

PROGRAM EVALUATION: CREATIVE-IN-RESIDENCE

Prepared for
National Building Museum
Washington, DC
April 2019




ABOUT THIS REPORT

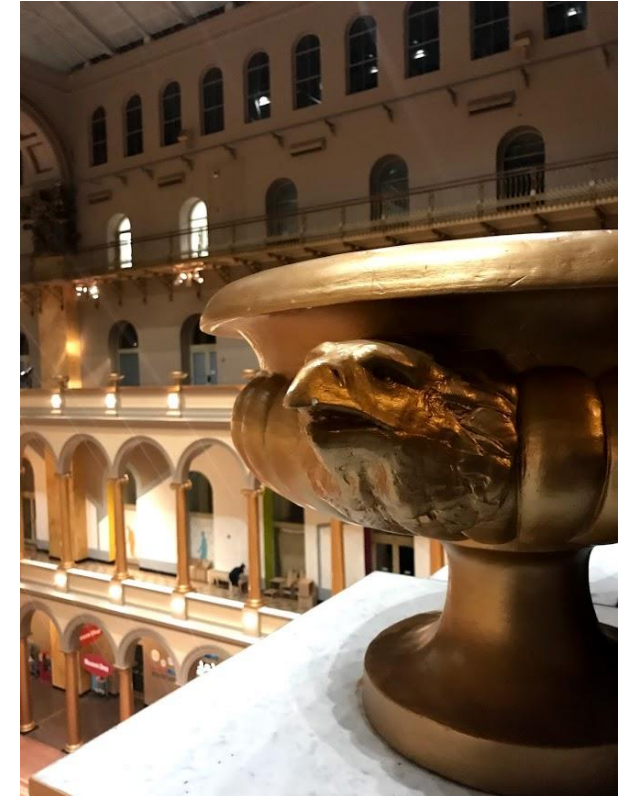
This report presents results from a study of *Creative-in-Residence*, conducted by RK&A, Inc. for the National Building Museum (NBM).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. [Introduction](#)
2. [Executive Summary](#)
3. [Study Background](#)
4. [Findings: General Visitors](#)
5. [Findings: Performers](#)
6. [Findings: Creatives](#)
7. [Findings: Cultural Peers](#)
8. [Appendix](#)

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

This report is a slidedoc: a narrative report created using PowerPoint. Slidedocs are made using a presentation software to more easily allow for the integration of words and visuals, but they remain rooted in narrative. Thus, this report is meant to be read (either on screen or in print) rather than presented. The report is organized by the sections indicated in the Table of Contents to the left; within each section, each slide contains findings on a singular theme or question. For an overarching view of the report, use slide sorter mode ().



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OVERVIEW

This report presents results from a study of *Creative-in-Residence* (CIR), conducted by RK&A, Inc. for the National Building Museum (NBM). CIR is a community engagement program created by the NBM to explore how visual and/or performing arts can be used to involve people in better understanding the built environment. In the most recent iteration of CIR, movement artist Heather Sultz brought together dancers, performers, and community members for two weeks in January 2019 to create an original movement piece that invited visitors to explore the museum's historic building in new ways.

The purpose of the study is to explore the extent to which CIR adds value to NBM as a place that offers a variety of meaningful experiences, and consider implications for the program's future.

For this study, RK&A conducted telephone interviews with participants who have different relationships to the program, to hear a variety of perspectives. Specifically, RK&A interviewed general visitors who attended the January 2019 performance, performers who co-created the piece with the most recent CIR, past creatives who have worked with the museum (including the most recent CIR), and cultural professionals (peers) who manage similar programs at other institutions.

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

OVERALL PERCEPTIONS

Overall, participants had positive experiences with CIR, and those involved in the most recent iteration enjoyed many aspects of the January 2019 performance.

For general visitors, the January 2019 performance was a “powerful experience” that helped them experience NBM’s building through an unexpected medium (dance). Several, for instance, enjoyed learning about the building’s history as the former pension office and seeing areas they are not typically allowed to visit, such as the fourth floor. Performers, in turn, appreciated the chance to work closely with the most recent CIR and said the experience boosted their creativity, felt “empowering,” and helped them develop a “special bond” with the building. Creatives also spoke positively about their experiences with NBM and praised staff’s collaboration skills, open-mindedness, and genuine enthusiasm for creatives’ work. In fact, the most recent CIR said working with NBM was the “smoothest” experience she has had collaborating with another institution. Although it is mostly related to the January 2019 performance, this positive feedback is encouraging for any future CIR iterations.



OVERALL PERCEPTIONS

Although participants had positive experiences with the January 2019 performance overall, there is room for improvement.

CONSIDER THIS

1. Crowding was a challenge at the January 2019 performance. While not all iterations of CIR will involve moving throughout the building, NBM may wish to consider strategies to mitigate this issue.
2. Participants perceived a lack of gender and ethnic diversity among performers and audience members. While NBM ultimately cannot control who responds to open calls for participation or who attends CIR events, it might consider strategies to help diverse audiences feel these types of experiences are for them, such as increasing the diversity of creatives invited to do residencies.
3. Performers strongly associate their positive experiences with the most recent CIR as an individual. Though not surprising, this raises the question of how NBM could ensure CIR experiences are viewed as a creative partnering between NBM and CIRs versus as CIR's projects as individual artists.



PROMOTING ENGAGEMENT WITH BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Multiple aspects of the performance helped participants develop their interest in the built environment.

Positively, visitors and performers saw the January 2019 performance as intimately connected with the museum’s mission. The medium of movement (dance) seems to have been particularly effective for helping visitors experience the building in new and different ways, beyond what is possible in traditional exhibitions. Specifically, being led throughout the building and watching performers dance in unexpected places (e.g., in the arches, on columns) helped visitors slow down, notice details, and more deliberately consider the building’s unique qualities. Similarly, performers said working on a site-specific piece changed how they will view spaces moving forward – not just as somewhere you are, but as “something you experience.” Most also appreciated learning about the building’s “hidden history” as the pension office, which came across in the performance through the use of props (e.g., red ribbons), visiting rooms that are normally off-limits (e.g., pensioner’s office), and through the conversation with the artist following the performance. This bodes well for the future of CIR because it demonstrates that there is a strong appetite among visitors for engaging with the building’s history in creative and intriguing ways.



PROMOTING ENGAGEMENT WITH BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Participants' takeaways from the January 2019 performance lend insight into what NBM might emphasize in future iterations of CIR (though with a different creative and/or medium).

CONSIDER THIS

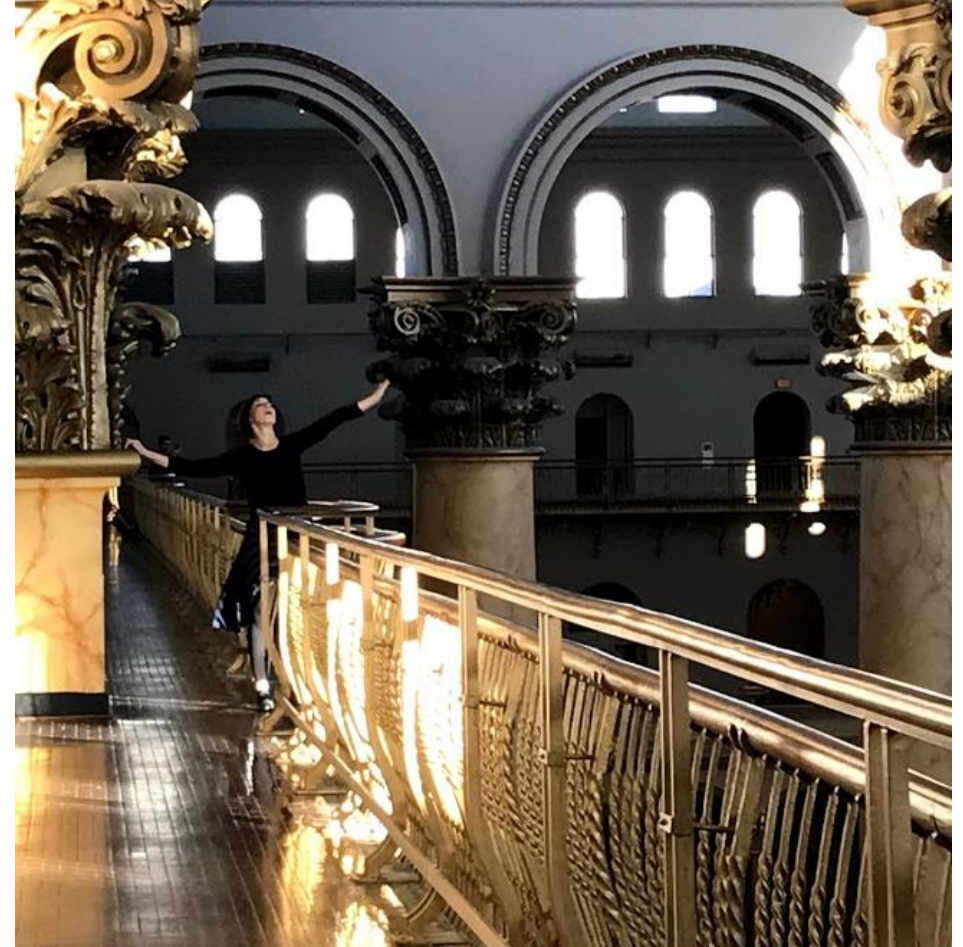
1. Moving throughout the building *in a very deliberate way* proved to be particularly effective for inspiring visitors' curiosity and critical thinking about the building's history and structure. How might NBM employ this strategy in the future, either through CIR or other programs?
2. Visitors' and performers' takeaways from the January 2019 performance were mostly historical and less about their own role in shaping the built environment, the latter of which is a program goal (as indicated by the education department's Impact Framework). NBM might consider how to collaborate with future CIRs to more deliberately emphasize the connections between people and place and help visitors feel agency in the built environment. Past creatives interviewed value creating community as an important goal of their work, so future CIRs are likely to support this effort.



