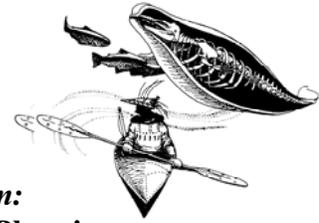


Pratt Museum

Homer Society of Natural History



A Community Vision for a Community Museum: Engaging Diverse Constituencies in Capital Project Planning

NARRATIVE

Background

The Kachemak Bay region of Southcentral Alaska is one of the most biologically productive and intensively-used ecosystems in Alaska. Sea otters, sea lions, and half a dozen species of whale ply the Bay's rich waters. Black and brown bears, wolves, and moose rove shoreline spruce forests and meadows. Commercial and recreational fisheries for salmon and halibut feed our economies and our ways of life. Salmon, shellfish, and seals support centuries-old Alaska Native subsistence cultures. The region's resources, beauty, and relative geographic isolation have attracted homesteaders, artists, Russian Old Believers, and visitors from around the world.

Located on the shore of Kachemak Bay, the Homer Society of Natural History operates the Pratt Museum, which is dedicated to helping people explore the natural history and human experience in the region through the arts, sciences, and humanities. The Pratt's mission is to ignite a sense of connection between people and place and to foster self-reflection and dialogue among the Museum's community and visitors. Each year, the Pratt's education programs, exhibits, and collections draw more than 35,000 visitors and engage more than 3,500 students. For local residents, the Pratt is a center for year-round exhibits and programs that promote community engagement and dialogue; the Museum is a fertile place for looking inward to explore who we are and where we live so that we may preserve our distinctive cultural traditions and environment with integrity. Summer travelers who visit this area have a keen interest in knowing about the people who live here and how we survive in this place, as consistently expressed in visitor studies and informal comments.

Developing meaningful community collaborations is a hallmark of the Pratt Museum. Staff and Board members work in conjunction with community members, including homesteaders, Alaska Natives, artists, Russian Old Believers, and commercial fishermen to develop programs and exhibits. The Museum's community-based Collections Plan is being used as a model by the Smithsonian Institution to guide community-based museums across the country, and Pratt staff members were invited to the 2003 *Partnership for a Nation of Learners* Summit in Washington, D.C. to present one of four national case studies on successful community collaboration. A small community museum, the Pratt is consistently recognized as a leader in its field. In 2005, the Pratt received the National Award for Museum Service, the country's highest honor for museums, and in 2004, the Pratt received the Governor's Award for Distinguished Cultural Service.

Our small, geographically-isolated community thrives on the opportunity to have a nationally-acclaimed museum that prioritizes community involvement and local and regional distinctiveness. The Museum has more than 550 members and donors, which represents substantial local investment in a community that has a population of only 5,000. The Pratt is supported by the City of Homer through a line item on the City's annual budget. And the Museum leverages strong partnerships within and outside the community—with entities including Alaska State Council on the Arts, Alaska Humanities Forum, Homer Council on the Arts, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Park Service, and Alaska Native villages and tribes—to ensure that local and regional needs are met.

STATEMENT OF NEED***Fulfilling MFA goals by strengthening the Pratt Museum's ability to serve the public and advance its mission and strategic goals***

As part of long-term organizational visioning and planning, the Pratt developed its Master Exhibit Plan (MEP), entitled *Kachemak Bay: An Exploration of People and Place*, which guides a complete redesign of the Pratt's exhibits and programs. (See MEP attached.) As with all planning at the Pratt, the MEP was developed through extensive community involvement representing the demographics and interests of the local community. The MEP addresses the overarching theme of people and place, and includes emphases on homesteading, fishing, Native cultures, and the marine environment. Phase I of the two-phase MEP was implemented in 2004 with the support of IMLS and the National Endowment for the Humanities and through participation by scholars, tradition-bearers, community collaborators, local artists and craftspeople, and professional designers and fabricators. Phase I was received with wide public acclaim, and an independent assessment performed by Wendy Meluch of Visitor Studies Services revealed the exhibit was highly effective at meeting its goals and the community-based process of its design and implementation was meaningful and satisfying to participants.

