

# AFTER THE BELL

TEEN CONVENING 2016 / EDUCATION REPORT





Teens and educators work together on a collaborative art project.

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- 5 Introduction
- 6 Overview
- 10 Convening Participants
- 19 Roundtable Discussions
- 26 Educator Roundtable
- 29 Lessons Learned
- 39 Online Forums
- 40 Acknowledgments
- 42 Conference Schedule



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*The views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent those of the Institute of Museum and Library Services.*

A background image showing several teenagers sitting around a table, focused on drawing or sketching on large sheets of paper. They are using markers and pencils. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting an indoor setting like a workshop or classroom.

**“THIS VERY SPECIAL  
EVENT HAS REMAINED  
ONE OF THE FEW  
OPPORTUNITIES  
FOR TEENS TO LEAD  
VITAL CONVERSATIONS  
ON A NATIONAL LEVEL  
ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE  
IN THE ARTS SINCE ITS  
LAUNCH IN 2009.”**

—Jill Medvedow, *Ellen Matilda Poss Director, ICA/Boston*

# INTRODUCTION

*After the Bell*, the ICA's eighth annual Teen Convening, brought together teens from Boston, Austin, Brooklyn, Chicago, New Orleans, Los Angeles, Atlanta, and Bentonville, Arkansas. Sharing their distinct viewpoints and experiences, these young people took the lead in discussing both the role teens play as collaborators in art museums across the country and the role museums play as sites of community-based learning for teen education and development. This very special event has remained one of the few opportunities for teens to lead vital conversations on a national level about young people in the arts since its launch in 2009.

The 2016 Convening began with its doors open to the public for a full day of programming, including teen presentations on their respective museums, a public panel exploring what makes art museums vital sites for learning “after the bell,” and a dynamic ICA Teen Night where participants were joined by hundreds of teens and colleagues from around Boston. Over 1,000 young people filled the ICA on this glorious summer Teen Night. For the next two days, teens and educators from participating institutions—Art Institute of Chicago, Brooklyn Museum, the Contemporary Austin, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, High Museum of Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and Ogden Museum of Southern Art—immersed themselves in discussing museums’ strengths as places of learning, how schools and museums might improve communication, and increasing access for young people both to and within museums. The diversity of backgrounds and institutions made for rich, productive conversations, and I think you’ll see in the following report that many lasting connections were made.

This year’s Convening would not have been possible without the generosity and dedication of the many individuals and organizations who share our commitment to teen arts education. The ICA extends its sincerest thanks to Converse for their partnership each summer, to UNIQLO for their sponsorship of this year’s event, and to our longtime teen education supporters the Institute of Museum and Library Services, as well as many other foundation, government, and corporate partners.

We thank artist Gerald L. Leavell II, who served as the artist-in-residence for *After the Bell*; current ICA

Teens Beatrice Española, Sienna Kwami, Dubem Okafor, Amireh Rezaei-Kamalabad, and Antonio Weathers; and Teen Arts Council alumni Nick Shea and Aric Crowe. These remarkable young people dedicated their summers to the Convening, and the result of their enthusiasm, creativity, and hard work was evident throughout the three days.

I also extend my appreciation to the talented ICA Education staff: Gabrielle Wyrick, Associate Director of Education and Teen Convening Project Director; Carlie Bristow, Teen Programs Assistant; Sean Snyder, Teen New Media Program Manager; Cliften Bonner-Desravines, Teen New Media Program Associate; and Monica Garza, Director of Education.

The ICA is dedicated to growing this national dialogue on teens in museums. Each of the participating organizations in the 2016 Convening extends our collective aim to empower teens through the arts. We are grateful for their partnership. Over the past eight years, the ICA has hosted 39 institutions from across the country, and we look forward to continuing and expanding these partnerships in the years to come as more of our partners launch regional convenings of their own.

Lastly, I am grateful to all our teens. Their energy, ideas, innovations, and passion have indelibly changed our museum and made us a better, more transparent, and more civically engaged institution. We honor our teens as individuals, creative thinkers, engaged citizens, and active and future leaders.

**Jill Medvedow**  
*Ellen Matilda Poss Director, ICA/Boston*

# OVERVIEW

The 2016 Teen Convening assembled teens and educators from across the country to participate in dialogue, exchange ideas, and work collectively to build a national network of museums committed to young people in the arts. Since it launched in 2009 as a structured forum for teens and educators to collaboratively learn how best to engage adolescents through contemporary art, the annual Teen Convening remains the only event of its kind to place the youth voice at the center of the development of teen arts education on a national scale.