VALUING NBM AS A PLACE FOR MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCES

Results indicate that CIR strengthened visitors' and creatives' appreciation of NBM and that there are many potential benefits of museum-creative collaborations for visitors, museum staff, and creatives alike.

As previously noted, visitors, performers, and creatives all said their experiences with NBM shifted their understanding of the built environment and the building's history. Beyond that, visitors and performers also said the performance made them more aware and appreciative of NBM in general (e.g., "there is a lot going on I didn't know about"). A few even intended to become members. Past creatives were left with a great "respect" for NBM, and they hoped to continue collaborating with NBM. More broadly, cultural peers spoke about the many benefits of working closely with creatives, including allowing museums to engage visitors with their collections in innovative ways, helping staff approach their work more collaboratively and creatively, and integrating historically underrepresented perspectives into the museum, all of which increases a museum's overall value to its community. All of this should encourage NBM in thinking about the future of the program.

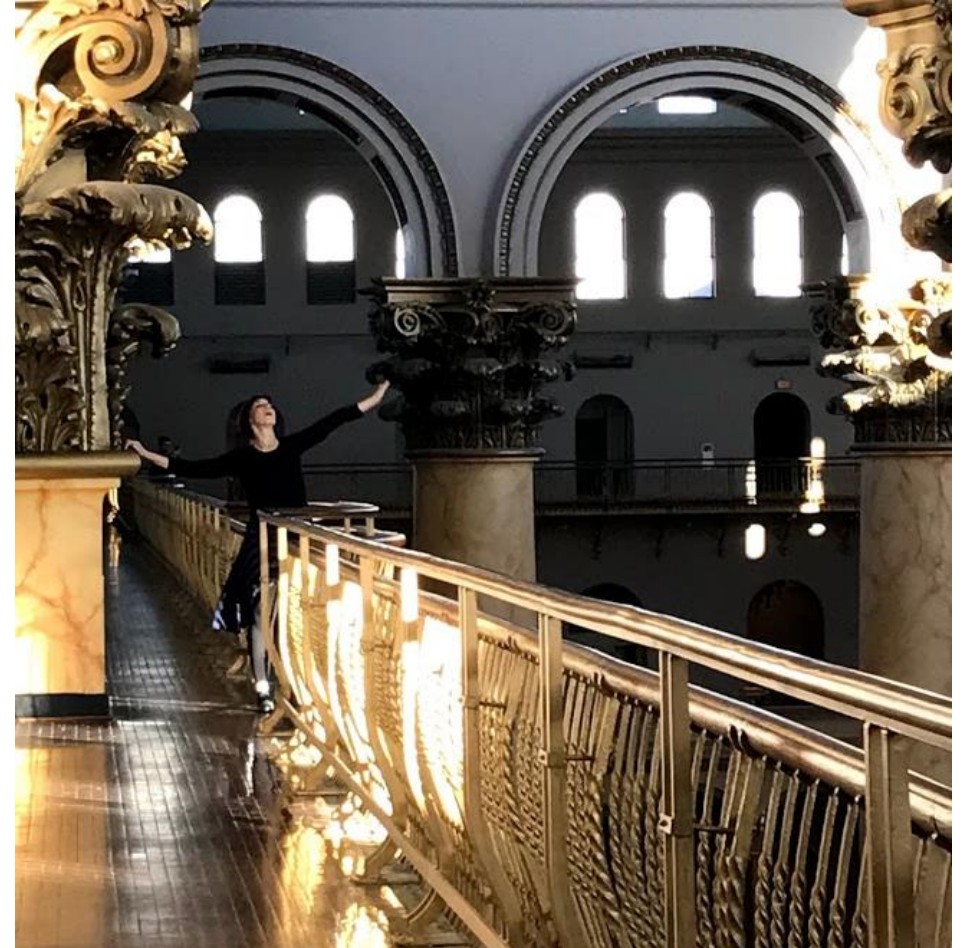


VALUING NBM AS A PLACE FOR MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCES

Although CIR strengthened most participants' appreciation of NBM, the experience of one past creative (who declined to be interviewed) should serve as a reminder of the importance of maintaining relationships with creatives.

CONSIDER THIS

One past CIR declined to be interviewed for the study because she was left with a negative impression of NBM after her residency. In an email response to the evaluator's invitation to participate in an interview, she explained that while the museum expressed enthusiasm for continuing their relationship after her residency had officially ended, staff failed to reach out or respond to her inquiries about working together again ("they ghosted me"). While this experience may be unique, it should serve as a reminder of the importance of clear and frequent communication with creatives with whom NBM hopes to have an ongoing relationship. Consider what systems could be implemented to keep track of communication with creatives after their residency has ended.



FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Those with more distant perspectives on CIR (cultural peers and past creatives) offered additional insights based on their experiences either with NBM or running similar programs, which are worth exploring as NBM considers the program's future.

What is the right balance of structure and freedom?

Throughout the interviews, past creatives and cultural peers discussed the importance of cross-departmental collaboration and balancing the institution's and the creative's goals for a successful residency. While past creatives all said NBM staff "let them breathe" while still supporting their work, they also sometimes left with the impression that there is "inadequate communication" among NBM staff, which may have led to missed opportunities.

CONSIDER THIS

In light of this finding, how might NBM provide consistent structure into each CIR iteration that supports collaboration but still allows for creative freedom? Perhaps, staff across departments could work together to create standards for using the building that are provided to all CIRs upfront, so CIRs have a sense of logistical limitations but are otherwise unrestricted. Explicitly acknowledging limitations of the collection and/or staff's technical abilities will also be important.

What is the ideal residency length, and how much planning is necessary?

The programs cultural peers manage vary greatly in duration, but no matter how long their programs were, all said having the residency begin with a "planning" period has been key to success. Of course, both long-term and short-term residencies have benefits and drawbacks. Long-term residencies (e.g., 2 years) offer more time for creatives and museum staff to develop a relationship, which can potentially lead to richer projects; however, they require dedicated staff to maintain the residency over such a long time. Shorter residencies (e.g., 6 months) may require less resources on the museum's part but can feel rushed.

CONSIDER THIS

While there is no perfect formula, NBM should consider how the length of the most recent and past iterations of CIR align with its overall program goals. And, consider building a planning period into each residency to ensure CIRs have adequate time to develop projects in collaboration with NBM staff.

STUDY BACKGROUND

STUDY OBJECTIVES

In 2018, the National Building Museum (NBM) contracted RK&A, Inc. (RK&A) to conduct a study of *Creative-in-Residence* (CIR), a community engagement program created by the National Building Museum (NBM) to explore how visual and/or performing arts can be used to involve people in better understanding the built environment. Through CIR, the museum works with creative individuals and artist groups of all disciplines to develop and complete new, site-specific work inspired by the museum's building and collections. In the most recent iteration of CIR, movement artist Heather Sultz brought together dancers, performers, and community members over two weeks in January 2019 to create an original movement piece that invited visitors to explore and learn about the museum's historic building in new ways.

The purpose of the study is to examine the program from multiple perspectives to provide as complete an understanding as possible of the program, its outcomes, and the potential for future programming like it at NBM. Specifically, the objectives are to:

- Examine the experiences and opinions of those involved in the program from varying perspectives, including the most recent and past creatives-in-residence, performers/co-creators, museum peers, and general visitors who attend the program;
- Identify the specific elements of CIR that can best help participants understand and develop interest in the built environment;
- Determine the extent to which the program adds value to NBM as a place that offers a variety of meaningful experiences;
- Consider the program's future and what can be prioritized and/or changed to best align with the program's purpose moving forward.

METHODOLOGY

RK&A conducted a series of interviews with multiple stakeholders representing varying perspectives and levels of involvement with CIR.

