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PROGRAM EVALUATION

INVESTIGATING WHERE WE LIVE

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SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This report presents results from a study of *Investigating Where We Live* (IWWL), conducted by RK&A, Inc. for the National Building Museum (NBM). IWWL is a long-running program that has brought together creative youth from across the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area every summer since 1996 to explore, document, and interpret the local built environment. For this study, RK&A conducted telephone interviews with participants who all have different relationships to the program, both internal and external, to hear a variety of perspectives on the program and its evolution over time. Specifically, RK&A interviewed youth who participated in the program in either summer 2018 or in the previous 3-5 years, NBM staff who have been either directly or indirectly involved in the program, outside stakeholders, and museum peers working in youth programs at other institutions. The purpose of the study is to examine the strengths and challenges related to the program so NBM can use the results to strategically plan for the program's future.

The following summary identifies key findings and presents and discusses trends across participant types. We hope that the information contained herein will help NBM in its decision making regarding the future of the IWWL program.

The findings presented here are among the most salient. Please read the body of the report for a more comprehensive presentation of findings.

OVERALL PERCEPTIONS

Participants spoke extremely positively of their experiences with IWWL, regardless of their role or level of involvement in the program. For youth, participating in IWWL was a “profound” experience that changed how they think about their peers, their community, and museums, and one that has had a lasting impression even a few years after participating. Likewise, NBM staff and outside stakeholders – even those indirectly involved in the program – spoke at length about the positive impact IWWL has had on youth’s social skills and their understandings of how the built environment and communities shape one another. And, unprompted throughout the interviews, staff and stakeholders described feeling “inspired” after seeing youths’ creative self-confidence grow and their ideas come to life each year in the exhibition.

PROGRAM STRENGTHS

Participants shared several strengths of IWWL. The program’s flexible structure rose to the top as a strength for both NBM staff and outside stakeholders. That is, while IWWL has a recognizable and basic framework (going out into the city, meeting community members, and applying those learnings to the museum), it easily adapts to new themes from year-to-year, which helps ensure it does not become boring or stale for NBM staff or youth participants. This flexible and adaptive nature is likely a main reason the program has remained strong and continued to attract repeat participants over its long tenure.

Another major strength is providing youth with agency. For instance, NBM staff said while the program emphasizes photography, youth can also choose to creatively express themselves through other means (e.g., poetry, painting); and, that branching out beyond photography has been encouraged more and more in recent years. Additionally, both youth themselves and outside stakeholders said NBM staff who run the program constantly encourage youth to pursue questions or issues they find intriguing. Perhaps most important for providing youth agency, however, is the exhibition. Nearly all participants said the fact that NBM provides youth a public, physical space to showcase their ideas is a core strength of IWWL.

A third strength of IWWL is that it regularly brings youth out into the local community. That is, rather than being based solely at NBM, the program takes youth out into Washington, D.C. to explore and photograph neighborhoods and meet with community leaders. NBM staff and outside stakeholders praised this facet of the program for helping youth learn about the built environment from many perspectives and begin to think critically about the role community members play in shaping a place. Youth, in turn, appreciated visiting a variety of neighborhoods across the District because it helped them gain comfort navigating their surroundings and better appreciate divergent perspectives.

A fourth strength is program staff themselves. Both outside stakeholders and youth energetically praised program staff’s “authenticity” – that is, their ability to create an open, permissive environment where youth feel comfortable asking questions and expressing themselves creatively. Echoing this idea, museum peers spoke broadly about the importance of “committed adult mentors” who value teens’ voices for creating successful youth programs.

Finally, both NBM staff and outside stakeholders praised the program’s intensive nature as a strength. That is, like in summer camp, youth participate in the program several days a week throughout most of the summer. This design not only helps youth quickly bond with NBM staff and their peers, but also helps them focus to ultimately create a “cohesive” and “thoughtful” exhibition. One stakeholder even likened the program’s design to a short, yet intensive, artist residency that could help attract new audiences each year. Moving forward, NBM might consider the pros and cons of viewing the program in this way.

PROGRAM WEAKNESSES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Participants named few weaknesses of IWWL, or were hesitant to characterize them as such. That is, anything they saw as a weakness of the program, they also viewed as a potential opportunity. A few trends emerged among NBM staff and outside stakeholders in particular. First, although a core strength of IWWL is that it brings youth physically out into the community, there is an opportunity to forge stronger connections with the city government (e.g., with D.C. Councilmembers, the Mayor's office). Outside stakeholders in particular were adamant that the program should take better advantage of its local network, and they articulated a natural connection between the program's and the city's goals of community engagement. And, stakeholders suggested the city has as much to learn from youth perspectives on current issues as youth have to learn from adults working in local government. Stakeholders who work in (or closely with) the city government offered their full support to help IWWL grow these relationships and find new ways for NBM and city to work together.

A second weakness and potential opportunity for the program relates to diversity. Both NBM staff and outside stakeholders noted that while IWWL is diverse on some fronts (e.g., gender, ethnicity), it is not on others. For instance, one staff member said the program relies on existing relationships and legacies to solicit new members; youth participants frequently hail from the same families, schools, and neighborhoods from year-to-year. They suggested recruiting in and expanding the program content to new neighborhoods (particularly east of the Anacostia River) and/or pursuing more local grants that would support diversifying the program. Relatedly, museum peers suggested youth programs often suffer when a museum does not fully embrace diversity in every sense of the word. For instance, program participants might be diverse in terms of gender and ethnicity, but do they represent a range of neighborhoods, schools, personal interests, academic skill level, or past level of exposure to museums? Moving forward, NBM should consider whether increasing diversity aligns with its goals for the program's future.

Another opportunity is expanding the program nationally. Both NBM staff and stakeholders cited NBM's reputation as a leader in museum teen programming and felt strongly that, as an anchor program at the museum, IWWL has a lot to offer the museum field as a whole. However, they discussed this notion only vaguely and did not suggest concrete steps NBM staff might take to expand nationally. Still, the fact that many mentioned this as an opportunity demonstrates that the idea has potential.

A fourth trend emerged only among the two museum peers, but nevertheless is worthy of discussion since it could be an important consideration for NBM. Museum peers spoke at length about a common weakness of museum youth programs generally (not at NBM specifically): a lack of training for program staff in supporting teens socio-emotionally. That is, while program staff often have subject-matter expertise, they lack sufficient training in youth development (e.g., social work, trauma intervention, crisis management). The two peers generally hoped museums would embed more social services support systems for youth programs staff, whether through consultants, professional development, or hiring additional program staff with these backgrounds to work on youth programs.

