due to the pandemic.

Anita Swindell (2007–8) presents gallery talk to elementary school students. Swindell is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Art History at University of Illinois at Chicago with a concentration in Gender and Women Studies.