In 2005, the Pratt developed its 2005 – 2010 Five Year Strategic Plan with participation by the Board of Directors and staff through a retreat facilitated by The Foraker Group, an organization that seeks to build capacity among Alaska nonprofits. Community input from numerous one-hour “coffee table” discussions between Board members and diverse community members on aspects of the Museum—including the ethics of collecting and the Museum's financial practices—as part of IMLS's MAP IV Governance Assessment program, helped shape the strategic planning process. The Strategic Plan (attached) recognizes the Museum's long-term vision of being a small, well-run museum that is well-respected, financially sustainable, frequented regularly, and that actively engages its community. A key mid-term goal of the Strategic Plan is implementing the second and final phase of the MEP and renovating the Pratt's 40-year-old building and making long-desired site improvements. The Pratt's aging building suffers from chronic problems with mechanical deficiencies, traffic bottlenecks, and leaks (see attached memo to architect Steve Fishback). Professional surveys in Building Conditions (see attached Executive Summary), Americans with Disability Act compliance, and Collections Storage Space conducted over the past year identified the following three additional priorities in the renovation: improving handicap accessibility, replacing the roof, and increasing collections storage space.

With the Strategic Plan, MEP, and professional building/space assessments in place, the Pratt has entered the “pre-development,” or planning, phase of what will be the most significant capital project the Museum has taken on in its 52-year history. The goal of the project is to implement the Museum's MEP, carry out needed building/site improvements, develop a plan for long-term financial sustainability, and create a museum that will better serve its community and visitors now and into the future. Recent opportunities have primed the Pratt for this project. The Pratt has been initiated into the “Pre-Development Program,” operated by The Foraker Group, the Rasmuson Foundation, and the Denali Commission. This program will provide in-kind professional services to the Pratt for capital project planning, including the services of a facilitator who will work with Board, staff, and the community to address long-term goals and building/site needs, and of a Pre-Development architect who will develop an architectural program that defines space needs and needed building characteristics. The architectural program is the precursor to a schematic architectural plan. The Pratt's friends group, Patrons of the Pratt Society (POPS), has recently secured \$100,000 in private donations to help the Pratt pay for related professional services not covered by the Pre-Development program. Our community-intensive process will require participation of the facilitator and architect in community events and meetings; these expenses are beyond the scope of the Pre-Development Program. In addition, over the last decade, the Pratt has purchased four neighboring parcels to implement the site plan component of the MEP; the Museum's 9.3 acres provide enormous potential for extending interpretive trails and satellite exhibits. Finally, the Pratt has the internal capacity to take these next steps: the Museum is debt-free, has operated with a budget surplus over the last four years, and has full commitment and strategic leadership from its Board and core staff.

While the MEP lays out a broad conceptual framework for exhibit and program revisions, and building assessments set specific priorities for structural improvements, the Pratt is eager to engage the community in considering what the Museum can become in a larger context, and how it can best serve its community and visitors now and in the future. We will use a model of community involvement implemented for creation of the Pratt’s community-based Collections Plan, to engage the community in addressing the following questions:

What are our most ambitious dreams of what the Pratt Museum can become?

How can we ensure the Pratt continues to be a dynamic center of curiosity and community engagement for our children and grandchildren?

How can the Pratt remain essential to the community and Museum visitors in the midst of rapid technological advances and environmental, social, and economic change?

“A Community Vision for a Community Museum” will help the Pratt reach out to diverse constituencies to seek broad community input as we begin capital project planning. IMLS funds will be used to support personnel, travel, contract, and supplies expenses so that we can work with diverse audiences and individuals to address their needs in capital project planning. The Pratt is committed to engaging diverse constituencies in planning its renovation; the Museum has a track record of involving reticent, silent, outsider, and non-participatory groups by building relationships and reaching out in ways that encourage participation while respecting cultural traditions and methods of communication. By engaging our community and Museum stakeholders in this way, we will fulfill the MFA goals of building organizational capacity to serve our public more effectively and of implementing the goals of the Museum’s MEP and Strategic Plan.