PROGRAM CHALLENGES AND THREATS

Participants worried about a few factors or trends that could affect program growth. Funding was a common concern, though participants spoke about it in different ways depending on their role. NBM staff, for instance, generally worried about having a limited budget and the potential negative effects on participants when staff have to do more with less. Similarly, museum peers raised the concern of program staff burnout due to limited resources. And, stakeholders and peers noted that funding cycles and trends often shift dramatically from year to year, causing pressure for strong and long-standing programs like IWWL to continuously “reinvent” themselves to keep appealing to funders. While IWWL will likely continue to be dependent on outside funders, NBM might consider steps it could take to mitigate some of these risks.

Stakeholders and peers also discussed the program’s subject matter (i.e., the built environment, investigating communities, and photography) as a potential barrier to youth engagement. Stakeholders, for instance, said it takes a “certain type of teen” to want to spend their summer at the museum engaging deeply with these topics. On a broader note, museum peers said any program’s subject matter can potentially be a barrier to youth engagement, so it is up to program staff to find ways to mitigate this threat; for instance, by allowing for flexibility and offering youth multiple various entry points into the program topic(s). NBM staff, however, were less concerned about this; from their points of view, the built environment is a broad subject that allows for multiple, diverse entry points, which is what helps make the program so flexible and dynamic. All of this speaks to the question of relevance and will be an important consideration for NBM as it considers the future of the program (Program Relevance section below).

Another potential challenge or threat is if NBM is not committed to youth on an institutional level. That is, historically teens are a new audience for museums, but museums in general have not come to terms with what this entails. Museum peers, for instance, compared museums to other youth-focused non-profits and community organizations and said museums cannot truly act as “safe spaces” for youth if youth are not central to their missions. Similarly, NBM staff who are directly involved in IWWL worried about the threat of museum leadership and program staff having different visions or goals for the program. While they acknowledged that IWWL has slowly increased the museum’s comfort working youth, they also said museum leadership is less willing than program staff to “take risks” with the program since it has such as long-standing, positive reputation.

ROLE OF NEW TECHNOLOGY

Overall, technology was not top of mind for participants when discussing IWWL. Youth naturally recalled learning to use a digital camera and spoke positively about this experience. However, they otherwise struggled to recall instances of using technology in the program, and when probed, mostly spoke vaguely about using computers or smartphones for research purposes. Similarly, most outside stakeholders and NBM staff did not naturally discuss technology throughout the interviews, neither as a strength nor as a weakness/potential opportunity for the program. One NBM staff member, however, shared mixed feelings on technology. They said while some new technology purchased for IWWL this year (e.g., a mini-

projector, a printer) may have somewhat improved program efficiency and time management, not having access to cutting-edge technology also helps encourage youths' creativity (e.g., in exhibition) since they do not feel constrained by having to use particular technology. Considering all of this, NBM should consider what role they hope technology will play in the program both logistically and creatively, and how to balance these two considerations in light of their overall goals for the program.

PROGRAM RELEVANCE IN D.C. 2018

As stated earlier, participants' enthusiasm for the program and its connection to the museum's mission was palpable throughout the interviews, no matter their role or level of involvement in the program. This is exciting, and also begs the question of how NBM can maintain that enthusiasm moving forward. NBM might first look to stakeholders' suggestion to strengthen ties with community leaders working in local government, especially in the Mayor's office and on the city council. Stakeholders greatly admired the program and its potential to help create a more "unified" city by bridging communities and strengthening relationships across generations. That is, they were excited at the prospect of better integrating younger generations' thoughts and ideas into the actual daily workings of Washington, D.C.. Youth participants, in turn, all said their experience in IWWL has helped them in their lives today, whether because they apply the photography and research skills they learned to other settings, because they now feel more comfortable navigating Washington, D.C., or because they draw on the social and communication skills they learned on a daily basis. As museum peers suggested, these soft skills will ultimately strengthen the entire community as youth continue to apply them in their work and daily lives, no matter what careers they pursue. Potentially, finding ways to better integrate the critical thinking youth do about their community and city's future with the actual day-to-day operations of adult influencers in the city will be an important step to ensuring the program remains relevant moving forward.

WHY NBM?

In considering the future of IWWL, a central question is "How do staff and stakeholders view IWWL within the overall context of NBM?" That is, to what extent do they see the program as aligned with the museum's mission and a core part of its work? This question is especially important given the program's long tenure at NBM and the national recognition it has received. Positively, findings suggest that staff and stakeholders have similar understandings of the program's goals and see strong alignment between program goals and the museum's mission, suggesting the program has a clear, strong focus that is transparent to all. When asked to discuss why they do (or do not) think it is important that NBM runs IWWL (as opposed to another institution), almost all spoke at length about the museum's dedication to expanding visitors' appreciation of the places and spaces around us—or, the built environment—and how, by virtue of being a program about investigating what has and continues to shape the local community, this idea is woven into the fabric of IWWL. That staff and stakeholders all see obvious connections between the program's goals and the museum's mission is encouraging and bodes well for the program's future.

Interestingly, however, only NBM staff felt strongly that this focus on the built environment is unique to the museum. While stakeholders certainly saw connections between the museum’s mission and the program’s goals, a few saw overlaps with non-profits and community organizations that focus on community engagement and urban planning/design. Stakeholders suggested these organizations could also effectively host the program. Similarly, museum peers had mixed feelings about what, if anything, makes IWWL unique among museum youth programs. Both were impressed by three aspects of IWWL in particular—the exhibition, the focus on community investigation, and the blend of historical learning with the creative arts—which they said demonstrates the museum’s commitment to elevating teens’ voices, to creating relationships with the local community, and to the arts. However, they saw parallels between each of these program elements and other museum youth programs, such as science museum youth programs where youth investigate the impacts of climate change on their local community, teen-curated exhibitions at historical societies, and art museum youth programs that emphasize artmaking. Perhaps, these discrepancies between participants’ perceptions of what makes IWWL unique are not so surprising given their varied relationships and experiences with the program. In considering all of this, NBM should think critically about what, if anything, makes IWWL unique amongst museums and in the wider world of youth programs. Perhaps, what makes IWWL unique is the *blend* of the three aspects that struck museum peers about the program coupled with NBM’s holistic approach to teaching about the built environment. That is, its emphasis on both the human and physical aspects of the built environment.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Overall, results suggest that IWWL is an extremely successful program and a meaningful experience for all involved. The Museum should be immensely proud of the success of IWWL to date and the strong reputation it has built among the museum community as a leader in teen programming. Still, as NBM moves into the future, there is an opportunity to think critically about the impact NBM hopes IWWL will have and to align its actions to push the program further. In thinking about the future of IWWL, consider the following questions:

- ◆ What are NBM’s goals for IWWL related to diversity? What steps could NBM take to make the program more diverse, if this is a goal? For instance, should the program recruit more participants who reside east of the Anacostia River?
- ◆ How might NBM establish and maintain stronger connections with the city, especially in government, not only to help youth more deeply engage with their communities, but also to help the city benefit from youth perspectives on important local issues?
- ◆ How might NBM better support youth socio-emotionally in IWWL and support staff in obtaining the proper training to do so? For instance, could NBM offer program staff regular professional development in social work, trauma intervention, or crisis management?
- ◆ What are other ways NBM might more reliably and sustainably engage program alumni and/or community mentors after they are done participating in the program? For instance, could alumni, mentors, and stakeholders participate in an advisory board after their program experience has ended to give input on future IWWL programs?