For a look at the visitor experience of the program, RK&A focused on the community-based work of the most recent CIR artist, Heather Sultz, and conducted short-answer interviews with:

- **General visitors:** 10 adult members of the public who attend the final CIR performance, entitled *Transits & Passages*, on January 26th, 2019.
- **Performers:** 4 members of the public and 1 NBM staff member who co-created and performed *Transits & Passages* with the artist.

Additionally, RK&A reviewed documentation provided by NBM (i.e., education department Impact Framework, creatives' work sample, call for performers, etc.) to provide contextual understanding of the program. RK&A also attended the final performance at the museum on January 26th, 2019.

For a big-picture examination of the program, RK&A conducted in-depth interviews with stakeholders with either an intimate perspective or an informed outsider perspective on CIR. These include:

- **Past Creatives:** The most recent creative-in-residence, Heather Sultz; and 3 other creatives who have worked closely with NBM in the past (either as part of CIR or in another capacity).
- **Cultural Peers:** 3 cultural professionals who work at different institutions and have experience managing similar programs.

DATA ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

About Interviews

Interviews are a qualitative method in which the interviewer can speak one-on-one with individuals about a specific topic. 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 Appendix). 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. Interviews with General Visitors were conducted in-person at NBM on January 26th, 2019 – the day of the performance – and audio-recorded with participants' permission to facilitate analysis. Interviews with all other participants were conducted via telephone; the evaluator took notes to facilitate analysis and audio-recorded for back-up with participants' permission.

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 CIR. Throughout the findings, verbatim quotations (edited for clarity) illustrate participants' thoughts and ideas as fully as possible; interviewer's questions appear in bold.

Interviewer's questions appear like this, in bold.

*"Quotations from participants look like this. *An asterisk within quotations indicates a second speaker.*"*

An asterisk (*) in the body text indicates additional commentary in the notes section.

FINDINGS: GENERAL VISITORS

GENERAL VISITORS OVERVIEW

RK&A conducted 7 interviews with 10 visitors who saw the CIR performance, *Transits & Passages*, at NBM in January 2019.* One-half of visitors attended the afternoon performance at 3:30pm, while the other one-half attended the evening performance at 6pm. We present findings for all visitors together owing to the small sample size, noting differences in their perspectives by performance time when appropriate.

Of the visitors who participated in an interview:

- Slightly more than one-half are male; slightly less than one-half are female.
- They range in age from 29-60 years; the median age is 41 years.**
- All but one are repeat visitors to NBM, though none are members.
- Most identified as a dancer or performer; a few said they used to dance, while a few others said they still dance recreationally.
- Most do not work in the built environment fields of design, architecture, or engineering. A few said they do, as a production designer, an architect, and a “journalist for engineers.”
- All but one were unfamiliar with the artist before attending the performance.



MOTIVATION TO ATTEND PERFORMANCE

Several factors motivated visitors to attend the performance.

Interest in dance: A few said they came to see the performance because they enjoy attending dance/movement performances, especially free ones. Another does rock climbing in her spare time, which she compared to dance since it also involves moving your body through space.

Fan of NBM: Two repeat visitors said NBM is one of their favorite local museums. Another was a furloughed government employee who visited NBM for the first time during the government shutdown* and enjoyed the experience, so he returned for the performance.

Interest in the building: Two were interested in seeing the museum's historic building specifically; one, for instance, hoped photographing the building during the performance would be a "different" and challenging experience.

Knew performer: Two knew one of the performers personally.

No specific reason: Two gave no specific reason for attending the performance; one "stumbled upon it" and the other came with a friend who wanted to attend.

Combination of dance and history: One said they were motivated to attend the performance because NBM is a great place to "combine" history and dance.

LIKE MOST

Overall, visitors spoke extremely positively about the performance. A few in particular had profound reactions, calling the performance “powerful” and saying it “took [their] breath away.”

Almost all liked that the performance invited visitors to follow the dancers throughout NBM’s building, and they enjoyed seeing the dancers use variety of spaces throughout the museum. More specifically:

- A few said moving around helped them focus on the building’s structure (versus on the objects).
- A few enjoyed seeing the museum from different vantage points they had never experienced, such as the 4th floor, because it gave them a “new perspective” on the building.
- Two liked the aesthetics of seeing the performers dance in unexpected spaces, such as on columns and in staircases.
- One said moving around made them feel like “part of the performance,” especially when the dancers physically interacted with visitors (e.g., by holding their hands).
- One said seeing the performance happen in spaces throughout the museum provoked their “imagination” and made them think about how to best utilize any space “regardless of what you have in mind.”



“I liked that we could move along with the dancers versus sitting down and observing from afar. You are part of the whole performance. They hold your hands and you follow them. When they started to move all around, you see it as different pictures and put it together and it all makes sense. And in the rooms with pictures about what happened there, you can look and see and figure out why they are going there or singing. It was amazing, you feel like you're part of it, it's a new way of approaching dancing. Your energy is part of it.”

LIKE MOST

Other things participants liked about the performance include:

Use of props: A few found the use of props compelling – especially the Civil War uniforms and the red ribbon --- because they liked the symbolism and because it helped them follow the story.

Live music: Two liked this; one, because they liked how the music played off of the building’s architecture; the other, because they enjoy cello.

Humor: One said he enjoyed the humor of the performers and described a “funny” instance where one of the performers pursued them with a box and he “had to figure out how to get away.”

Interactive history: One described interactive moments that made them think critically about history; for instance, seeing the dancers climb on and repeatedly close the stairwell gate to prevent visitors from passing through, which helped them think about what it must have felt like for people (e.g., African Americans) to be historically faced with barriers to success.



LIKE LEAST

Visitors also named a few things they did not like about the performance experience.

Crowding: A few – most of whom attended the 3:30pm performance – said the large crowd detracted from the performance experience. Two, for instance, said it was hard to see, hear, and “appreciate” what was happening from afar; especially, when the performance was confined to small spaces on the upper floors. Another worried the crowding in the stairwells would be “dangerous” in an emergency.

What did you like the least about the performance?

“Not knowing where to go next, I noticed they incorporated a lot of gestures of where to go or where to look. I don’t know if they weren’t expecting all the people here [or not]. Some of the corners in the beginning... it was hard to see what was going on, especially on the stairs, where they were putting the wet pieces of paper. I need[ed] more directions for where to go.”

Acoustics: Two discussed sound. One said NBM’s introduction and the concluding conversation with the artist were difficult to hear since there was no microphone. The other said the chanting that was part of the performance was “disconcerting.”

Lacked historical context: One wished for more historical context to better understand the performance’s subject matter; perhaps, through “spoken word” or a written pamphlet.

Dancers’ level of experience: One said it was easy to tell which performers were the “real” dancers – that is, dancers with professional dance training – and that they would have found a “tighter” performance more entertaining.

NEW LEARNINGS FROM THE PERFORMANCE

When asked if the performance made them think about or learn anything new, visitors shared a few ideas.

Building's history: A few spoke generally but said the performance made them think about the building's history as the pension administration building after the Civil War. For one this was new information, while two others indicated they had some knowledge of the building's history, but it was not top of mind prior to the performance.

Pensioners' experiences: A few said the performance made them think about individual pensioners' stories, including the hardships they went through trying to obtain their pensions. Two aspects of the performance in particular brought this to light: 1) when pensioners' names were read aloud while their documents were stuck on a performer, and 2) when the cellist played in the old pensioner's office.

Performance: One enjoyed hearing about the performers' backgrounds in the discussion following the performance. Another was pleased to learn of NBM's support of performance-based initiatives.

Unsure: One was unsure whether the performance made them think about anything new; another said it did not, but did not expound.

WHY INVITE THE ARTIST TO CREATE A PERFORMANCE PIECE?

A few trends emerged when visitors shared why they thought NBM invited the artist to do a residency and create this performance.

Sharing the building's history: A few said the building has a rich history that is potentially underappreciated, so inviting an artist to create a site-specific performance is a creative way to bring the building's history "to life."

Considering new perspectives: A few thought the museum's motivation was to find new and creative ways to engage audiences with built environment topics, beyond traditional exhibitions. One, for instance, said they typically associate the built environment with "structure" so a movement piece provided a new and contrasting perspective.

Engaging new audiences: A few said NBM likely hoped to engage new audiences and/or more intentionally engage members of the local community in their work, and they were pleased to see the diversity of both performers and audience members.* One (who previously worked in museums) saw this as part of a field-wide need for museums to find ways to better promote public engagement in the arts.

"Promoting change:" One said museums can "promote change" by working closely with artists, but did not expound.

Unsure: One was hesitant to respond, but speculated NBM might have wanted to "showcase their site."

Why do you think NBM invited the artist to do a residency and create this piece?

*"To give viewers and anyone that visits a new perspective and be able to put into dance some of the history and bring it to life, and tell stories through dance in the actual space. And to get the local community to think differently about it, educate themselves, be creative... [it's an] awesome opportunity to be part of community art and not have to pay. *It doesn't feel like architecture. When you see dancing and movement, you see there's also movement in and out or within places.*"*

PERFORMANCE'S CONNECTION TO MISSION

Visitors were also asked how they thought the performance connected to NBM's mission (as they understood it).

