

# REINVENTING THE MUSEUM TOOL

This tool has been featured in all three Reinventing the Museum publications. It has been dramatically updated for the third edition from *Reinventing the Museum: Relevance, Inclusion, and Global Responsibilities*, edited by Gail Anderson of Gail Anderson & Associates, and published by Rowman & Littlefield in 2023. An earlier version of this chart is also featured in *Mission Matters: Relevance and Museums in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, written and edited by Gail Anderson, and published by the American Association of Museums in 2019.

The **Reinventing the Museum Tool** captures the essence of the trends in the paradigm shift and provides the underpinnings of the structure and concepts presented in the third volume. The terms on the left depict the assumptions and values that capture traditional museums. The terms on the right illustrate the characteristics of the reinvented museum. Please note that the term *traditional* is not intended to be pejorative but is rather a term for reference in this particular dialogue to illustrate one viewpoint around the museum as institution and concept.

Within an institution, a useful dialogue can unfold using the **Reinventing the Museum Tool** to discuss where a museum currently stands in the continuum between the traditional museum and the reinvented museum and where it wishes to be. This can help trigger discussions about relevancy, institutional vitality, and alignment with contemporary museum practice. Such a dialogue may point to a need to revisit the mission or shape a new vision in order to embrace the institution’s greatest potential within today’s complex environment. In the process of self-examination, the reinvented museum is likely to modify some traditions and retire others. In its most dramatic iteration, the conversation may cause a museum to overhaul the institution systematically at all levels of operation, including organizational restructuring. Each museum will determine which aspects of its operation to retain and which new strategies to adopt, while charting a path that is realistic and appropriate. Further, some institutions may decide that their desired position on the continuum is mid-way or at a place that represents compromise. Regardless of the position, the point is to be deliberate and honest. Use an X to mark where a museum is today, & an asterisk to mark future aspirations.

| <b>TRADITIONAL MUSEUM</b>       | <b><u>Institutional Mindset</u></b> | <b>REINVENTED MUSEUM</b>           |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Mission as document             | .....                               | Mission as compass                 |
| Inwardly defined vision         | .....                               | Vision for greater good            |
| Obligatory oversight            | .....                               | Inspired investment                |
| Autocratic leadership           | .....                               | Shared leadership                  |
| Provincial                      | .....                               | Global connections                 |
| Internally driven               | .....                               | Expansive perspective              |
| Tradition as given              | .....                               | Culture of Inquiry                 |
| Assumed value                   | .....                               | Earned value                       |
| Ethics internally defined       | .....                               | Ethical & social responsibilities  |
| Private                         | .....                               | Transparent                        |
| Exclusive                       | .....                               | Inclusive & equitable              |
| Unchallenged assumptions        | .....                               | Holistic, integrated principles    |
| Belief that museums are neutral | .....                               | Neutrality is nonexistent          |
| Authoritative                   | .....                               | Broad empowerment                  |
| Controlled and contained        | .....                               | Compassionate & empathetic         |
| Keeper of knowledge             | .....                               | Exchange of knowledge              |
| Collection as priority          | .....                               | Public engagement as focus         |
| Amassing collections            | .....                               | Strategic collecting               |
| Array of activities             | .....                               | Intentional & impactful activities |
| Scarcity mindset                | .....                               | Abundance mindset                  |
| Established fiscal model        | .....                               | Agile fiscal model                 |
| Risk averse                     | .....                               | Informed risk-taking               |
| Reactive                        | .....                               | Proactive                          |
| Ephemeral adjustments           | .....                               | Transformational realignment       |
| Stability as goal               | .....                               | Agile sustainability               |

**TRADITIONAL MUSEUM**

**REINVENTED MUSEUM**

**Inclusion & Social  
Responsibility**

|                                     |       |                                    |
|-------------------------------------|-------|------------------------------------|
| Historic exclusion                  | ..... | Holistic inclusion                 |
| Embedded colonial history           | ..... | Dismantled colonial practices      |
| Systemic racism                     | ..... | Antiracist practices               |
| Colonial-based worldview            | ..... | Reparative worldview               |
| Privileged                          | ..... | Empathetic                         |
| Cultural appropriation              | ..... | Cultural empowerment               |
| Presumptive ownership               | ..... | Repatriation                       |
| Isolated from social issues         | ..... | Engaged with social issues         |
| Eschewing responsibilities for past | ..... | Owning responsibilities for past   |
| harms & actions                     | ..... | harms & actions                    |
| Denial of biases & prejudices       | ..... | Recognition of biases & prejudices |
| Limited representation              | ..... | Inclusive representation           |
| Homogeneous as norm                 | ..... | Diversity embraced                 |
| Suppressed differences              | ..... | Welcomed differences               |
| Heteronormative, cisgender          | ..... | Gender fluid                       |
| Patriarchal                         | ..... | Intersectional                     |
| Entitled language                   | ..... | Intentional language               |

**Public Value &  
Engagement**

|                                  |       |                               |
|----------------------------------|-------|-------------------------------|
| Good intentions                  | ..... | Public accountability         |
| Privileged society               | ..... | Civic responsibility          |
| Museum as destination            | ..... | Museum integral to community  |
| Insular worldview                | ..... | Part of greater ecosystem     |
| Isolated existence               | ..... | Engaged in community issues   |
| Non-essential                    | ..... | Essential                     |
| Primary public experience onsite | ..... | Online, onsite & offsite      |
| Academic expertise               | ..... | Community expertise           |
| Internal concerns dominate       | ..... | Internal & external balance   |
| Controlled access                | ..... | Open access                   |
| Lack of accessibility            | ..... | Accessibility driven          |
| Climate initiatives not priority | ..... | Proactive climate initiatives |
| Voice of authority               | ..... | Shared authority              |
| Debate & discussion              | ..... | Dialogue                      |
| Protective caretaker             | ..... | Shared stewardship            |
| Enforced directives              | ..... | Interactive choices           |
| One-way communication            | ..... | Open communication            |
| Presenting                       | ..... | Collaborating                 |
| Unidimensional                   | ..... | Multi-dimensional             |
| Safeguarding                     | ..... | Welcoming                     |
| Institutional peer recognition   | ..... | Broad-based relationships     |
| Lack of digital access           | ..... | Digital equity & access       |

**TRADITIONAL MUSEUM**

Established approaches .....  
Hierarchical management .....  
Privileged information .....  
Inwardly driven .....  
Singular viewpoint .....  
Cautious .....  
Limited environmental practices .....  
Segregated functions .....  
Compartmentalized goals .....  
Isolated efforts .....  
Range of offerings .....  
Quantity as success .....  
Promoting & selling .....  
Assumptions about public .....  
Limited community involvement .....  
Analog .....  
Limited use of technology .....  
Static role .....

**Internal Operations**

**REINVENTED MUSEUM**

Learning organization  
Egalitarian processes  
Accessible information  
Responsive to stakeholders  
Multiple viewpoints  
Entrepreneurial  
Extensive environmental practices  
Integrated operations  
Holistic, shared goals  
Collaborative efforts  
Strategic priorities  
Public impact as success  
Marketing-based approach  
Research & data informed  
Ongoing community involvement  
Virtual  
Integrated digital strategies  
Dynamic