STUDY BACKGROUND

In 2018, the National Building Museum (NBM) contracted RK&A, Inc. (RK&A) to conduct a study of Investigating Where We Live (IWWL), a long-running summer program that brings together creative youth from across the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. Each summer, approximately 35 middle and high school students use digital cameras, creative writing, interviews, and their own observations to explore, document, and interpret the built environment in D.C. neighborhoods and use their findings to design and install an exhibition in the museum. The purpose of the study is to examine the strengths and challenges related to the program so NBM can use the results to strategically plan for the program's future. Specifically, the objectives of the study are to explore:

- ◆ In what ways does the program affect participants, NBM staff, and stakeholders?
- ◆ To what extent does new technology enhance the program experience?
- ◆ How do staff and stakeholders view IWWL within the overall context of NBM's work? (To what extent do they see the program as aligned with the museum's mission and a core part of what NBM does?)
- ◆ What is the broader landscape of teen programs currently in the museum field and how does *Investigating Where We Live* fit in/compare?
- ◆ To what extent is the program relevant in 2018 (and in the District of Columbia specifically) and how can it continue to be relevant (and align with future generations)?
- ◆ What are important considerations for program improvement over the next five years, especially for aligning the program's purpose with NBM's mission and vision, and for setting it apart from similar programs moving forward?

METHODOLOGY

RK&A conducted a series of in-depth interviews with multiple stakeholders, representing varying perspectives and levels of involvement with *Investigating Where We Live*, to explore the outcomes and impact of the program and consider the program's future. These include:

- ◆ Youth participants, both recent (summer 2018) and the previous 3-5 years (2013-2015)
- ◆ NBM staff who are either directly or indirectly involved in the program
- ◆ Outside stakeholders (e.g., funders) who are indirectly involved in program
- ◆ Museum peers, i.e., staff with experience organizing teen programs at other institutions

In-depth interviews are a qualitative method in which the interviewer can speak one-on-one with individuals about a specific topic. In-depth interviews encourage and motivate people to describe their experiences, express their opinions and feelings, and share with the interviewer the meaning they gleaned from an experience. The interviews were structured by open-ended interview guides (see the Appendix A). However, the evaluator allowed conversations to follow the trajectory of participants' thoughts and experiences. The evaluator also asked probing or clarifying questions as needed to enhance understanding. All interviews were conducted via telephone, audio-recorded with participants' permission, and transcribed to facilitate analysis. Participants under the age of 18 years gained parental permission from a parent or guardian before being interviewed (see Appendix B).

Additionally, RK&A observed one program session in the summer of 2018; the purpose of the observation was to gain contextual understanding to help the evaluator in the interview process.

DATA ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

In-depth interviews produce rich, descriptive data that are analyzed qualitatively. Findings are presented in narrative, by stakeholder type. A comprehensive summary discusses patterns and trends appearing across stakeholder types and relevant insights to help NBM consider the future of IWWL. Throughout the findings, verbatim quotations (edited for clarity) illustrate participants' thoughts and ideas as fully as possible; interviewer's questions appear in italics.

FINDINGS: YOUTH PARTICIPANTS

RK&A interviewed five people who participated in the *Investigating Where We Live (IWWL)* program as teens. Of the participants, one participated in the most recent program iteration (summer 2018); the other four participated in the program in the summers of 2013-2015.¹ We have presented findings for all participants together owing to the small sample size, but we note differences in their perspectives by year when appropriate.

MOTIVATION TO APPLY TO IWWL

A few factors influenced participants' decision to apply for IWWL:

- ◆ **Recommendations:** Almost all said others recommended they apply to program. For instance, one heard about the program from a teacher; another, from their siblings.
- ◆ **Interest in subject matter:** A few were also interested in the program because they wanted to learn more about photography, architecture, and/or engineering.
- ◆ **Relationship with NBM:** One applied to IWWL to continue their relationship with NBM after having positive experiences in other NBM teen programs (e.g., Design Apprenticeship).
- ◆ **Cost:** One applied in part because it is free for participants.
- ◆ **Making a difference:** One said they applied to IWWL in part because they wanted to be part of something that would make a “positive impact” on the world.

¹ RK&A attempted to interview more teens who participated in the most recent program iteration (Summer 2018). RK&A sent multiple rounds of emails to past program participants inviting them to participate in an interview about their IWWL experience, but only one recent participant responded. Two issues may have deterred recent participants' responses: 1) participants under 18 needed to have their parent or guardian sign a consent form for them to be interviewed, an extra step they may not have wanted to do and 2) RK&A conducted interviews near the beginning of the school year, so teens may not have felt they had time to participate in an interview.

IWWL TAKEAWAYS

Participants were asked to discuss what they took away from their experiences in IWWL, including: 1) their overall takeaways, 2) what, if anything, about the program feels relevant to their lives today, and 3) how, if at all, the program made them think about the built environment.

OVERALL

Overall, participants spoke extremely positively about IWWL and described it as a “profound experience” that meant a lot to them. A few vividly recalled specific program activities they enjoyed, such as learning to use a camera, visiting community gathering places and historic buildings, traveling on the Metro, and building a 3D-model of a city. Even those who were less specific in their responses said they still think about the program and that they always felt engaged in program activities; as one put it, “I never felt bored.” When asked to describe what they took away from the program, participants shared several ideas:

- ◆ **Social skills:** A few enjoyed working in teams throughout the program because it taught them how to better communicate, cooperate, and compromise with others. One also said the teamwork helped him become less judgmental of others. However, one sometimes disliked group work because their voice was lost.
- ◆ **Photography skills:** A few said learning photography skills was one of their biggest takeaways from the program – not just physically working a camera, but also techniques for creatively “telling a story” through photographs.
- ◆ **Exhibition design:** A few said they gained insight into the process of designing and exhibition, something they previously knew nothing about. And, they took pride in seeing their exhibition in the museum and knowing it would be on display for months.
- ◆ **Lasting relationships:** A few said they are still in contact with IWWL program staff and other participants.
- ◆ **Appreciation of depth:** One said the program taught them that there is more to a community than face value—it is built on “history and stories” and those will also shape a community’s future. Similarly, another said the program taught them to be more “open” to possibilities and to spend more time thinking critically.
- ◆ **Comfort navigating surroundings:** Two, both from Maryland, appreciated visiting different neighborhoods across D.C. because it made them more comfortable taking Metro and navigating their surroundings in general.