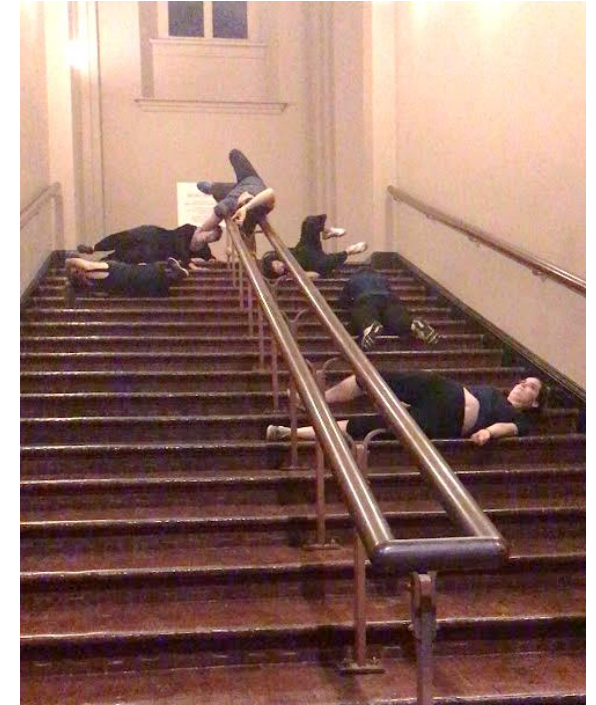
While they were not always confident in their understandings of the mission, they shared a few ideas, which largely overlap with why they thought NBM invited the artist to do a residency.

Sharing the building's history: A few again said the performance was intended to showcase the building's "forgotten history," including the many voices that were part of its story. They said this was illustrated in many ways, such as through the performers' portrayal of wounded soldiers.

The building as "an experience:" A few said the performance was a (successful) attempt to make the building more "interesting" and "accessible;" and, to encourage visitors to see beyond the building as simply a structure, but "as something you experience." They cited a few aspects of the performance that reinforced this idea, such as how visitors were "pulled through" different parts of the building as well as how performers "slithered" down the staircases and climbed on the columns.

Unsure: Two had trouble articulating a connection to the museum's mission ("it's hard to say").

Construction: One said moving through the building and seeing the "wear on the bricks" made them consider how buildings are constructed.



"I am not familiar with the mission, but definitely because of the way it's built, with the story of the space... helping people see beyond space as the building, but as something you experience."

PERCEPTIONS OF NBM POST-PERFORMANCE

Visitors were also asked if the performance changed their impression of NBM.

All spoke positively about the museum, and a few shared more specific thoughts, some of which relate to NBM's building specifically and some of which are more general.

Deepened respect for NBM: A few (who all attended the 6pm performance) said they liked this “new type of public engagement” and it made them want to return. One also said learning that NBM works closely with artists has evolved their understanding of the museum from “simple” to complex – “I had no idea they did this kind of thing.”

Appreciation for the building: A few spoke about this. Two were grateful for the opportunity to see NBM's building from “new angles” from the 4th floor, which is not normally open to visitors. Similarly, one said noticing details (like gates and crevices) throughout the performance has changed how they will view buildings in general moving forward. And, another said the performance reminded them of the “monumental nature” of NBM's building.

Positive impression but no change: A few spoke positively but did not articulate any particular way the performance changed their impression of NBM.



“I know from reading the packet before, the main objective was to make people think or see things differently in terms of spaces, and that made me think... I won't look at stairs or gates the same way again, or crevices in the walls, because you can make artistic impressions out of it. If I ever ventured into choreography, this would inspire me to incorporate similar things.”

UNDERSTANDING OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Next, visitors were told the museum’s mission – to inspire curiosity about the world we design and build – and asked to discuss their level of familiarity with the built environment before attending the performance as well as the extent to which the performance made them think about it.

Most said they were familiar with the concept of the built environment prior to the performance (either through their studies or from having previously visited NBM), while **two were unfamiliar**. In their responses, almost all returned to their favorite aspect of the performance – **moving around the building** – and shared several ways this made them consider the built environment:

- A few said moving around made them think about the building’s history; for instance, how each room has been used and how the construction process in the 1800s might have differed from today.
- A few spoke broadly but said moving around and seeing dancers occupy unexpected parts of the building (e.g., arches) helped them notice details they never would have noticed before.
- Two said the performance made them think about the different ways we use space depending on our needs. One said it reminded her of how she and her cat move around her home differently.
- Two mentioned having to carefully consider their path when weaving around performers who were staggered and stationary on the staircases. One said this helped them notice details since they had to pay close attention to their path; the other said this maneuvering made NBM feel like a “sacred space” because it reminded them that people were casualties.
- One said moving around reinforced the grandeur of NBM’s building and made them reflect on other favorite buildings in DC that they want to visit again soon.
- One said the performance did not make them consider the built environment.*

LINGERING CURIOSITIES

Finally, visitors shared what, if anything, they were left wondering about after attending the performance.

History: Two were curious to learn more about the building's history and if this information is available on the museum's website or through "historical tours." Another said understanding history makes people "thoughtful, compassionate, and unified."

Process: One wanted to know how the residency came to be; for instance, if the artist wrote a proposal to NBM, who funded the project, and how performers were recruited. Another wondered how the artist determined the choreography.

Another performance?: Two wondered if NBM would host more performances with "different choreographers" in the future.

Diversity: One, who attended the 6pm performance, noted the lack of gender diversity among performers (mostly female) and lack of ethnic diversity among audience members (mostly white).

Nothing: One said the performance did not leave them wondering about anything in particular.

Additionally, several reiterated that they enjoyed the performance and said they hoped NBM would put on more programming like this in the future.

Do you have any additional thoughts you'd like to share?

"I saw her on the stairs and think that was a great use of the space. I hope there are more things like this in the future."

"Just my gratitude that they made it happen."

"In general, thank you for the opportunity to do this. It happened to be I was going through social media for something to do today, and this came up."

FINDINGS: PERFORMERS

PERFORMERS OVERVIEW

RK&A conducted 4 interviews with members of the public and 1 interview with an NBM staff member who co-created and performed in the final performance piece, *Transits & Passages*, at NBM in January 2019.* All of the performers RK&A interviewed were selected by NBM staff because they represent varying levels of performance experience and familiarity with the museum. All interviews were conducted via telephone, approximately 2 weeks after the performance, to allow performers time to reflect on their experience.

Of the performers interviewed:

- All are female.
- Their familiarity with the museum prior to the performance varied:
 - Two had never visited NBM prior to being part of this performance.
 - One is a teacher and had visited NBM many times with her students. Another visited NBM for the first time recently, after moving to the area.
 - One is a longtime NBM staff member.
- Their prior experience with dance/performance also varied:
 - Two identify as dance professionals (e.g., teach dance, part of a company), while one identified as a dance hobbyist and has performed in small-scale recitals.
 - Two had never danced publicly before this opportunity.
- Most do not work in the built environment fields of design, architecture, or engineering.
- All but one were unfamiliar with the artist before the performance.



MOTIVATION TO APPLY

Performers shared a few factors that motivated them to apply to be part of *Transits & Passages*. Their primary motivations for participating differed depending on their prior level of experience with dance/performance.

Getting outside of comfort zone: Those with little to no dance/performance experience were primarily motivated by a desire to venture outside of their comfort zones. One, for instance, said she is trying to find ways to challenge herself as her 60th birthday approaches. Similarly, the NBM staff member said she hoped to “push” herself by participating.

Creative inspiration in dance: Those with a lot of prior dance/performance experience primarily sought creative inspiration through new and different dance experiences. One said working with Heather and seeing her creative process in action would be a “growth opportunity” for her as a dancer.

Love for NBM: Two said they were partially motivated to participate because they had visited NBM before and “love the museum.”

Heather’s experience: One non-dancer said seeing that Heather has extensive experience as a movement artist was motivating because it made her feel she would come away from the experience with a “deeper sense” of dance.

Quick timeframe: One said the quick time frame for the performance – about one month from start to finish – was a motivating factor since it made it easier to fit into their busy schedule.

No dance training required: One non-dancer also said a motivating factor was the fact that NBM and Heather did not require performers to have any formal dance training.

MOST ENJOYABLE

When asked what they found most enjoyable about the experience, performers spoke extremely positively about the artist's approach to the creative process and shared a few interrelated ideas.

First, most appreciated that **they were “truly a part of the creative process;”** that is, from the start they were invited to co-develop the performance and not just learn pre-determined choreography.

Second, most enjoyed **the mix of structure and improvisation** the artist used to facilitate the co-creation process. As an example, one explained that the artist hoped to use the museum's columns and invited performers to try out different ways of interacting with them in rehearsals until they mutually decided what would be best for the performance.