Investing in Museum Capacity

This project will build the Pratt’s capacity of its programs, its capacity to serve its community and visitors, and its capacity to ensure long-term financial sustainability. A primary goal of this project is to ignite community involvement and investment in the Pratt, which keeps the Pratt a vital and vibrant part of the community and will help ensure long-term financial sustainability of the Museum. This project will help the Pratt conduct the long-range planning and visioning necessary to address the changing needs of its community, and to realize the growing potential of the Museum’s programs and partnerships with local and national institutions.

Audience

The primary project audience is drawn from communities of the Kenai Peninsula, a population of 51,000, who are made up of Alaska Natives (primarily Dena’ina Athabaskan and Sugpiaq Alutiiq), Russian Old Believers (a sect of Russian Orthodox that live in religiously traditional, purposely secluded communities), and a mix of more recent immigrants from the Lower 48 States, all of varied socioeconomic backgrounds. The second audience is the 350,000 residents of the Anchorage area, more than half the state’s population. In June 2008, we will gather input for capital project planning from summer visitors, through tailored questions incorporated into an American Association of State and Local History survey to 120 individuals. Summer travelers are the Pratt’s most numerous visitors; they come from every state, and an average of 40 foreign countries annually.

PROJECT DESIGN

Goal

The goal of this project is to engage diverse constituencies in planning the Pratt’s renovation through a process that is meaningful and transformative to participants.

Activities

1. Establish organizational long-range plan for revision and/or growth of Pratt programs.

The Pratt will enlist the services of a professional facilitator to bring together the Board and staff for capital project planning that builds off the MEP and Strategic Plan.

- Hold first facilitated one-day meeting with Pratt Board and staff.

A Community Vision for a Community Museum:

Engaging Diverse Constituencies in Capital Project Planning

- Staff and Board complete independent work to address revision and/or growth of Pratt programs.
- Hold second facilitated one-day meeting with Pratt Board and staff to address space/site needs.
- Facilitator produces written report that summarizes institutional vision and revision and/or growth of Pratt programs and associated space/site needs.

2. Form a volunteer Community Vision Committee to work with Pratt Board and staff to engage the community in capital project planning.

The Pratt will form a 9-member volunteer Community Vision Committee (CVC) with members from its community-based Exhibits, Collections, and Education Advisory Committees as well as 3 at-large community members and two Board members. The Museum Director will serve as the staff liaison. The CVC will take the lead in gathering community input and feedback through this project. These volunteers will represent the varied regional demographics and stakeholders. Pratt staff will work with Wendy Meluch of Visitor Studies Services to draft, pilot, and implement evaluation tools.

3. Gather and interpret community and regional feedback.

- Conduct media outreach to kick-off “A Community Vision for a Community Museum” through local and regional newspapers and local public and commercial radio stations.
- The CVC will work with Board, staff, and Wendy Meluch to develop a questionnaire to gather community input on the Pratt’s renovation. The Pratt will mail the questionnaire to the Museum’s 550 members, distribute it as an insert in one local and one regional newspaper, and make it available on the Pratt’s website.
- The Pratt and the CVC will hold one open house event during which community members can get a behind-the-scenes look at Pratt exhibits, programs, and collections and offer input on the renovation through a professionally facilitated discussion with community members, Pratt Board and staff, and the Pre-Development architect.
- Board members will hold 5 one-hour “coffee table” conversations at local coffee shops with community members who represent various demographics, including families with young children, the elderly, homeschoolers, teens, “snowbirds” (those who spend winter elsewhere), and business owners to solicit input on the renovation.
- The Pratt will hold two professionally facilitated, invitational meetings with local, regional, and statewide education, research, and community institutions with focuses in the sciences, arts, and humanities to solicit input on the Pratt’s renovations. The Pre-Development architect will participate.
- Pratt Board and staff will hold one professionally-facilitated open house event in Anchorage to provide an opportunity to gather feedback from the Pratt’s 56 Anchorage members. The Pre-Development architect will participate.