OVERALL, WHAT DID YOU TAKE AWAY FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE IN IWWL?

“At first, I thought pictures were just pictures. You took pictures because [they were] cool. But I learned how to capture the entire history of buildings in one picture. I also learned how to capture the creativity and the artistic side of the residents of the community [by] taking pictures creatively, not just pointing and clicking.”
—Participant

RELEVANCE TO MY LIFE TODAY

Participants elaborated on the ideas mentioned above when asked to discuss how, if at all, the program is relevant to their lives today. For instance, a few gave examples of how the photography skills have been useful in other contexts. One alumnus still does photography for fun and has a sibling who became a professional photographer after participating in IWWL; another is studying marketing and frequently applies the program's lessons about effectively using imagery in storytelling. Similarly, another explained that they have used the exhibition design skills in their current work as an archivist. Still another praised the program for teaching them to do the "best research you can" and said this lesson helps them in college today. Finally, most reiterated how teamwork skills such as cooperation and encouraging others will help them in all aspects of life.

THINKING ABOUT THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Participants were also asked to discuss how, if at all, the program made them think about the built environment, or the people, processes, and materials that create buildings and places. All enthusiastically said the program helped them become aware of and better appreciate the built environment, which was something they had never done before. More specifically:

- ◆ **Noticing buildings' design:** A few shared ways they think about and appreciate buildings differently after participating in the program. For instance, one said they now advocate for handicap accessible design, and another said they now walk into buildings to inquire about their history and design.
- ◆ **Placemaking:** Two said visiting different neighborhoods during the program taught them about the role architecture plays in shaping communities. That is, how buildings or open spaces (e.g., a skate park) can serve as community gathering spaces as well as physically and emotionally shaping a community.
- ◆ **Role of teamwork:** Two spoke generally about the importance of teamwork and good communication in city planning and design.
- ◆ **My generation's role:** One said the program made her aware of the fact that her generation will shape the future of the built environment, but did not elaborate.

HOW, IF AT ALL, DID THE PROGRAM MAKE YOU THINK ABOUT THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT?

"It showed me how these are [the elements that] create a place. Architecture shapes a community because no matter where you go in the world, you'll have the basic architecture but there's always something that the architect puts into their work that makes it unique and brings the community together as a whole. When you see a Cape Cod style house you automatically think you're on the water because that is the vision and that's what you feel when you see that kind of house. So, for me architecture evokes emotion. And it kind of feels [like] architecture creates an environment regardless of where you are."

— Past Participant

USE AND INFLUENCE OF TECHNOLOGY

When asked to recall technology they used in the program, participants generally had trouble remembering details about the technology they used since a few years had passed since they participated in the program. However, three trends emerged:

- ◆ **Photography technology:** A few spoke about using cameras and reiterated some of the photography skills they learned, such as thinking about angles. Along these lines, two recalled having the option to use Adobe Photoshop to modify photographs, and one took advantage of this opportunity. Another said they wished the program offered access to “stronger, more heavy duty” cameras instead of the digital cameras offered.
- ◆ **Research technology:** A few recalled using the museum’s computers and/or their smartphones to do research for their exhibition, though for the most part they did not elaborate on specific platforms, processes, or devices they used.
- ◆ **Exhibition installation technology:** One enjoyed working with wood and using power tools to install their exhibition because it made them more aware of the construction process “from start to finish.” The other remembered using a mini-projector to play with images’ scale when installing their exhibition.

SUGGESTIONS FOR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

Before making suggestions for how NBM could improve the program, all participants reiterated their satisfaction with their program experience (“it’s a really great program”) and with the program managers in particular (“[they] are awesome at what they do”). When probed, their suggestions were mostly idiosyncratic. They include: 1) extending the program application deadline since spring is a busy time for students; 2) expanding the age range to allow younger students to participate; 3) extending the length of the program to allow for deeper learning; 4) using smaller groups or having the option to occasionally work individually; and 5) covering different neighborhoods in a single program to add variety to the experience.

FINDINGS: NBM STAFF

RK&A interviewed five National Building Museum staff members (NBM staff) about their experiences with the *Investigating Where We Live* (IWWL) program. All are senior-level staff, and most have worked at NBM for at least a decade. Their levels of involvement with the IWWL program vary. A few have had direct involvement with the program, either as program managers or by supporting core program activities through their department (e.g., exhibition installation). Two have supported the program indirectly, from an administrative standpoint (e.g., finance, development). We have presented findings for all NBM staff together owing to the small sample size, but we note differences in their perspectives by role or level of involvement in IWWL when appropriate.

GOALS OF IWWL

When asked to describe the overall goals of the IWWL program, NBM staff shared a few ideas:

- ◆ **Embody NBM's mission:** A few connected the program's goals to the museum's mission to inspire curiosity and critical thinking about the built environment by challenging teens to think about how others live and environments different than their own, and by encouraging them to question and think critically about "important issues and spaces."
- ◆ **Youth development:** A few said the program aims to develop participants' soft skills by bringing teens "from all walks of life" together and encouraging problem-solving. Two also said a goal is to provide teens a sense of authority in the museum.
- ◆ **Community engagement:** Two discussed this idea, but in different ways. One said the program aims to help communities become more "active" in their city; the other said a goal is to help NBM broaden its reach by engaging with communities across the region.

EVOLUTION OF GOALS

NBM staff also shared two ways the goals of the program had (positively) changed over time. First, they noted a shift in content focus from specific neighborhoods (e.g., Shaw) to broader historical and cultural themes (e.g., the 2018 theme District of Culture), particularly in the last few years. Second, they noted a shift in the medium(s) of creative expression emphasized in the program. Specifically, they said in the past the program almost exclusively emphasized photography, but now it also encourages other forms of "creative self-expression."

PERCEPTIONS OF IWWL

NBM staff were asked to discuss their perceptions of the IWWL program from four angles: 1) strengths, 2) weaknesses, 3) potential opportunities, and 4) challenges or threats.

PROGRAM STRENGTHS

NBM staff named several strengths of the program:

- ◆ **Flexible structure:** A few praised this as a major strength. Specifically, they said while the program has a basic “skeleton” – going out into the city, meeting with people who live and work somewhere, and applying those learnings to the museum – it is flexible enough that it does not feel repetitive year to year for staff or participants.
- ◆ **Empowering teens:** A few said the program provides teens agency, autonomy, and creativity, mostly by providing them with an exhibition space. They said this makes teens feel valued and also shows visitors that the museum values the teen voice.
- ◆ **Connection to community:** Two said a major strength is that the program allows participants to meet with community leaders, citizens, and organizations, helping participants see how each party affects a community and the larger built environment.
- ◆ **Intensive:** Two said that because IWWL is a summer program that participants attend a few days a week (“like camp”), it allows them to fully immerse themselves in the content.
- ◆ **Diversity:** Two said a strength of IWWL is that brings together teens from across the DMV region who might not have met otherwise and helps with social development.
- ◆ **Staff expertise:** Two, who are involved with the program indirectly, praised the strong leadership and expertise of the program staff. One added that having mostly paid staff run the program ensures quality remains high.
- ◆ **New technology:** One said some new technology purchased this year (e.g., projectors, printers) has improved efficiency and time management.