Third, a few said **the artist created a “welcoming” and “non-judgmental” atmosphere** from the start by explaining that they would all work together, which the other performers upheld. As one older, non-dancer put it, “I always felt my voice was heard.”

Finally, a few said they enjoyed spending time with a **varied group of performers** who brought diverse ideas and levels of experience to the table.



“I think there was always a sense of empowerment, even though it was a mix of people with experience and minimal or no experience. It was a supportive and creative environment. We had a say in what we were doing, we got to create together, and I never felt judgement from peers because Heather created that atmosphere from day one that we were doing this together despite our level of skills. We're creating the piece together, and it's not about the kind or level of performer you were.”

LEAST ENJOYABLE

When asked what was least enjoyable about the experience, performers shared a few ideas, but overall remained positive about the experience.

Egos: Two said there were a couple of other performers who “thought they were more important” than others. However, they also acknowledged that this is typical in any group setting and said the artist did a good job of managing them without being demeaning, so their attitudes did not detract greatly from the overall experience.

Late nights: Two said it was tiring to rehearse late into the night (until 9pm) to prepare for the performance, but they understood that this schedule was necessary since many of the performers had full-time jobs.

Aspects of choreography: One, who had no dance experience prior to this performance, said it was challenging to “get the rhythm right” and to quickly learn new choreography as the piece evolved and when other performers dropped out. Another, also a non-dancer, said she is out of shape so moving up and down the staircases so often in the performance was challenging.

OVERALL TAKEAWAYS

Next, performers were asked what they took away from the experience overall. Their takeaways are wide-ranging and personal, yet broadly fall into three categories:

Comfort with Themselves

A few – mostly those with little to no performance background – explained that working with Heather to co-create the performance made them more “flexible,” “adaptable,” and less self-critical. Improvising, for instance, helped them learn to not take themselves too seriously and becoming more comfortable with “discomfort.” One was also proud of herself for working closely with strangers.

Creative Confidence

A few described feeling more creative and confident, in slightly different ways. One, for instance, took away the notion that “anyone can perform,” even non-professionals. Another said the experience left her with a “sense of empowerment” and served as a reminder that she thrives in creative and collaborative environments. And, one dance teacher said this experience was a “creativity boost” and that she hoped to experiment with new ways of exploring “how space influences our thinking” with her students.

Appreciation for NBM and the Arts

A few – mostly those with a performance background – described feeling more aware and appreciative of NBM’s offerings (e.g., “there’s a lot going on that I didn’t know about”) and more excited about the value of performance art in general. One, for instance, said she learned to appreciate the uniqueness of site-specific performance (“it can’t be done anywhere else”). Another spoke at length about the value of performing arts projects that bring members of the community together.

WHY INVITE THE ARTIST TO CREATE A PERFORMANCE PIECE?

A few trends emerged when performers shared why they thought NBM invited the artist to create this performance, some which relate to the artist's personality and experience and some which relate to broader interpretive goals.

“Unique” way to interpret the built environment: A few said the museum wanted find “unique” ways for visitors to experience architecture and the museum's building. One said doing so not only helps visitors see how dance and architecture “intersect” but also helps the building's history “come to life.”

Artist's people skills and subject matter expertise: A few praised the artist's people skills and said she is easily able to work with people from all different backgrounds. And, two said she is a good fit for NBM since she has extensive experience bringing “spatial environments” to life.

Change perceptions of dance: One said dance is often not thought of as fine arts (i.e., compared to painting) so this served as an opportunity to elevate dance's reputation and show the public how dance can be “educational” and “tell a story.”

New type of programming: One speculated that newness was a motivating factor (“they hadn't done a dance piece before”).



“It's a different way of looking at the museum. The building itself, I think people are awed by the architecture, and I think using movement to reflect that awe is just a different way of doing it. Usually when people go in, they look up see big columns, the tops of pillars, but the movement piece of it helped. You can read about the history but I think the whole piece made the history not come to life so much, but explored it in a different way. I thought that was a very unique way to educate people about the museum's history and form.”

PERFORMANCE'S CONNECTION TO MISSION

Performers were also asked how they thought the performance connected to NBM's mission (as they understood it based on their experience co-creating the performance).

All described the performance as intimately connected with the museum's mission and evoked its site-specific nature in their responses.

A few, for instance, explained that **everything the performers did was inspired by the building**, whether related to its history as a place where soldiers came to receive pensions ("everything we did represented their lives") or its architecture ("the space motivated our movements... it would not have worked anywhere else").

Two also said being part of the performance had a **"profound effect"** on them and that it **sparked their own curiosity and awe** for the building.

More broadly, two others (including the NBM staff member) said **the performance invited visitors of all backgrounds to engage with the building and experience exploring a place in new and creative ways** that are not possible in a normal museum visit.

What do you think the performance has to do with the mission of NBM?

"It goes to the basic value of exploring the built environment and world around us, and I think that this... even at a basic level of doing it within the building itself, it's part of the built world. It goes to the heart of exploring a space, location, or city and creating inspiration and seeing things in new ways. And those are key things we're looking at -- inspire people and help them see the world differently -- that's what we're getting at. So that was a key part of doing it in the building that way. And on the flip side, [seeing NBM differently] happened for performers too. We spent a lot of time together. There were people who had never been [to NBM] before but who like architecture or performance, and a few people who were very familiar with NBM, so we have these people from different walks of life with different understandings of the museum. At the end there was so much curiosity about the building, its history, what we're doing currently. [They were] asking about exhibits or summer programs."

-- NBM staff member

PERCEPTIONS OF NBM POST-PERFORMANCE

When asked whether the performance changed their impression of NBM, all spoke positively and said it had, in a few ways.

Deepened respect for building's history: A few said they now have a deeper appreciation for the building's rich history as the pension office around the time of the Civil War and how you can see this history in the building's architectural elements (e.g., "sculptural friezes" outside of the building), which was something they had never considered before.

Impressed with NBM's offerings: Two said they were impressed that NBM offers "out of the box" programming (beyond school programs) and continuously strives to use the building in "thoughtful" ways.

"Special bond:" One said she now has a "special bond" with the building after being allowed to spend time in parts that visitors normally do not get to see.

Breaking old habits: The NBM staff member said seeing how the artist quickly moved so many visitors throughout the building (e.g., narrow staircases) was initially stress-inducing, but ultimately reassuring, and that it has helped her "think differently" about wayfinding.

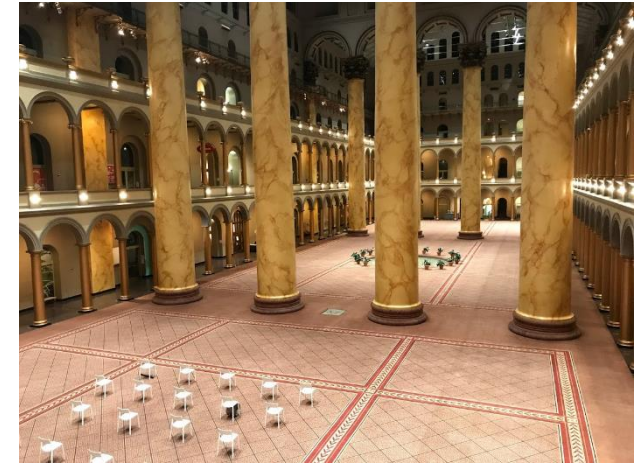
UNDERSTANDING OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Next, performers were told the museum's mission – to inspire curiosity about the world we design and build – and asked to discuss their level of familiarity with the built environment before being part of the performance as well as the extent to which the performance made them think about it.

A few were aware of the built environment prior to the performance because they had visited NBM, knew a city planner, or because they had previously worked on a site-specific piece. Two said it was mostly an unfamiliar concept. More specifically:

A few said this experience changed how they will view spaces moving forward. One, for instance, said it helped her see the “hidden history” in the NBM building and that she hopes to “transfer” this mentality to other buildings. Along those lines, the NBM staff member said this experience has made her think more about how people move through space and helped her “see the performance” in other spaces.

And, two discussed how people connect to place. One said the performance emphasized the need for collaboration to create better places and a better society in general. Similarly, another said it made her think about the importance of being “cognizant” of how people feel when creating places.



How, if at all, did the performance make you think about the built environment?

“I guess it was on a more micro level, really about that building more than the whole idea of buildings and places. Hopefully it'll transfer when I'm in other buildings– I'll see and think about their past and the different pieces of them and how those work with whoever is visiting and how people interact with those buildings. I think I'll think about it more than just walking into a building. I'll be thinking "huh, how can we create a piece here?"”

PERFORMERS' RECOMMENDATIONS

Finally, performers were asked what, if anything, they would recommend NBM change about the process to make it better for other performers in the future.

They shared several ideas, which differed depending on their perspective as members of the public or as NBM staff.

Advertise more widely: Two hoped NBM would advertise to a wider audience, both within the DC arts community and in general, because dancers often look to other institutions (e.g., Kennedy Center) for performance opportunities and because there are “a lot of [members of the public] out there who want to be creative in their daily lives.”

Change dates: One said it was hard for performers to commit to performing on a holiday weekend (MLK Jr. Day), so the museum should consider a different timeline. Similarly, the NBM staff member said it was difficult to both recruit for and market the event all in the span of a month.

Increase accessibility and diversity: One, who identified as African-American, said although the performance was technically open to all, it did not feel that way because the majority of performers and audience members were white. She suggested advertising to more diverse populations to make the performance feel more like it is “for everyone.”

Additionally, the NBM staff member shared a few suggestions to improve the experience based on her internal knowledge of NBM. They include:

- Standardizing the introduction process for artists to better explain what is and is not possible when working with the building upfront, instead of having these conversations along the way, as the artist’s ideas emerged.
- Finding ways to create a “stronger connection” between performers and NBM staff; while performers spent extensive time with the artist, they did not meet other staff members until the day of the performance.
- More intentionally using this as an opportunity to cultivate repeat visitation and long-term relationships between performers and the museum, since without NBM staff present performers may have come away with the impression that the performance was “[the artist’s] project at the museum.”

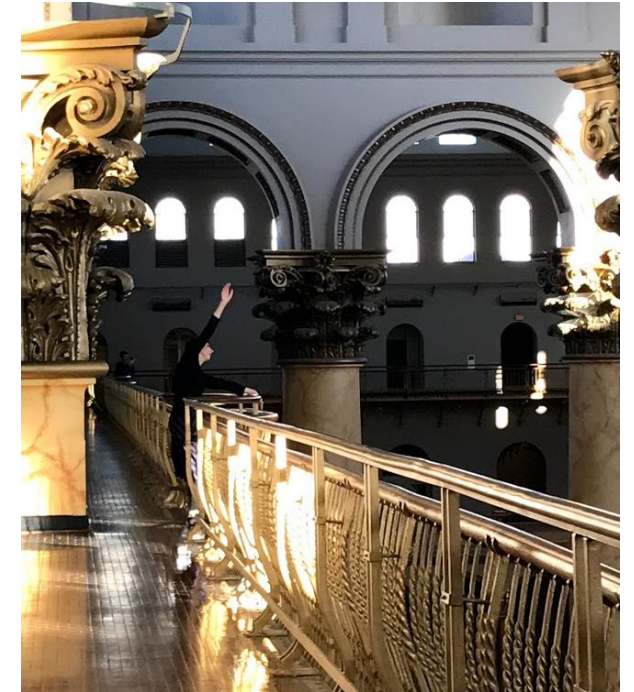
FINDINGS: CREATIVES

CREATIVES OVERVIEW

RK&A conducted 4 interviews with creatives who have previously worked closely with NBM to produce or showcase original work (either as part of the CIR program or through another initiative), including the most recent creative, Heather Sultz, who led the development of the January 2019 performance piece, *Transits & Passages*.^{*} All interviews were conducted via telephone in February and March 2019. We present findings for all creatives together owing to the small sample size, noting differences in their perspectives by type and level of experience with NBM when appropriate.

Of the creatives:

- Most are female; one is male.
- All worked with NBM within the past 3 years.
- The depth of their experiences with NBM vary:
 - In addition to Heather, one other was a Creative-in-Residence at NBM.
 - Two were never officially Creatives-in-Residence, but nevertheless have worked closely with NBM staff to develop exhibitions and programming related to their work.
- They represent a range of artistic mediums, including movement, music, bookmaking, and photography.
- All have worked with other museums in the past, though for the most part through one-off installations or programs and not as part of an official or long-term artist residency.



WHAT WORKED WELL

When asked what worked well about their experience at NBM, creatives spoke extremely positively about NBM staff and shared a few interconnected ideas.

First, most appreciated NBM staff's **open-mindedness** and willingness to allow artists to experiment without knowing what would result. The most recent CIR, for instance, appreciated that staff embraced her "improvisational and organic" process.

They also said working with NBM staff was a truly **collaborative** process and that staff were very responsive to their questions and needs. As one put it, "I never felt shut out of the process."

And, they appreciated staff's **genuine and sincere enthusiasm** for their work, which they said came across on a daily basis through small interactions and conversations, and also more broadly through staff's successful marketing of their programming.

Finally, they appreciated staff's **competence** ("they knew what to do") and **depth of knowledge**, which they said "greatly enhanced" their process and ideas.

Additionally, the most recent CIR said the diversity of performers she worked with to create *Transits & Passages* was an asset – "I didn't have a weak link in that group" – though she mostly attributed this to luck.

"The staff at the Building Museum were really amazing. All the different people were really supportive of what I came in with, and that doesn't always happen. It made it not only fun to work with them but it made it worthwhile... People don't always take to my way of working– it's very improvisational and organic, no set idea on day one. Everyone here was very open to that and enthusiastic about creating an atmosphere where I could let the event evolve. It's not easy to achieve this in a very short time. It's a leap of faith to ask people to go with something in the process of being created everyday. And they did, so that was really wonderful."

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED

Creatives also discussed challenges they encountered when working with NBM.

While all named challenges, they described them as minor and said nothing greatly detracted from their experience at NBM.

Staff communication issues: A few shared ways they saw this play out during their time at NBM:

- Two said it was sometimes challenging to receive useful information at the last minute due to delays in staff communication; for instance, the most recent CIR said she learned she had permission to use certain spaces at the museum for her performance with only a few days notice.
- One said she enjoyed working with NBM staff but also that she left with the impression that there is “inadequate communication between departments,” which limits productivity and leads to missed opportunities.
- One was disappointed that facilities staff at NBM did not realize that they were responsible for helping to maintain part of his installation, and that as a result it deteriorated quickly.
- One said she created extra artwork that NBM staff promised they would make available for purchase in the museum’s store, and she was disappointed that this promise was not kept.

Payment schedule: One said she received her stipend from NBM later than promised so she had to delay payment to her collaborators.

Performers’ commitment: The most recent CIR said it was challenging when performers had to drop out due to scheduling conflicts, as was letting go of performers who were not a good fit. However, she expected these challenges, so they did not feel overly disruptive.

Financial limitations: One, who worked with NBM primarily on an exhibition, was disappointed at the lack of funding available for more “robust” programming related to the exhibition (e.g., programming that could accommodate more participants, expanded geographic range, longer time frame, more workshops).

CONNECTION TO MISSION

Creatives were also asked how they thought their work at NBM connected to the museum's mission (as they understood it).

All saw strong connections between their work and the NBM's mission and provided details from their unique projects as evidence.

All shared ways their work invited **critical investigation of design, architecture, and history**; for instance, through showcasing photographs of old theaters in Baltimore or experiential walking tours of the museum's building that highlighted its acoustics.

And, all said their work was intended to **spark curiosity and conversation about place**, such as how we can make better use of existing spaces, "reinvent" unused spaces, or bring out the creative richness of a place.

And, two said their work focuses on **creating community and people's connection to place**, which they saw as intimately connected with NBM's goal of bringing forth the different roles people can play in shaping the built environment.

What do you think your work had to do with the mission of NBM?

"I think the museum tries to explain the built environment. So they're interested not simply in history of architecture, but also how that affects people in their everyday lives. And that extends to design as well as architecture. That's really what I was doing with my [work]. I want people who [see] it to go, 'Why is that?' And a museum is about questioning what we look around at, what we make of our buildings, and how they're used, or could they be used better, or could they be reinvented? The museum's job is to question and explain the built environment and spark conversation about how it could change."

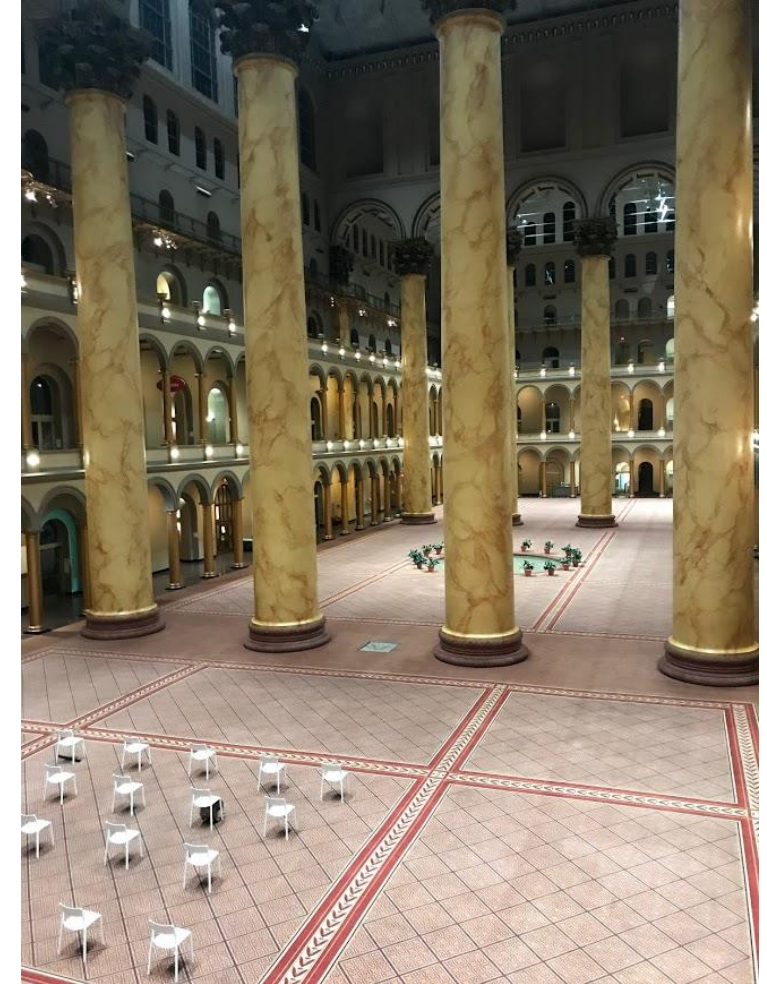
"My work is basically the same mission, though a little bit tweaked. NBM deals with the built environment, instilling curiosity about that. I'm trying to instill curiosity about your environment and community, and my specific medium is movement. What I do and what they do is very in line. This helped the whole process. I'm trying to create experiences for specific communities that you can experience in an environment, whether built or organic, in a new way. I think that sparks creativity."