4. Engage under-represented communities.

To engage the five Native communities in the region, the Pratt will hold meetings in these communities, three of which are accessible only by boat or airplane. (See attached letters of support.) Russian Old Believer communities, established in purposeful isolation in various parts of the world, have been particularly challenging to engage. The Pratt will build off relationships it has developed with Russian Old Believer women who attend the local college and a Russian Old Believer teen—a Pratt intern—and her family who have participated in Pratt programs to engage these secluded communities in program planning.

- Hold input-gathering meetings in each of the five regional Native communities: Nanwalek, Port Graham, Seldovia, Ninilchik, and Kenai.
- Meet with three Russian Old Believer families in Nikolaevsk, Kachemak Selo, and Vosnesenka and five Russian Old Believer college students to gather input on the Pratt’s renovation.

5. Develop a draft architectural program for community and stakeholder review.

- The CVC and Pratt staff will compile community and stakeholder feedback into a report and work with the Pre-Development architect to develop a draft architectural program—the precursor to a schematic architectural plan—that defines space needs for the building and outlines site improvements.

- Make draft available on Pratt website, at the Museum, and as an insert into local and regional newspapers with a solicitation for feedback.
- Distribute draft to institutional stakeholders with a solicitation for feedback.
- Hold two open house events—one in Homer, one in Anchorage—to solicit feedback on draft.
- Hold meetings in the five Native communities to gather feedback on draft.
- Meet with Russian Old Believer participants to gather feedback on draft.

6. Make changes as necessary to architectural program.

The CVC and Pratt staff will work with the Pre-Development architect to make changes as necessary based on community/stakeholder feedback.

7. Seek Community and Stakeholder Approval of Final Architectural Program

- Make final program available at the Museum and on the website with solicitation for approval.
- Distribute final program to stakeholder institutions with solicitation for approval.
- Hold meetings in five Native communities to seek approval of final architectural program.
- Meet with Russian Old Believer participants to seek approval of final architectural program.
- Pratt Board of Directors approve a final draft of the architectural concept design.

8. Produce Architectural Plan and Cost Estimate

The CVC and Pratt staff will work with the Pre-Development architect to produce a schematic architectural plan and cost estimate based on the community-based architectural program.

9. Conduct Project Evaluation

- Contract with Wendy Meluch of Visitor Studies Services to evaluate the community input-gathering process. The evaluation will assess participant satisfaction with the process. (See attached draft evaluation forms.)

Community and Scholarly Involvement

The primary purpose of this project is to involve many community voices in capital project planning and development of an architectural program. Rather than limiting involvement to a small group of specialized scholars, the Pratt will make use of the incredible wealth of knowledge and experience in our community, including backgrounds in homesteading, Russian Old Believer contemporary life and history, mammal skeleton articulation, commercial fishing, Alaska Native culture and contemporary life, marine science, native plants, anthropology, and fine arts.

Partners

The Pratt Museum has two main partners for this project, the Pratt’s friends group—Patrons of the Pratt Society (POPS), and The Foraker Group (see attached letters of support). POPS formed ten years ago with the goal of raising project-specific funds to help the Pratt meet its mission and goals. Since then, POPS has raised more than \$500,000 to help the Museum pay off its mortgage, acquire land to fulfill its site plan, replace saltwater aquaria, and purchase necessary software. POPS will provide necessary cash support for this project. The Foraker Group—working in concert with the Rasmuson Foundation and Denali Commission—has accepted the Pratt into its “Pre-Development Program,” which will provide a variety of in-kind professional services to the Pratt for capital project planning and design. The Foraker Group’s mission is to build capacity and promote sustainability in order to strengthen Alaska’s nonprofits by providing training and professional services.