PROGRAM STRENGTHS

“This program float[s] a concept to [teens] instead of saying we want you to do this task X, Y, Z. We’re saying [here’s] this topic, let’s think about it this way. Now what does that mean to you? How do you see that? Where do you see that playing out in a community or do you see that playing out in your experience? I think that level of agency where they can do something self-directed helps keep that level of engagement, gives them that autonomy. Allows them to pursue what is interesting to them.”

– NBM Staff Member

PROGRAM WEAKNESSES

NBM staff also shared a few perceived weaknesses of IWWL. Weaknesses named were mostly idiosyncratic, though there was a noticeable difference in responses depending on staff members' level of involvement. Those directly involved shared more specific ideas concerning program implementation and those indirectly involved spoke more broadly about its overall direction.

- ◆ **Safety:** Two mentioned safety. One said it has become increasingly difficult to safely explore Washington, D.C., in the summer months due to extreme heat; the other said ensuring teens' safety has been an issue in the past during exhibition installation (e.g., when teens use power tools they are not supposed to use, like circular saws).
- ◆ **Uncertain direction:** Two, both indirectly involved in IWWL, acknowledged the museum is reconsidering the program's future. One said the program feels "self-directed" and said it sometimes seems there is disconnect on program goals between senior leadership and staff who are closer to the program. Along these lines, another said the program's short timeframe can make it hard to achieve its ambitious goals.
- ◆ **Relies on existing relationships:** One acknowledged the program is already ethnically, racially, and culturally diverse but also said participants tend to come from the same schools, families, or neighborhoods; that is, there are legacies that limit who participates.
- ◆ **Limited technology:** One suggested that a lack of cutting-edge technology has limited how participants can engage visitors in their exhibition, but also that not having access to cutting-edge technology has encouraged their creativity.
- ◆ **Challenging logistics:** One said relying on the metro for transportation limits potential site/neighborhood visits.

CHALLENGES OR THREATS THE PROGRAM FACES

NBM staff also discussed challenges or threats IWWL faces (both internally and externally):

- ◆ **Internally,** two cited limited staff capacity and budget, which can limit program growth and negatively affect participants when staff have to do "more with less." Two others worried about maintaining a united program vision from senior leadership, for instance, in the face of staff turnover. Similarly, one said IWWL is well-regarded as a core part of NBM's exhibition offerings by program staff, but leadership see it mainly as an education program; and that conversations about the future of the program can often go in circles when all parties are unwilling to "take risks" to push it further. Another named photography challenges, including the high cost of printing quality images and teens' preference for using phones to take pictures.
- ◆ **Externally,** a few acknowledged that IWWL faces competition from other youth programs in the D.C. region, though they were not overly concerned since NBM has a strong reputation for teen programs. However, one admitted the museum should consider providing benefits to participants, such as financial compensation or school credit, to compete with other local programs. Additionally, one said expanding the program to other museums could be challenging since there are no other museums with missions dealing with the built environment. Instead, they suggested NBM look to expand the program in community centers or other non-profits.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE PROGRAM

NBM staff saw a variety of opportunities for the IWWL program, including:

- ◆ **Boosting advocacy** and tackling challenging issues in IWWL, considering teens will be the “next generation of policymakers and citizens addressing these topics.”
- ◆ **Increasing opportunities to learn about exhibition development**, to increase participants’ museum literacy.
- ◆ **Traveling the IWWL exhibition** to other museums or community spaces, to give it a life outside of NBM. Along with this, shortening the exhibition’s run at NBM.
- ◆ **Strengthening relationships with the D.C. councilmembers**, who could provide insight and access to current regional issues.
- ◆ **Showcasing all the ideas collected by teens over 20 years of IWWL**, since this represents a “wealth of information” on the city over time.
- ◆ **Growing the program** to have a national presence.

IMPACT OF IWWL

Finally, NBM staff discussed the impact of IWWL on participants; on Washington, D.C.; on the National Building Museum, institutionally; and on themselves, personally.

IMPACT ON PARTICIPANTS

Overall, NBM staff said IWWL positively impacts participants, in a few key ways:

- ◆ **Empowerment:** Most said the program instills a sense of pride, confidence, and self-respect in participants because they are encouraged to pursue and share their own ideas and are able to see those ideas actualized in an exhibition in a national museum.
- ◆ **Social skills:** A few said the group work and neighborhood visits help participants become more comfortable at working with people who are different than themselves (whether peers or community residents) and teaches them group communication skills.
- ◆ **Deepened understanding of D.C.:** A few said through conducting research, both at the museum and in the field, IWWL helps participants develop a richer understanding of and appreciation for the history and culture of Washington, D.C.
- ◆ **Relationship to museums:** One said the program encourages participants to reconsider what museums “are and can be.” Similarly, another said IWWL encourages participants to begin lifelong relationships with museums and NBM in particular.

WHAT DIFFERENCE, IF ANY, HAS IWWL MADE FOR PARTICIPANTS?

“I think with the neighborhood investigations [and] exhibit design, we’re helping them better understand how to articulate their ideas, talk about things, [and] present. You simply see more confident youth come out. You see youth becoming more comfortable working with others. That idea of working with people who are different than you or think differently than you. So, developing social skills. I’ve seen teens handle conflict over what to call their exhibit better than I’ve sat in a meeting and talked about what to call one of our exhibitions.”

– NBM Staff Member

IMPACT ON WASHINGTON, D.C.

Two ideas rose to the top when NBM staff shared what difference, if any, they thought IWWL has made for Washington, D.C.:

- ◆ **Valuing teens:** Two, who both play a direct role in the program, said seeing youth take initiative (i.e., through neighborhood visits) and share their ideas candidly (i.e., in the exhibition) has helped broaden average citizens and government officials' perspectives on teens' capabilities and "lessen their prejudices" towards youth.
- ◆ **Legacy:** Two spoke generally about IWWL as an "anchor" program for the city's teens and discussed how its reputation spreads via word-of-mouth among local families.
- ◆ **Unsure:** One was unsure how IWWL affects the city as a whole.