In fall 2015, a small group of eight ICA teens met to brainstorm and select the topic for the 2016 Teen Convening. Reflecting on the distinctive quality of learning in an art museum setting, this group of ICA teens expressed the many ways that their art museum learning experiences were different from and also a complement to their formal, classroom-based educational experiences—in their words, their art museum experience was “not school.” They discussed the ways in which their teen program prioritized active learning, self-direction, collaboration, and creative freedom, and stood as a key opportunity for experimental, innovative, and experiential learning. Based on this initial conversation with ICA teens, the 2016 Teen Convening was titled *After the Bell*, exploring what makes art museums vital “after-the-bell” learning sites, as well as the benefits and importance of having such open-ended learning spaces available to youth.

Eight organizations with exceptional teen programs that prioritize experiential learning were invited to participate: Art Institute of Chicago, Brooklyn Museum, The Contemporary Austin, the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, High Museum of Art, ICA/Boston, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and Ogden Museum of Southern Art.

Preceding the in-person event in Boston, the 2016 cohort of participants came together virtually for a series of online forums. During these online conversations, participants identified four main questions for dialogue:

- 1. What are the needs of teens as they grow into adulthood and how can art museums address those needs?**
- 2. What are the differences between learning in an art museum setting and in a classroom setting? What are the pros and cons to each?**
- 3. What does growth and/or success look like in an art museum teen program? For teens, how do you measure your own growth within your program? For educators, how do you mark growth within the young people you work with on a daily basis?**
- 4. How does your teen program (and teen programs more broadly) challenge existing mindsets and perceptions about museums?**

The eighth annual Teen Convening opened on August 10, 2016, with a public day attended by hundreds of museum professionals and teens from across the region and beyond. Teens from the eight participating organizations presented their distinct programs to a large audience in the ICA's Barbara Lee Family Foundation Theater. Characteristically creative and inventive, the teens presented in a wide array of formats including on stage illustration, video, animation, spoken word, mock infomercials, and even a little disco roller-skating. In the afternoon, ICA teen program participants moderated a public panel focusing on the unique qualities of learning in the art museum. This public dialogue featured panelists from a range of constituencies, including



Teens and educators participate in an opening icebreaker on the first day of the Convening.

Teens Tatyana Graham from the Brooklyn Museum and Maite Nazario from the High Museum of Art becoming fast friends.



Rahn Dorsey, Chief of Education, City of Boston; Yana Minchenko, teacher, Boston Public Schools; Gerald L. Leavell II, ICA artist-in-residence; Marit Dewhurst, Director of Art Education and assistant professor in art and museum education, City College of New York (CUNY); Aric Crowe, ICA teen alumnus; and myself as a representative of the professional museum education community.

To celebrate the first day of the Teen Convening and welcome Boston-area youth to the museum, the ICA Teen Arts Council hosted a large-scale and exultant summer Teen Night attended by more than 1,000 local teens. Titled “Look at Yourself/Ourselves,” this Teen Night explored the ways in which contemporary art allows us to see ourselves reflected in works of art while simultaneously expanding our perspectives, knowledge, and empathy toward others. Featuring a collaboratively wheat-pasted photo wall of all attending teens, an open-mic lounge, T-shirt screen-printing, and youth performances from partners across the city, this event was a jubilant and festive finale to the Teen Convening’s dynamic first day.

The second day of the Teen Convening began with a collaborative workshop with Baltimore-based artist and educator Gerald L. Leavell II. Following a shared morning of creativity, participants came together for a series of roundtable discussions. As one teen participant noted, “I found the discussions between teens and museum educators very valuable. It was liberating and empowering to be on the same playing field with the educators; I had never had conversations with adults where my opinion was valued like that.”

On the third and final day of the Convening, teens and educators met separately. ICA Teen Arts Council member Amireh Rezaei-Kamalabad and TAC alumnus Nick Shea led a teen roundtable that challenged youth participants to both imagine their ideal museum of the future and reflect on key takeaways and action items they wanted to implement in their own cities and communities. Simultaneously, participating educators came together for a group conversation moderated by artist and social worker Melissa Rocklen on issues, opportunities, and strategies related to working with teens in museums. After their separate sessions, teens and educators met for a moving closing session led by Cliften Bonner-Desravines, program associate for the ICA’s Teen New Media program. Together with participants from their own organizations, teens and educators identified lessons they learned from each of the eight museums and what they will take back to their own institutions.