Project Management & Corrections

Because the Pratt Museum exists in a regionally distinctive community—one in which people live off the bounty of the land and sea, one in which dynamic Native cultures inform and enrich our lives, one in which homesteaders are still around to share stories of a life lived off the land, and where creativity, resourcefulness, and hardiness abound—we are committed to having the pre-development phase of our renovation reflect the uniqueness of the Museum and our community. The project includes specific efforts to involve the community not only in initial gathering of input but in review of a draft architectural program so that changes can be made as needed before seeking broad community approval. We recognize that it may be difficult to reconcile

community interests with practical and financial realities, and we will do our best to accommodate institutional priorities with broad community interests.

Outreach

The Pratt recognizes that we must publicize this project in order to ensure its success, and that different methods of outreach are appropriate for different audiences. The Pratt will leverage its relationships with local and regional media to encourage community involvement in this project. The Pratt will seek to publicize the project through the “Coffee Table,” a regular program of the widely-supported local public radio station that addresses important community issues; and on a popular local commercial radio station. The Pratt will seek coverage of this project by the two local newspapers and the regional newspaper, including distributing the community survey as a newspaper insert and advertising opportunities to provide input through events. The Pratt will address the unique challenges posed by communicating with remote communities, including Native villages and Russian Old Believer communities by building off existing relationships with individuals. We will also contract with a project webmaster to ensure timely website communication to gather stakeholder input and provide project updates, which will be particularly important for residents in geographically isolated places.

Outcomes & Evaluation

There are two primary outcomes of this project:

1. A final architectural program that is widely approved by the community; and
2. Broad community involvement that is meaningful to and has positive impacts on participants

The Pratt employs outcome-based evaluation techniques in program development and has two staff members trained in this method. We will contract with Wendy Meluch of Visitor Studies Services (see attached letter of commitment) to evaluate participant experience in this process. We will also use the following metrics to assess broad community engagement:

- Participation (including completing surveys, attending events, participating on committee participation) by 25% of Pratt members;
- Participation by 15% of Pratt members who live outside the local area of the lower Kenai Peninsula;
- Participation by the five regional Native communities, including 20 individuals in Port Graham and in Nanwalek, 15 individuals in Seldovia, and 10 individuals in Kenai and in Ninilchik;
- Participation by 3 Russian Old Believer families and 5 Old Believer college students;
- Participation by the region’s leading education, research, and community institutions: Kachemak Bay Research Reserve, Homer Council on the Arts, Center for Alaskan Coastal Studies, Lake Clark National Park & Preserve, Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska Native Heritage Center, Bunnell Street Gallery, Cook Inlet Keeper, Homer Chamber of Commerce, Homer Public Library, Kachemak Bay Campus of the Kenai Peninsula College, the City of Homer, Kachemak Heritage Land Trust, K-12 educators, and the Smithsonian Institution Arctic Studies Center.
- Participation by the following interests/stakeholders: families with young children, the elderly, homeschoolers, snowbirds, and business owners.

PROJECT RESOURCES

Time

This is a one-year project that will take 1,738 staff hours to complete. This project has been designed to cause the least impact possible on the Pratt’s ongoing programs and exhibits. The long months of fall, winter, and spring are the time when our community is most available to participate in a community project and the time when Museum visitation is lower and the Board and staff hunker down for planning and assessment.

Personnel

The Pratt’s 9-member Board of Directors will participate in facilitated planning retreats, serve on the CVC and hold input-gathering discussions with stakeholders. The Board is composed of local area residents that represent the Pratt’s constituency with backgrounds in the arts, sciences, and humanities. They bring skills in financial

management, strategic planning, community relations, real estate, and philanthropy. They are new parents; retirees; academics; avid gardeners; business owners; and employed by state, federal, and private entities.