IMPACT ON THE NATIONAL BUILDING MUSEUM

When asked about the effects of IWWL on the National Building Museum as an institution, NBM staff shared a few ideas:

- ◆ **Pride:** Most said the museum is incredibly proud of IWWL's success over the past two decades, but a few also said its success is a double-edged sword. While the museum is proud of the program, its success has caused leadership to take the program for granted, rather than pushing for the program's structure and goals to evolve and grow with time.
- ◆ **Commitment to teens:** A few said IWWL embodies NBM's long-standing commitment to the teen audience, which they said sets NBM apart from other museums. Further, the program has increased the staff's comfort level with teens over time, even beyond the education department (e.g., curatorial, visitor services, leadership).
- ◆ **Pushing boundaries:** Two said IWWL has helped NBM become more "socially conscious" in its programming and exhibitions. Similarly, seeing teens' innovative approaches to exhibition development has pushed museum staff's thinking on what is possible in exhibitions, a trend they hope continues.
- ◆ **Building relationships:** Two discussed this, in different ways. One said IWWL has strengthened connections among museum staff across departments, as they must interact to prepare the IWWL exhibition. Another said IWWL has helped the museum forge connections with diverse audiences who may not otherwise be museum-goers.

WHY NBM?

Staff were also asked to discuss why it is important (or not important) that NBM runs IWWL, as opposed to another institution. Three trends emerged:

- ◆ **Connection to mission:** Most said the goals and themes of IWWL are strongly intertwined with the museum’s mission of engaging audiences with the built environment. They described this focus on the built environment as unique to NBM, yet a broad enough topic that it affects everyone.
- ◆ **National presence:** One said being rooted at NBM makes IWWL a more powerful program since the museum has a “bigger platform” than a smaller community organization with fewer resources.
- ◆ **Audience expertise:** One said IWWL makes sense as an NBM program because the museum are experts in engaging the teens after working with them for decades.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT THAT THE NATIONAL BUILDING MUSEUM RUNS IWWL?

“I think because at the core of our mission is really exploring the built environment, which is this broad term [but] is really just about the spaces and places we build around us. So, I think that is exactly what Investigating Where We Live is doing constantly. Whether it’s in a neighborhood or it’s community-themed or exploring change over time. I think that is directly tied to our mission, who we are.”

– NBM Staff Member

PERSONAL IMPACT

Finally, NBM staff shared how IWWL has personally affected them. All spoke positively and described working with participants and/or seeing their work in the final exhibition as “thought-provoking,” “refreshing,” and inspiring. Those who play a more distant role in the program spoke broadly, stating that they look forward to seeing the teens’ work every year and learning from their creativity. Two, who have played a more direct role in the program, had more to say. One, for instance, emphasized the “continuity of community” that has resulted from IWWL and said they have built lasting and “beautiful” relationships with participants, program staff, and interns. The other said participants constantly inspire them to look at situations differently and that seeing participants model how to work productively with others has inspired them to strive for better relationships with their colleagues.

FINDINGS: OUTSIDE STAKEHOLDERS

RK&A interviewed four outside stakeholders about their experiences with the *Investigating Where We Live* (IWWL) program. All are familiar with the program, though their relationships with it vary. Stakeholders include funders, board members, and past guest speakers/supporters from the local government. We have presented findings for all stakeholders together owing to the small sample size, but we note differences in their perspectives by role or degree of involvement in IWWL when appropriate.

GOALS OF IWWL

Stakeholders' perceptions of the goals of IWWL largely align with those of NBM staff. Stakeholders said the goals of IWWL are:

- ◆ **Deeper understanding:** All said the program is intended to deepen youth's awareness, understandings of, and connections to the built environment (either in general, or in Washington, D.C. specifically) and how it affects their lives.
- ◆ **Youth development:** Two said a program goal is positive youth development, or creating a "safe space" for youth to come together, share ideas, and have those ideas authenticated and validated by the museum.
- ◆ **Public engagement:** One, a board member, said another program goal is to educate and foster relationships with the general public (e.g., bring in new members), mostly through the IWWL exhibition.

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE OVERALL GOAL OF INVESTIGATING WHERE WE LIVE?

"I think city planning and architecture and the built environment is a place where everyone sort of understands how it's negotiated, but no one understands that it's very intentional and the power of an individual or a collective to manipulate that and change that. So, I think the goal is really just [to] make sure that young people learn about the city and [are] empowered to sort of shape that and tell their own stories."

—Outside stakeholder

PERCEPTIONS OF IWWL

Like NBM staff, stakeholders were asked to discuss their perceptions of the IWWL program from four angles: 1) strengths, 2) weaknesses, 3) opportunities, and 4) challenges or threats.

PROGRAM STRENGTHS

Stakeholders named several aspects of IWWL that they view as strengths, which again echoed NBM staff's perceptions:

- ◆ **Flexible structure:** Like NBM staff, a few stakeholders praised the program for being flexible, “process-driven,” and youth-oriented. They liked how the program provides youth with a “framework” to work within (i.e., the theme) and emphasizes collaboration (e.g., through small-group work) while still allowing for freedom and creativity.
- ◆ **Staff expertise:** Two said they admire NBM staff members’ “special” youth-development skillset and called this a huge strength of the program. In particular, they praised the current program manager for her ability to be “conscientious” and “authentic” with participants by listening to them and encouraging their creativity.
- ◆ **Connection to community:** One said a strength of the program is that it draws on a wide array of local “informants” to help youth learn about the built environment from many angles; for instance, an organizer in D.C.’s Chinese American community.
- ◆ **Intensive:** One board member compared the program to an artist residency and liked that the program takes places over a “concentrated” period of time because this allows for participants to dive deep into their subject matter and results in a more thoughtful and cohesive exhibition.

PROGRAM WEAKNESSES

Stakeholders suggested a few possible weaknesses of IWWL, though they struggled to do so since they are not directly involved in program design or implementation. Responses include:

- ◆ **Timing:** One imagined that having only five weeks to work with youth might limit how deeply participants can engage with the theme. And, that the summer season might make it hard for youth to focus – it is a season when youth “want to be free.”
- ◆ **Small size:** One, a board member, said the program’s small size is a weakness since it is not reaching as many youths as it could; but they also acknowledged that NBM has limited resources (e.g., funding) to expand the program so more youth can participate.
- ◆ **Lack of diversity:** One said IWWL does not seem like it is especially catered to students of color, despite diversity being a supposed priority both at NBM and for the museum field.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE PROGRAM

Stakeholders named several opportunities that might strengthen IWWL, which are inter-related:

- ◆ **Taking advantage of existing network:** A few (all non-board members) were adamant that NBM should better take advantage of its local network to strengthen IWWL. In particular, two wished for stronger connections between IWWL and local government offices or organizations; for example, the Mayor’s office. They said not only would participants benefit from access to these organizations, but also that city planners and officials would benefit from hearing youths’ perspectives about the future of the city. Another suggested collaborating with programs that receive grants from the same funders as IWWL.
- ◆ **Cultivate equity:** A few also discussed or alluded to NBM’s existing intention to promote equity, access, and inclusion within IWWL and, by extension, throughout the city and in professions relating to the built environment. They suggested more intentionally promoting the program east of the Anacostia River because it is an area of D.C. that has a high number of disadvantaged youths and is rapidly changing.
- ◆ **Expand nationally:** One wished the museum would use its expertise in youth programming around the built environment to expand IWWL nationally and help create a pipeline for marginalized youth to enter built-environment professions.
- ◆ **Pursue more local grants:** One said NBM should pursue more local grants, such as ones that fund bringing Title I students to the museum, to take advantage of the above-mentioned opportunities for IWWL.
- ◆ **Engaging parents:** One recalled seeing participants’ parents’ pride in their children’s work at past IWWL exhibition openings and suggested the museum could strengthen the program by finding ways to directly involve parents.

