

Community Mapping and Museums

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How do you define your community? How many different communities, do you identify yourself with?

The community mapping project is an initiative that was launched by the CMA under the second phase of the Cultural Diversity and Museums program specifically to address the issues of board/institutional formation and employment equity. Community mapping is the term used to describe the process of discovering the resources available in a community. It gives institutions the opportunity to tap the diverse skills and expertise of their cultural communities, thereby allowing multiple perspectives to be brought to the decision-making process and enhancing institutions ability to respond, effectively to community interests and concerns. Community involvement at all levels of museum activity is essential in order to build strong organizations with broad support.

The challenge of community mapping has been undertaken by four Alberta museums: the Peace River Centennial Museum, the Ukrainian Museum of Canada, the High Prairie and District Museum, and the Musée Héritage Museum. Project objectives include creating an inventory of community resources and building ongoing relationships with Canada's cultural communities. By reflecting on the current relationship between museums and their communities, participants explore cultural diversity issues as well as aspects of cross-cultural communication.

People use maps to orient themselves. When project participants developed a map that placed the museum at its centre, they were able to make numerous links with a variety of community organizations. However, when they placed a cultural community at the centre of a second map, they found that museums become one of many organizations with which that community may-or may not-identify. As a result, participants quickly realized that it is impossible to create a map with a cultural community they know little about at its centre.

This mapping process reflects the initial steps in a much longer journey toward employment equity and organizational development within our museums. Nevertheless, it is a necessary journey to undertake, for Canadian museums need to demonstrate the value of diversity to their boards, staff and volunteers if they are to realize their mandates of promoting civic values and play a role in the public life of the community and the country.