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Promoting Creativity in Libraries

Consider the Artist Residency

Art has the power to enhance our surroundings and enrich our lives. From the visual artworks adorning our spaces to the music that fills our environments, creative expressions encourage us to embrace fresh perspectives and open our minds to epistemic diversity. The infusion of creativity within our work settings boosts contentment and fosters overall well-being. The recent conversation between Sydney Adams, Lisa Forrest, and Nancy Falciani-White shows that this is a sentiment that is spreading through libraries.¹ I believe that creativity is a skill that can be cultivated and taught, and it thrives when given ample time, determination, and resources. With a background in art and art history before transitioning to a librarian role, I have engaged with students and faculty in various fields such as health sciences, nursing, social work, writing, and the arts. Through these interactions, I have realized that creativity is essential across all disciplines. Drawing from this conviction, I embarked on a research journey in the fall of 2022 to explore the concept of artist residencies, specifically examining how they could integrate into academic library settings.

I began my exploration with several questions:

- How could a creator-in-residence program align with library goals?
- What advantages could a residency bring to a library?
- What opportunities do libraries present for a creator?
- What are the financial implications of establishing residency?
- What challenges and considerations might arise from implementing a residency?

As I immersed myself into researching residencies, I ruminated on the ways a residency could simultaneously challenge and complement a library's offerings. Philosophical dilemmas emerged, like the extent to which a library can accommodate artistic expressions that challenge conventional norms and rules that are foundational in libraries. Additionally, practical concerns arose regarding the financial feasibility of compensating a creator-in-residence adequately. To grasp the intricacies of hosting and sustaining such a program, I recognized the need to understand creatives and how institutions could collaborate with them for their mutual benefit.

I began by researching artists working in unconventional settings like scientific laboratories,² urban landscapes,³ cemeteries,⁴ and government institutions.⁵ I explored nontraditional environments that lead to fruitful residencies and considered whether academic libraries should support creator-in-residence programs. Key principles for success emerged, include

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defining clear roles between the artist and the host organization and avoiding exploitative practices that reinforce the financial precarity that artists often face.

Residencies in Libraries

Art residency programs have demonstrated immense potential for fostering creativity, community engagement, and interdisciplinary collaborations. As I was beginning my research on residencies in 2022, Georgia Tech began their artist-in-residence program, which focuses on arts-based programming that relates to the STEM fields.⁶ With additional examples ranging from public library initiatives in Australia,⁷ Great Britain,⁸ and the US⁹ to academic institutions offering fellowships in the US,¹⁰ the outcomes of such programs have been diverse and impactful. The stories that emerge from residencies hold great potential for outreach and philanthropic work in libraries,¹¹ and improvements in engagement and problem solving among participants are seen. Moreover, residencies may help shift the mindset of funders and policy makers, as shown in the Engaging Creative Minds program.¹²

One avenue for academic libraries to consider might be identifying where change would be welcome and thinking creatively about how an artist might contribute to the mission. For example, a library that maintains a brand guide for its communication could engage with an artist to integrate accessibility or justice (or any of its values) into its communications.

My initial questions evolved throughout my research, concluding with broader considerations. These included whether the library is resourced adequately to ensure that the creator is not exploited, whether the library is organizationally ready to embrace creative friction, and whether the purpose is both clear and flexible.

Conclusion: Facilitating Creative Collaborations

The possibilities surrounding residency experiences are boundless. If an institution chooses to embark on creating residency programs, considerations must encompass elements such as purpose clarity, artist-oriented approaches, community integration, and a willingness to navigate potential challenges and conflicts in the service of creativity.

The integration of artist residencies within academic library settings presents an exciting opportunity for innovation, collaboration, and the cultivation of a vibrant creative ecosystem. By fostering artist-in-residence programs, libraries can not only enrich their cultural offerings but also contribute to the advancement of artistic practices. Just as art enriches our world, libraries stand as essential champions of knowledge, creativity, and cultural preservation. The combination of artistic endeavors and library spaces promises to be a mutually enriching and transformative venture. **»**

Notes

1. Sydney Adams, Lisa Forrest, and Nancy Falciani-White, “Creativity in the Library: Intentionality and the Art of Making Space,” *College & Research Libraries News* 85, no. 3 (March 2024), <https://doi.org/10.5860/crln.85.3.103>.

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3. Justin Langlois, “Recuperating Conflict: Between Critical Generosity and Antagonistic Activation,” *Art/Research International* 5, no. 1 (2020): 148–57, <https://doi.org/10.18432/ari29489>.
4. Michael Lithgow and Karen Wall, “When the Dead Rise: Encountering Resistant Legacies of Creative Economy within an Artist’s Residency at a Municipal Cemetery,” *Cultural Trends* 27, no. 5 (2018): 353–66, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09548963.2018.1534719>.
5. “PAIR—DCLA,” accessed April 9, 2024, <https://www.nyc.gov/site/dcla/publicart/pair.page>.
6. “ARTS Initiatives,” Georgia Tech Library, accessed April 17, 2024, <https://library.gatech.edu/library-arts>.
7. Celia Brown, “We Just Aim to Print Well: The University of Sydney Library Printer in Residence,” *Art Libraries Journal* 46, no. 3 (2021): 70–77, <https://doi.org/10.1017/alj.2021.11>.
8. Clare Qualmann, “The Artist in the Library,” *Performance Research* 22, no. 1 (2017): 12–24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2017.1285557>.
9. “The BUBBLER @ Madison Public Library,” The BUBBLER @ Madison Public Library, accessed April 9, 2024, <https://www.madisonbubbler.org>.
10. “Foundry Makerspace,” Foundry Makerspace, accessed April 9, 2024, <https://www.foundrymakerspace.com>.
11. Brown, “We Just Aim to Print Well.”
12. Tracey Hunter-Doniger and Robin Berlinsky, “The Power of the Arts: Evaluating a Community Artist-in-Residence Program through the Lens of Studio Thinking,” *Arts Education Policy Review* 118, no. 1 (2017): 19–26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10632913.2015.1011814>.