CHALLENGES OR THREATS THE PROGRAM FACES

Stakeholders also discussed perceived challenges or threats to IWWL:

- ◆ **Competition:** A few discussed this, both in a general sense (“everyone’s doing a program”) and specifically related to funding, which they said can change drastically from year-to-year; so, it is a constant threat.
- ◆ **Leadership:** Two, who are more distantly involved with NBM, speculated that internal politics and turnover might make it hard to retain a united vision for IWWL.
- ◆ **Subject matter:** Two said IWWL’s subject matter could prove challenging, since it takes a “certain type” of teen to want to spend the summer at NBM and photographing cities.

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS OPPORTUNITIES FOR INVESTIGATING WHERE WE LIVE?

“I think the National Building Museum curriculum could go national. There needs to be a pipeline program to get youth interested in urban planning and design. Let’s start one, right? I really think the National Building Museum is so respected because it’s been there for so long so there’s an opportunity to bottle this magic and spread it around and really become a thought leader in this kind of work.”

–Outside stakeholder

VALUE OF IWWL

Stakeholders were also asked to discuss the overall value of IWWL. All emphatically emphasized the program's value – for participants, Washington, D.C., and themselves personally.

VALUE FOR PARTICIPANTS

When discussing the value of IWWL for participants, two ideas rose to the top:

- ◆ **Increased awareness and openness:** All said IWWL helps participants deepen their understanding of the city in which they live and teaches them to appreciate many aspects of the built environment. They said the program opens youth's eyes to architecture and design, and also helps them consider the roles people (both individuals and groups) play in shaping a community.
- ◆ **Creative self-confidence:** Two said the program's encouraging and permissive environment helps youth develop their artistic confidence, experiment with creative expression, and realize their own talent when "they didn't think they were artists."

VALUE FOR WASHINGTON, D.C.

Stakeholders also shared thoughts on how IWWL contributes to Washington, D.C. as well as the role they hope IWWL might play in the future of the city:

- ◆ **Shaping the next generation of leaders:** Two mentioned this idea. One, who works in local government, said IWWL is key to integrating diverse voices in the future of the city and "figuring out who's not at the table." The other spoke generally but also hoped that participants' ideas are regularly shared with city planning leaders moving forward.
- ◆ **Strengthening community:** Two discussed this, in slightly different ways. One said they hoped IWWL could serve as a template for other organizations to create similar programs, with a goal of building a "stronger, more unified city." The other, a board member, said seeing participants' thoughts and ideas on the city in the IWWL exhibition could inspire people from diverse backgrounds (who historically may not be museum goers) to return and develop a relationship with NBM.

PERSONAL VALUE

Stakeholders were not asked directly how IWWL has impacted them personally because of their distance from its design and implementation. Nevertheless, throughout the interviews all touched on how the program has affected them. One, for instance, said they were "moved" by the creativity and enthusiasm for civic engagement in the IWWL exhibition. Another discussed how IWWL and NBM in general has broadened their worldview and made them better appreciate their surroundings. Still another could relate personally and was palpably excited at the potential for IWWL to create a pipeline for minorities to enter the field.

WHY NBM?

Finally, stakeholders were asked to discuss why it is important (or not important) that the National Building Museum runs IWWL, as opposed to another institution.

- ◆ **Connection to mission:** Like NBM staff, a few saw an obvious connection between the goals and themes of IWWL and the museum’s mission to critically engage the public with the built environment. One (a board member) felt strongly that IWWL could not exist elsewhere because NBM is the only museum with this mission. Another, a funder, said NBM is a good fit for IWWL because it balances the physical aspects of the built environment with the human aspects as opposed to another group, like the Humanities Council, which might only emphasize human stories if they ran the program.
- ◆ **“Safe space”:** One said NBM provides youth a safe space to question and express themselves, which is a critical aspect of the program. They did not think schools could host IWWL effectively because schools are less “person-centered” than museums.
- ◆ **Unsure:** One spoke positively about IWWL but did not think it is critical that NBM run the program. They explained how the museum’s status and recognition in the community give the program clout but also thought it could live elsewhere.

FINDINGS: MUSEUM PEERS

To situate *Investigating Where We Live* (IWWL) within the broader landscape of youth programming in museums, RK&A also interviewed two museum professionals who do not work at the National Building Museum (museum peers). Both hold senior-level positions at their institutions and have extensive experience designing and managing youth programs. While neither recalled learning about *IWWL* specifically before the interview with the evaluator, both cited NBM's reputation as a leader in youth programming and said they have communicated with NBM staff in the past to learn about their approach to youth programming (either through an in-person visit to NBM or via telephone).

EXPERIENCES WITH TEEN PROGRAMS

Museum peers were asked to discuss their experiences with youth programs in museums. Specifically: 1) what makes them thrive, 2) common weaknesses and potential opportunities, 3) common challenges or threats they face.

FACTORS THAT MAKE TEEN PROGRAMS THRIVE

Peers said several factors are key to creating a thriving youth program:

- ◆ **Youth agency:** Both said it is crucial that museums allow youth to have a voice in the museum so they feel valued and can develop their sense of self. They explained that cultivating youths' agency means providing opportunities for them to pursue what interests them, remaining adaptable to different learning styles and courses of action, and showcasing youths' ideas publicly (e.g., via an exhibition, an event, etc.). All of this ensures a museum's commitment to teens is more than just "lip service."
- ◆ **Committed adults:** One said youth programs thrive when run by "dedicated, positive adult mentors" who are deeply invested in the participants. Being a teen is "hard," and teens need support emotionally and help accessing resources to deal with challenges.
- ◆ **Frequency and consistency:** One said the more time teens spend in the program, the greater its impact; for instance, meeting at least once a week throughout the year.
- ◆ **Connection to mission:** One said, in their experience, youth programs thrive when their goals embody a museum's mission and when they take full advantage of the unique resources at a museum's disposal (e.g., its collections, subject-matter expertise).
- ◆ **Career development:** One said youth programs thrive when they provide teens with pathways for career development. For instance, opportunities to meet with museum staff and learn about their careers; this also helps garner staff buy-in.

WEAKNESSES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Peers named a few areas of weakness in museum teen programs, which they also saw as opportunities for growth and improvement:

- ◆ **Lack of training:** Both said museum educators who run youth programs are typically subject matter experts, but often lack adequate training to support the socio-emotional needs of teens (e.g., social work and/or training for trauma intervention, crisis management, etc.). This can make it difficult for educators to take a holistic view of teens (i.e., consider the “whole young person”) and provide them with adequate support when teens turn to them with challenges. Both hoped museums would embed more social services training or support systems for youth programming staff, either through consultants, professional development, or hiring staff with training in these areas.
- ◆ **Lack of diversity:** One explained that while most museum youth programs strive for diversity, they often fall short in truly embracing every sense of the word. For instance, participants might be diverse in terms of gender and ethnicity, but do they represent a range of neighborhoods, schools, personal interests, academic skill level, or past level of exposure to museums?
- ◆ **Lack of compensation:** One felt strongly that youth participants should be paid for their time, since they are making valuable contributions to museums. And, this might help diversify programs by attracting teens who would otherwise take part-time jobs.
- ◆ **Lack of integration:** One said providing teens the chance to create a “teen exhibition” or a “teen event” is valuable in that it gives them agency, but also said it is worth exploring how museums might integrate teens’ ideas into their work more holistically.

CHALLENGES AND THREATS

Peers also shared a few challenges or threats museum teen programs often face:

- ◆ **Non-traditional audience:** Both discussed the fact that teens typically are not a priority audience for most museums, and this can stunt youth programs’ growth if a museum is not fully ready to embrace the teen voice. For example, one said if a museum intends to serve as a “safe space” for teens to express themselves, that may mean confronting some controversial current issues rather than remaining “neutral.”
- ◆ **Staff burnout:** One said the lack of training in social services and the pressure of advocating the value of youth programming to potentially skeptical museum leadership can lead to burnout among education staff.
- ◆ **Funding:** One discussed funding as a threat to youth programs in two ways: 1) that many programs depend on external funding; and 2) that programs are subject to shifting trends in what funders support. This creates pressure to continuously reinvent programming to appeal to funders.
- ◆ **Program subject matter:** One said another potential challenge is the subject matter of the program or museum itself, and determining appealing entry points for teens to keep them engaged. Allowing for flexibility (e.g., letting teens pursue questions or ideas that interest them) is key to combatting this challenge.

VALUE OF YOUTH PROGRAMS

Peers also discussed the overall value of museum youth programs, 1) for youth participants, 2) for a museum, and 3) for a city or community.

FOR PARTICIPANTS

Overall, peers said the benefits of museum youth programs for youth participants are “immeasurable” but fall into a few general categories:

- ◆ **Bridging communities:** Both said museum youth programs help teens meet, interact, and form strong friendships with other teens (and adults) from different backgrounds whom they would not meet otherwise.
- ◆ **Skill building:** Both said museum youth programs help teens develop a range of concrete, practical skills, such as academic and research skills that are important for college readiness (e.g., writing, close observation), creative skills (e.g., photography), career skills (e.g., project management, customer service) and socio-emotional skills (e.g., communication, taking critiques). All of this helps teens develop confidence and a strong sense of “individual identity.”
- ◆ **Appreciation for museums:** One said youth programs help develop teens’ comfort with museums and museum literacy; that is, teens develop a better understanding of museums and appreciate all they offer their communities. For instance, teens might learn that it is possible to conduct research using a museum’s collections.

FOR A MUSEUM

Peers shared two main ways teen programs contribute to museums:

- ◆ **Fresh perspectives:** Both said museums, especially more traditional ones (e.g., historical societies), benefit from hearing teens’ unique perspectives on current societal and cultural issues, which they can infuse into their exhibitions, events, or other endeavors. They described a “symbiotic relationship” between museum professionals and teens learning from one another.
- ◆ **Community engagement:** One also said that bringing diverse teens into the museum helps museums more deeply engage with and be held accountable to their communities as well as build an audience for the future.

FOR A CITY OR COMMUNITY

When asked what value museum youth programs provide for a city or community, peers discussed many of the same ideas. In short, they said engaging diverse audiences in these programs not only helps youth participants “see themselves as part of the larger city,” but can also help community members build relationships with museums. Further, youth participants will apply the skills they learn in museum youth programs to anything else they do in the future (inside or outside of the museum), which ultimately strengthens the whole community.

PERSPECTIVES ON IWWL

Finally, peers were asked to discuss IWWL specifically, based on information provided by the evaluator and their existing knowledge of NBM's youth programs.

WHAT MAKES IWWL UNIQUE?

When asked what, if anything, about IWWL seems unique compared to other museums' youth programs, peers had mixed responses. They discussed a few aspects of IWWL that struck them most – the final exhibition, its focus on community investigation, and creative elements. One said these aspects made IWWL “distinct” from other youth programs, while the other saw parallels with youth programs at other institutions.

- ◆ **The IWWL exhibition:** Both discussed how NBM devotes a large exhibition space to showcasing IWWL teens' ideas and creations, which is impressive since many institutions are unwilling or reluctant to give teens so much real estate in the museum. They both spoke very positively about this aspect of the program, but one said it is not “unique,” since other museums do the same for teen programs.
- ◆ **Community investigation:** Both were struck by IWWL's focus on helping teens explore their city and learn about where they live, in part because it allows the program to be flexible in response to the changing community as well as teens' personalities and interests from year to year. Again, one did not see this focus as unique, but the other called this “active investigation” in the community “exciting.”
- ◆ **Creativity:** One alluded to the creative elements of IWWL, which they valued since it reflects NBM's “architectural mission.” While emphasizing creativity might not be unique since it is also a focus of art museum programs, IWWL is still a model for historical societies and non-arts-focused institutions hoping to inject more creative elements into their youth programming.

ADVICE FOR NBM

Peers were also asked whether they had any advice for NBM as it considers the future of IWWL. They shared a number of positive aspects of IWWL they hoped NBM would retain, including the exhibition space, its focus on creative skills, its flexibility, and its “political” focus on current events in the city, which they said aligns with NBM's mission and the political nature of Washington, D.C.. To push IWWL further, they suggested:

- ◆ Offering public programming for youth using the IWWL exhibition as inspiration; these programs could be co-created with IWWL participants.
- ◆ Inviting program alumni and/or community mentors to participate in an advisory board after their program experience has ended to give input on future IWWL programs.
- ◆ Finding ways to increase the program's diversity, such as by inviting students from more schools in different neighborhoods to participate.
- ◆ Offering NBM staff regular professional development opportunities related to youth development (e.g., social work).