Museum Director Heather Beggs will oversee management of this project and will serve as the primary liaison to the Board and CVC. Heather has experience in personnel management, development, museum administration, and nonprofit legal and business issues, and has successfully led the Museum for four years. She holds a J.D. and M.A. from Indiana University and a B.A. from St. Olaf College. Gale Parsons, Exhibits Director & Cultural Liaison, will serve as the primary liaison to the region's Native communities. She is trained in IMLS outcome based evaluation and has taught K-12 art in public and private schools and at the University of Alaska. Gale has a long history of creating strong ties to Native Alaskan villages, in part through the Pratt's biennial *Gathering of Native Tradition*. Elizabeth (Betsy) Webb, Curator of Collections, will gather and interpret community feedback, serve as the primary liaison to the region's Russian Old Believer communities and Museum members from outside the Homer area, and coordinate project evaluation. Betsy has 38 years of professional experience as a curator, and is experienced in building community partnerships. She is trained in IMLS outcome-based evaluation and successfully led implementation of Phase I of the MEP. Betsy holds a B.A. in Anthropology and Museum Studies and M.A. in Biology from the University of Colorado. The Pratt Museum's Director of Education position will be vacant on November 15, 2007. (See attached position description.) The Director of Education will serve as the primary liaison to the partner education, research, and community institutions.

The Foraker Group will provide and coordinate professional facilitator and architect services through the Pre-Development Program. No grant funds will be paid to The Foraker Group. Wendy Meluch has been designing and conducting evaluative research for informal learning centers as Principal of Visitor Studies Services since 1996. Wendy served as independent evaluation of the Pratt's *Kachemak Bay: An Exploration of People and Place* exhibit and of the community-based process for exhibit creation and implementation. She is adept at assessing in what ways community participation has been meaningful and transformational to participants. Wendy will perform front-end, formative, and summative evaluation.

Budget

The total budget for this project is \$179,230.35, which represents a \$88,625.21 request to IMLS, and Cost Share in the amount of \$90,605.14.

Impact

Project Products & Measurable Results

This project will produce an architectural program that is widely approved by the community and stakeholders. The program is the necessary precursor to a schematic architectural plan. Broad community involvement in renovation planning will be a result of this project. Specific metrics to quantify and evaluate are described earlier. Museum Director Heather Beggs will coordinate reporting of project results.

Long-Term Impact & Sustainability

With the architectural program, the Pratt will have completed the first major step forward in a capital project that will guide, to a large extent, how the Pratt Museum will serve its community and visitors over the next 10, 20, even 30 or more years. Concurrent with this project, the Pratt will initiate a two-year project to build its development capacity in light of an upcoming capital campaign and develop a plan for long-term financial sustainability. The Pratt's motto is "better, not bigger," and we are committed to using the capital project to help us ensure financial sustainability. With the concept design and financial assessment and planning in place, and support from the Pratt's friends group, POPS, the Pratt will be able to take the next steps—including attaining a cost estimate, developing a case statement, and contracting with an architectural design firm—towards launching a capital campaign that will raise funds to realize the community's vision for the Museum.

BUDGET FORM - PAGE FOUR

Section B: Summary Budget

	\$ IMLS	\$ Cost Share	\$ TOTAL COSTS
1. Salaries and Wages	32,767.52	33,088.62	65,856.14
2. Fringe Benefits	8,191.88	698.46	8,890.34
3. Consultant Fees	8,000.00	45,000.00	53,000.00
4. Travel	9,914.00		9,914.00
5. Supplies and Materials	15,477.00		15,477.00
6. Services	2,715.00		2,715.00
7. Student Support			0.00
8. Other Costs			0.00
TOTAL DIRECT COSTS (1–8)	77,065.40	78,787.08	155,852.48
9. Indirect Costs			0.00
TOTAL COSTS (Direct and Indirect)	77,065.40	78,787.08	155,852.48

Project Funding for the Entire Grant Period

1. Grant Funds Requested from IMLS	88,625.21
2. Cost Sharing:	
a. Cash Contribution	26,310.36
b. In-Kind Contribution	64,294.78
c. Other Federal Agencies*	
d. TOTAL COST SHARING	90,605.14
3. TOTAL PROJECT FUNDING (1+2d)	179,230.35
% of Total Costs Requested from IMLS	49.45%

* If funding has been requested from another federal agency, indicate the agency's name:

