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Future Leadership Development in Art Museums Presentation by Judith Meredith

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Issues were identified from interviews:

- need to replace senior staff
- tectonic change
- need for management at all levels
- losing people mid-pipeline

Surveys confirmed these concerns:

There is a need to replace senior staff:

Average age of art museum directors in 1980 was 47, in 1998 was 52, and today is 56.

Today 1% of directors are under 40, 18% are over 50

The average years of experience is 20 years.

So, there is definitely a retirement bubble looming...

But, not all those expected to retire, will actually do so

37% expect to retire between 66-69

18% expect to work past age 70

40% would like to retire between the ages of 55-65

only 55% would like to retire before they reach 55

and these numbers are very relative because most people at age 60 still don't know exactly what they will do; many plan to work beyond age 65, health and other circumstances permitting

Still, 34% expect to retire within the next 5 years;

32% within the next 10 years;

This is double the normal attrition rate in other sectors

Many directors are today older when hired and have less experience

A director hired at age 51 will have less than 2 years experience

Hired at age 44, will have 3-4 years experience

Hired at age 36 will have 5 years experience or more

The major conclusion is that there will 128 openings for art museum directors within the next 5-10 years.

Tectonic changes in museums means changes in what is required of directors:

Average space in art museums has doubled
Attendance is up 90%
Funding needs have increased as much as 4x's
More staff to manage
New services and kinds of profit centres
Bigger collections and supporting infrastructure

Many directors started with smaller organizations and grew them (from airplanes to space craft)

Implications:

- need for many candidates
- to fill complex positions; expectations are high
- means, older and more experienced hires

All this matters because:

The bubble is coming fast
There's a new definition of "qualified"
There are new management structures
It will be challenging to replace long-term directors – hard to find good candidates and risky given all that is expected and at stake

This means:

Intense hiring opportunities and competition, which tends to benefit the largest museums, for people with 5-10 years experience

Risks

Turmoil and turnover

Different hiring strategies, e.g. split positions, interim directors, two leader model

Are there enough curators out there to fill these positions?

To maintain opportunities, action needs to be taken NOW to:

- provide training
- develop strong management teams
- work at two levels, with both individuals and in terms of the field as a whole

What training is available now?

There is broad training but there are gaps; very few combined programs, but most importantly, use of the programs that are out there is limited.

There is a lack of commitment in the museum industry to training:

- not enough effort
- not enough investment
- lack of understanding of the urgency and the issues

Reality is most directors learn on the job; but museums have become more complex and the expectations of the younger generations are different; they require wooing / investment.

The deterrents to entering the field:

- onerous responsibilities
- multiple models
- not enough people in the pipeline
- knowledge transfer is difficult
- hard to get experience with international programs and collaborations

The key issues are:

- create awareness of the issue
- develop commitment and investment
- communicate and recruit – especially from the academic stream which offers greater security and prestige for some
- invest all through the pipeline

Options

- mentoring
- municipal programs
- single course offerings (for working people)
- identifying staff for further training

Overall observations

- a retirement bubble is coming but it is uncertain when and how big
- the field is not investing enough
- the complexity of the role of directors is underestimated

Within the field, associations need:

- leadership development committees
- mentoring programs
- ways to transfer knowledge
- outreach to promote the field
- collaborate with universities
- create awareness among boards and funders