Each year, the Teen Convening brings a richer, deeper, more involved dialogue between youth and museum professionals on the topic and role of teens in the arts. In a world where teens are particularly vulnerable to social division and racial and political conflict, museums have the opportunity and responsibility to cultivate empathy and embrace their capacity as sites for community. The Teen Convening stands as an important forum for collaboration and understanding across generations, geographies, and backgrounds. It is our hope that this report captures the great feelings of unity and partnership evident at the ICA this past August and contributes to the ever-growing movement of youth empowerment and social change through the arts.

**Gabrielle Wyrick**

*Associate Director of Education  
and Teen Convening Project Director*

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**“I FOUND THE DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN TEENS AND MUSEUM EDUCATORS VERY VALUABLE. IT WAS LIBERATING AND EMPOWERING TO BE ON THE SAME PLAYING FIELD WITH THE EDUCATORS; I HAD NEVER HAD CONVERSATIONS WITH ADULTS WHERE MY OPINION WAS VALUED LIKE THAT.”**

*—Teen Participant*

# CONVENING PARTICIPANTS

## Art Institute of Chicago Chicago, IL

Founded in 1879, the Art Institute of Chicago (AIC) comprises eight buildings and covers nearly one million square feet. Located in the heart of Chicago, the Art Institute strives to collect, preserve, and interpret works of art of the highest quality from across the globe for the inspiration and education of its visitors. Today the collection contains approximately 300,000 works of art—ranging from ancient art to work created by today's foremost artists—and visitors number 1.5 million annually from across the city, the country, and the world.

Each year, Youth Programs enable hundreds of young people to use the museum as a resource and site for making art, meeting other teens, working with artists, and practicing their passions to make a difference in the museum and the city. Youth Programs at the AIC strive to engage, empower, and cocreate with teens to be active makers, programmers, and participants in the museum and the Chicagoland area. Programs are designed to provide a wide variety of pathways through the museum. This includes everything from drop-in programs such as the huge after-hours party Exuberus Teen Night and the youth-led Break the Mold museum pop-up night; art-making workshops, online classes, and competitions; museum career internships; creative practice and community (Teen Lab); and leadership and programming (Teen Council). With each opportunity, AIC aims to help youth find their voice in the museum and beyond.

## Brooklyn Museum Brooklyn, NY

The Brooklyn Museum's (BKM) Teen Programs support critical learning, creative expression, youth leadership, and connecting teens' unique voices within the arts and the local and global communities. BKM's programs serve approximately 1,200 to 1,500 teens annually from Brooklyn and around New York City. Programs provide a diverse group of teens with paid employment

and opportunities for producing engaging and eclectic cultural programming based on special exhibitions for their peers in Teen Nights and the Teen Night Planning Committee. In addition, Teen Programs build safe and creative spaces supporting gender and sexuality diversity in the LGBTQ Teen Night and the LGBTQ Teen Night Planning Committee. Teens also design and implement engaging arts education programs for museum visitors, including younger audiences and peers, in the Museum Apprentice Program; learn technology-based skills and gain expertise in interpretive resources around arts and social justice in Digital Artizens: Feminist Project; and take art classes while assisting teaching artists as Teen Work Study students in the Gallery/Studio Program. BKM Teen Programs are committed to representing marginalized voices within the arts—starting with young people, youth of color, LGBTQ+ youth, and working-class and immigrant youth—and activating social justice consciousness, dialogue, and action through the permanent collection, special exhibitions, and the visual arts at large.

## The Contemporary Austin Austin, TX

The Contemporary Austin aspires to be the contemporary art museum for Austin, Texas, and an essential part of city life. Through a unique combination of both an urban indoor location and an outdoor sculpture park, the Contemporary embodies an eclectic and collaborative spirit with rotating exhibitions and public programs. The Contemporary Austin values the importance of a space in which teens can build a community that strengthens and inspires their creative expression, propensity for risk-taking, and critical engagement with art and contemporary ideas. The museum invites teens throughout Central Texas to participate in a variety of free programs where they can meet peers, engage in rich exploration of contemporary culture, gain job experience, and take ownership by helping to envision the museum in new ways. Whether Teen Council members are throwing teen events or running the museum's Tumblr, the



2016 teen participants.

