

# REINVENTING THE MUSEUM TOOL

This tool is an excerpt from *Reinventing the Museum: The Evolving Conversation on the Paradigm Shift*, edited by Gail Anderson of Gail Anderson & Associates, and published by AltaMira Press in 2011. It is a dramatically revised version from the first edition of *Reinventing the Museum*, originally published in 2004.

The **Reinventing the Museum Tool** captures the essence of the paradigm shift occurring in museums. These lists of terms were developed over more than three decades of working with museum leaders and listening to conversations about the changing role of museums. The terms on the left depict the assumptions and values that capture traditional museums. The terms on the right illustrate the characteristics typical 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.

## TRADITIONAL MUSEUM

### Institutional Values

## REINVENTED MUSEUM

Values as ancillary	.....	Values as core tenets
Institutional viewpoint	.....	Global perspective
Insular society	.....	Civic engagement
Social activity	.....	Social responsibility
Collection driven	.....	Audience focused
Limited representation	.....	Broad representation
Internal perspective	.....	Community participant
Business as usual	.....	Reflective practice
Accepted realities	.....	Culture of inquiry
Voice of authority	.....	Multiple viewpoints
Information provider	.....	Knowledge facilitator
Individual roles	.....	Collective accountability
Focused on past	.....	Relevant and forward looking
Reserved	.....	Compassionate

**TRADITIONAL MUSEUM**

**REINVENTED MUSEUM**

**Governance**

Mission as document .....  
 Exclusive .....  
 Reactive .....  
 Ethnocentric .....  
 Internal focus .....  
 Individual vision .....  
 Single visionary leader .....  
 Obligatory oversight .....  
 Assumed value .....  
 Good intentions .....  
 Private .....  
 Venerability .....  
 Caretaker .....  
 Managing .....  
 Stability .....

Mission driven  
 Inclusive  
 Proactive  
 Multicultural  
 Expansive perspective  
 Institutional vision  
 Shared leadership  
 Inspired investment  
 Earned value  
 Public accountability  
 Transparent  
 Humility  
 Steward  
 Governing  
 Sustainability

**Management Strategies**

Inwardly driven .....  
 Various activities .....  
 Selling .....  
 Assumptions about audiences .....  
 Hierarchical structure .....  
 Unilateral decision-making .....  
 Limited access .....  
 Segregated functions .....  
 Compartmentalized goals .....  
 Conservative decisions .....  
 Fund development .....  
 Individual work .....  
 Static role .....

Responsive to stakeholders  
 Strategic priorities  
 Marketing  
 Knowledge about audiences  
 Learning organization  
 Collective decision-making  
 Open access  
 Integrated operations  
 Holistic, shared goals  
 Informed risk-taking  
 Entrepreneurial  
 Collaboration  
 Strategic positioning

**Communication Ideology**

Privileged information .....  
 Suppressed differences .....  
 Debate/discussion .....  
 Enforced directives .....  
 One-way communication .....  
 Keeper of knowledge .....  
 Presenting .....  
 Two-dimensional .....  
 Analog .....  
 Protective .....

Accessible information  
 Welcomed differences  
 Dialogue  
 Interactive choices  
 Two-way communication  
 Exchange of knowledge  
 Facilitating  
 Multi-dimensional  
 Virtual  
 Welcoming