UNDERSTANDING OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Throughout the interviews, creatives also discussed how their experiences at NBM made them think about the built environment in new or different ways, which differed depending on their artistic medium(s) and work at NBM.

New perspectives on the building: A few, whose work at NBM was tied very closely to the museum's building (e.g., an acoustic tour that led visitors throughout the building) said that during their time at NBM, they were constantly in "awe" of the building's scale and used it as a source of inspiration. Two were particularly fascinated by its history, which they tried to evoke in their work and continued to wonder about even after leaving NBM.

Broader issues: One, whose work at NBM did not directly tie to the museum's historic building, said the experience did not dramatically change her understanding of the built environment since it was a familiar topic, but that working with the curatorial team left her with a "richer" understanding of how her work in one local community connected to broader, national issues.



WHAT MAKES WORKING WITH NBM UNIQUE?

Creatives were also asked to discuss how, if at all, their experience working with NBM was different than working with other cultural institutions – in other words, what about working with NBM was unique.

High level of support: A few again praised NBM staff for the high level of support they offered and the collaborative atmosphere they created during creatives' time at NBM.* Importantly, they said NBM staff struck a "good balance" between adding depth to their ideas without impeding their creativity.

Scale: Two were impressed at the scale their work took on at NBM, which was grander than what they had experienced at other institutions ("larger audience, larger space"). Related to this, one, who had previously only worked in art museums, explained that having the opportunity to spend time in the museum's building gave her ideas related to architecture that she had never imagined when working in a place filled primarily with paintings.

Smooth administration: One said working with NBM was her smoothest experience in terms of administration, but did not expound.

Additionally, all creatives said that as result of their experiences, they were left with great "respect" for the museum, and a few said they hope to continue collaborating with NBM. One added that she became a member as a result of her experience.

"Contrasting to other things, it was a much grander scale. Larger audience, larger space, more satisfying complete residency because all aspects of the residency came off well. It was all well-attended. Everything was completed in a way that made it feel worthwhile on my end. That doesn't always happen. It actually hardly ever happens."

"They strike a good balance. They add serious weight and thought to the work but also let me breath, and I think they get it right."

EFFECT ON CREATIVE PROCESS

Creatives were also asked how, if at all, they thought working with NBM affected their creative process.

In their responses, **all reiterated the positive nature of their experience with NBM** and said they appreciated the opportunity to work closely with the museum. More specifically, two said the experience was a **“creative boost”** and an good **opportunity to test new ideas**. Two others said it was a **“rare”** chance to work in a **highly collaborative environment**, which they appreciated because it is a departure from their normal, more individualistic way of working. Along these lines, another said working with other artists, stakeholders, staff, and visitors **“expanded [her] range”** in terms of the types of people and topics she normally deals with in her work.

However, despite all of this, most said the experience did not greatly affect their creative process. Instead, they were grateful to NBM for **“validating”** their work, and they hoped this experience would generate opportunities for future collaborations, whether with NBM or other institutions.

In what ways, if any, has your experience at NBM affected your creative process?

“I appreciate the opportunity to draw upon decades of experience in, for example, collaborative creation of performing a performance. Those opportunities are rare, and I cherish them. By collaborations I mean not just with other artists but with someone like [NBM staff member], someone in that position who had a high measure of creative energy and ideas. That’s a precious thing. Goes a long way about getting future opportunities.”

“The validation of having this work presented to the public being on a national stage is a creative boost to want to do more work in this vein. And in a practical sense probably will lead to other opportunities because it gives you some additional credibility.”

OVERALL VALUE IN MUSEUMS' WORKING WITH CREATIVES

Additionally, creatives were asked to discuss why they thought NBM invites creatives to do residences (or other work) at the museum, as well as the overall value they see in museums working closely with creatives.

Their responses touched on the benefits of collaborations between museums and creatives for visitors, creatives, and museum staff.

First, most spoke about the value of **challenging visitors' expectations** by offering unexpected programming that is different than anything they've experienced elsewhere. One, for instance, said **experiential** and **interdisciplinary** programs can be "**life-changing catalysts,**" especially at NBM, which has a "proactive" interdisciplinary mission that emphasizes connections between architecture, design, engineering, and community.

Along those lines, two said these collaborations provide a **boost in creative energy** for both creatives and museum staff, who each gain new insights from observing each others' processes and hearing each others' expertise.

In a similar vein, two said museum-creative collaborations have the potential to **bring together "different voices and ideas"** and **create connections and community**. The most recent CIR, for instance, said her performers come from diverse backgrounds and did not know each other before the experience, but quickly formed a strong community.

Additionally, two said that museums working closely with artists can only **generate more and broader support for the arts** by showcasing how art can speak to a variety of important topics. Additionally, one said collaborating with museums also led credibility to individual creatives' work.

Why do you think NBM has invited you and other artists to do residencies at the museum?

"I think it's to bring different voices and ideas to the museum. What I did connected but was a really different thing than what they typically do. It gives the museum staff and visitors a peek into a completely different world, like it did for me. It does the same for their people, a completely different peek into the work of an artist. That is something I do a lot in my work so I was very excited to be a part of this. I think I needed that kind of thing too."

ADVICE FOR NBM

Finally, creatives were asked what advice they would give NBM to consider for the future of the Creative-in-Residence program, based on their experiences.

Blend structure and freedom: Two (both of whom were never officially CIRs) advocated for this in any CIR program. One, for instance, hoped any residency would provide enough freedom to allow her to create something “totally new,” but also feel like it had a “beginning, middle, and end.”

Host a variety of creatives: One said the museum should aim to work with people from many different creative disciplines beyond art, including scientists and historians, to offer new and different perspectives on the built environment— “I think that’s why they call it Creative-in-Residence and not Artist-in-Residence.”

Provide access to NBM collections: One past CIR was impressed by the depth of the museum’s collections and said NBM should offer all CIRs the chance to use them, either directly or as a source for inspiration.

Provide a quiet workspace: One past CIR said he was not offered a “quiet” space to work at NBM during his residency; he did not find this problematic since he is local to the area, but thought CIRs coming from further away might want privacy.

FINDINGS: CULTURAL PEERS

CULTURAL PEERS OVERVIEW

RK&A conducted 3 interviews with cultural professionals who manage artist-in-residence programs at other institutions – one at an art museum, one at a science museum, and one for a major city. None have a professional relationship with NBM (and they were unaware of NBM’s CIR program before the interview). The programs they manage vary in duration and structure, as described below. All interviews were conducted via telephone in February 2019. We present findings for all peers together owing to the small sample size, noting differences in their perspectives by experience or institution type when appropriate.

Art Museum

- Long institutional history of working with artists and hosting “participatory,” community-driven experiences
- 1 artist per year, for a 6-month residency
 - First 3 months for planning
 - Last 3 months for public engagement in the galleries
- Open call for artists; final artists selected by a cross-departmental museum “task force”
- Focus on local artists
- Artists receive \$7,500 honorarium + \$2,000 for materials

Science Museum

- Long institutional history of working with artists; rooted in art-science mission
- 3-4 artists at once, for a 2-year residency
 - First year for research/project proposal
 - Second year for project execution
- No open call for artists; artists-in-residence invited after working with museum on smaller initiatives
- National and international artists; non-local artists visit museum 4-6 times per year for “intensive weeks”
- Artists receive stipend (amount not disclosed)

Major City

- New program, completing its 3rd year
- Program grew out of the new mayor’s support for the city’s cultural plan
- 7 artists in Year 3, for a 1-year residency
 - First month for research/project proposal
 - Rest of the time for project execution
- Open call for artists; final artists selected by a committee of artists and city staff
- Focus on local artists
- Artists receive stipend (amount not disclosed)

GOALS FOR WORKING WITH ARTIST

To begin, peers were asked to describe the institutional goals for working closely with artists. Three themes emerged.

All said one of the major institutional goals of hosting artist residents is to **help staff gain new perspectives on their work** (“more creative thinking in the work we’re doing”). The city peer, for instance, said artists’ work has helped city officials better understand how issues such as climate change and racism are linked (e.g., through dance).

The two museum peers said working closely with artists allows them to **engage audiences with their collections and/or the world in new and unexpected ways**. At the science museum this takes the form of emphasizing connections between art and science; for example, when artists create programming on refraction and rainbows to bring physics to life. Similarly, the art museum peer said her institution is interested in expanding audiences’ notions of creativity and also having a “responsibility” to showcase varied perspectives.

And, one museum peer said working with artists to create innovative programming helps **attract new audiences who may not otherwise visit** the museum.

Additionally, the city peer said another goal is to help artists gain recognition in the community; and, related to this, to ensure community members feel the “identity of the city” reflects the community’s creative spirit.

“[My institution] has a unique role for our communities, for visitors, for society at large, to create experiences that enhance creativity. There are a lot of tactics to do that – one is working alongside creatives and artists. From that we were like ‘wow, creativity is so expansive in its definition.’ We want audiences to see that expanded notion of creativity and what the museum can be and push the bounds of what it means to be participating in a museum space. From passive observing to active participation.”

“We really want to create experiences that help people understand and think about their world [in a] super broad sense. For some science centers, some that are really focused on science education in a structured way, artists-in-residence might be an add on or extra. But for us it’s always been part of the program here. [We have] broad interests. We continue to have creative people in the mix. It’s not an add on, but part of who we are.”

WHAT HAS WORKED WELL

When asked what they have found works well when working with artist residents, peers shared several ideas, which differed depending on their program's structure.

Built-in planning time: All said building in a “collaborative planning period” to the beginning of the residency is key to success. They said the planning period helps staff and artists get to know one another and allows artists time to do research and generate project ideas that are grounded institutional and/or community needs, while still ensuring projects are “artist-led,” which helps artists feel invested.

Selectively choosing artists: All shared thoughts on the best approach to selecting artists, which differed depending on their institutional goals. The science museum peer, for instance, said working with artists on a shorter engagement first helps staff establish a relationships with artists and understand whether their working style and goals are well-aligned with the institution's for a longer-term residency. The art museum peer, on the other hand, stressed the importance of working only with local artists to promote community engagement. And, the city peer said having a cohort of artists from different disciplines working together helps promote creativity among both artists and city staff.

Open attitude: All mentioned or alluded to the importance of being open and comfortable with ambiguity when working with artist residents. As one put it, it is important to understand that “you’re bringing in something that has never happened.”

Involving a variety of staff: The art museum peer said having staff from across departments participate on a “task force” to select and manage artist residents has helped staff feel invested and “pushed” them to think about their work in new ways. Similarly, the science museum peer said the most successful artist residencies are those where the artist's work clearly ties to “larger museum programming” that staff is already working on, since staff are already invested in (and thus better able to support) those endeavors.

Peer support: The city peer said engaging multiple artist residents at once is “critical” because it provides artists “companionship” throughout their residency.

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED

Peers also named several challenges they have encountered when working with artists-in-residence.

Timeframe: All mentioned this. One, for instance, said it is difficult to form relationships with artists in a relatively short period of time. And, another said a hosting long-term (e.g., 2 year) residencies requires “dedicated” staff to keep things moving.

Artist “maturity:” Two said finding “mature” artists who have a realistic sense of how much they are able to take on in the residency can be challenging (sometimes artists are overambitious).

Working on social issues: Two said it is challenging working with artists on “social practice,” but for different reasons. The city peer said it is sometimes difficult for artists who are not used to working on city-wide social issues to connect to them, and that doing so requires a certain “vulnerability” from artists that takes time to develop. By contrast, the art museum peer said “socially-engaged” artists often struggle with the notion that while the museum is their platform for their work, it does not officially endorse their views.

Limitations of staff expertise: The art museum peer said not having the right staff expertise to support creatives in realizing their goals can be challenging; for instance, when the museum’s IT department struggled to technically support a “hacker” creative-in-residence.

Encouraging a diversity of creatives: The art museum peer said that while the museum hopes to engage a diverse array of creatives (e.g., traditional mediums as well as chefs, chair designers, etc.), it has been challenging to encourage applications from diverse professions as well as from people who are not “full-time” creatives (side hobbyists, with day jobs).

Showcasing process: The art museum peer also said showcasing an artist’s process to audiences is challenging when their medium is intangible (e.g., dance), as is helping artists feel comfortable showing off their process as opposed to a finished product.

OVERALL VALUE IN WORKING CLOSELY WITH ARTISTS

Peers also discussed why working closely with artists is a valuable endeavor for cultural institutions, and shared several interrelated ideas.

They were also asked about potential drawbacks of working closely with artists, but they acknowledged their bias in favor of artist-in-residence programs, and so did not articulate any drawbacks.

All said **artists offer new perspectives on familiar topics**, which **promotes dialogue and creative thinking about important issues** and **expands public understanding of the role art can play in our society**. The city peer, for instance, described an artist who worked closely with elders and city officials to successfully advocate for better signage at a dangerous intersection.

Peers also said working closely with artists can help museums **“unlock new perspectives” on their collections or subject matter** through participatory, multi-modal experiences. This, in turn, **helps visitors “find personal and social relevance” with the museum** through unexpected touchpoints.

Peers also said working closely with artists **ultimately strengthens museums’ relationships with their community**, either by directly employing local artists or because artists’ work draws in community members who may not otherwise have engaged with the museum. Along these lines, working with diverse artists can also help museums **incorporate historically absent or underrepresented perspectives**.

Additionally, one said hosting artists-in-residence helps **“humanize” artists for the public**, exposing not only the artistic process but the people who create things.

“Any way we can broaden people’s exposure to art and provide places for artists to contribute to thoughts and ideas contributed to the public, for me it’s a given. Artists can often prototype and push ideas forward, and that is key to society growing. You never know what’s going to engage the random person coming by and having multiple modes of entry to them [is important].”

TAKEAWAYS FROM WORKING WITH ARTISTS

Peers were also asked to describe what, if anything, they have taken away from their experiences working closely with artists at their institutions.

Collaboration skills: Two said having to manage relationships between artists, staff members across multiple departments, and community stakeholders has helped them develop stronger collaboration and communication skills; namely, the need for complete and total trust, transparency, and vulnerability.

Constant curiosity and creative inspiration: The two museum peers said that although they do not consider themselves artists, having a window into artists' creative processes has helped them establish a "deeper interest" in the world around them and feel constantly attuned to their own assumptions and ways of working.

Deeper understanding of community needs: The city peer said working closely with artists has helped her and her colleagues (i.e., city officials) better understand the needs of their community as a whole and also their "creative community."

"I feel like I'm a constant negotiator and bridge builder. Between the artists, institution, community. It's challenging to be that in-between person. I have learned when to be completely open and honest because it benefits artists' vision. What does transparency mean? What do they need to know to benefit their project? Framing everything in the positive. On the onset being transparent that there will be challenges and you are along for the ride and need to trust each other. I learn immensely from artists who put themselves out there everyday in their work – how brave they have to be in every situation. I try to bring that to every situation."

"It's a hard question to answer, when you live and breathe it. What have I learned? Everything? Who I am? [laughs] The biggest pull for me is the ongoing engagement with interesting people who are constantly asking questions. It's never boring."

ADVICE FOR NBM

Finally, peers were asked what advice they would give NBM to consider for the future of the CIR program, based on their experiences.

Balance institutional and artist goals: All discussed the importance of striking a healthy balance between the institution’s goals for the residency with the artist’s goals – in other words, “designing a program that suits you and leaving room for the artist to do work that is beneficial to them.” One said this involves starting with an artist-centric mindset (really trying to understand their intentions) but also explicitly clarifying that the museum will play the role of “creative partner” as well as the expertise the museum brings to the table (e.g., knowledge of collections history and visitation patterns).

Consider open calls for artists: The art museum peer explained that having open calls for artists’ aligns with her institution’s goal of inviting artists from a variety of creative practices (“we don’t know what the next big practice is”) and suggested NBM consider open calls if it has a similar goal.

Properly support staff: One said it is important for staff to have the proper emotional and financial resources to support an artist-in-residence program because it is “a lot to administer.”

Trust artists’ creative processes: One said while it is important to have broad programmatic goals, it is equally important to remain open-minded to artists’ ideas – no matter how unexpected or different – is key to feeling satisfied with the end result. In her words, “the more open you are the happier you’ll be with the result.”

Be mindful of your platform: One said it important to remain mindful of the role the museum plays in boosting artists’ careers; having their work in a museum “has a lot of weight for creatives.”