**“I WILL NEVER FORGET THE PEOPLE I MET. EACH ONE AFFECTED ME IN SOME WAY AND I AM BETTER FOR IT NOW. I GOT TO ENGAGE WITH PEOPLE IN COMPELLING CONVERSATIONS AND DEBATES, HEARING OPINIONS I COULD BUILD OFF OF AND ONES I ARGUED AGAINST. I FOUND DIFFERENT VERSIONS OF WHAT IT MEANS TO ‘HAVE A VOICE,’ AND IDEAS I THOUGHT TO BE UNREALISTIC DIDN’T SEEM SO MUCH OF A STRETCH ANYMORE.”**

—Alexandria Cantey, Teen Participant, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art



ICA teen alumnus Gibson Alcott DJing the Public Day of the Convening.

council advises the museum in order to build a strong youth arts community. Additional programs include Young Artists, a short course that introduces creative careers, provides portfolio development, and explores a wide range of artistic materials through the lens of contemporary art; and the Teen Artist + Mentor Program, where teens partner with an artist-mentor to collaborate one-on-one through weekly meetings over seven months and a final exhibition of collaborative work. A large number of teens also volunteer and assist instructors yearly with children's art classes during the summer at the museum's Art School. Through its teen programs, The Contemporary strives to nurture an inclusive and supportive environment in which art can build lasting connections and spark dialogue with peers that prioritizes the diversity and creativity of a teen voice.

### **Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art Bentonville, AR**

Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Arkansas, opened in 2011 with a mission to celebrate the American spirit in a setting that unites the power of art with the beauty of nature. The museum's remarkable building, designed by world-renowned architect Moshe Safdie, is situated in a wooded ravine on 120 acres of Ozark forest, and features two copper-roofed and glass-walled bridges spanning a natural stream. The museum's grounds include several nature trails, which connect with Bentonville's downtown area via the city's paved Crystal Bridges Trail.

The museum's permanent collection includes American masterworks ranging from the Colonial era to the contemporary. Included within the collection are iconic images such as Asher B. Durand's *Kindred Spirits*, Norman Rockwell's *Rosie the Riveter*, and Andy Warhol's *Coca-Cola [3]*—each reflecting a distinct moment in American artistic evolution—as well as major works by modern and contemporary American artists, including Georgia O'Keeffe, John Baldessari, and James Turrell. The permanent collection, which continues to grow through a strategic acquisition plan, is on view year-round and is enhanced by an array of temporary exhibitions.

Crystal Bridges' Teen Council was formed in 2012 as a means of engaging with area high school students. Council members volunteer their time and skills building connections between teens with an interest in art by planning and marketing programs for their peers across communities, advising the museum on teen

audiences, and learning about Crystal Bridges' collection, programs, and operations. Local teens enjoy year-round programming, including Teen Nights in the spring and fall, plus monthly pop-up TEN (Teen Experience Night) events, such as Art and Politics Conversations, yogART, art workshops, and dance instruction.

### **High Museum of Art Atlanta, GA**

Located in Atlanta, Georgia, the High Museum of Art has grown from its origins in a stately home on Peachtree Street to become the leading art museum in the southeastern United States. With more than 15,000 works of art in its permanent collection, the High has an extensive anthology of 19th- and 20th-century American and decorative art, significant holdings of European paintings, a growing collection of African American art and burgeoning collections of modern and contemporary art, photography, folk art, and African art. In addition, the High is dedicated to supporting and collecting works by Southern artists. Featuring award-winning architecture by Richard Meier and Renzo Piano, the High Museum is part of the Woodruff Arts Center, one of the largest arts centers in the world, along with its arts partners, the Tony Award-winning Alliance Theatre and the Grammy Award-winning Atlanta Symphony Orchestra.

ArtsVibe is a collaborative effort between all of the Woodruff Arts Center partners, designed to meet the needs of arts-oriented teens as well as those who are less familiar with the arts by offering a combination of paid and free events for students in grades 6 through 12. The High Museum hosts monthly art-making workshops and gallery experiences for the general public and local youth organizations. Essential to these efforts is the High Museum of Art's Teen Team, a group of creative high school students who share a common interest in art and community engagement. The Teen Team gets behind-the-scenes access to the museum, plans Teen Nights and events, assists with summer camps, and learns about the museum's exhibitions and collections. The Teen Team also takes on a large project for the museum each year. In the past, they have staged a teen film festival and curated an exhibition of prints from the High's modern and contemporary art collection. This year the Teen Team worked together to create a pop-up shop after studying the High's design collection and special exhibition *The Rise of Sneaker Culture*.

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## Institute of Contemporary Art Boston, MA

The ICA has a strong institutional commitment to teens, stemming from the recognition that teens are our future artists, leaders, and audiences. ICA Teen Programs provide safe spaces for the high-need teen audience, connect teens with contemporary art and artists, and support their artistic growth, creativity, critical-thinking and leadership skills, and overall well-being and health. They address Boston teens' demonstrated need for arts education, leadership development opportunities, and relationships with artists and mentors. Teens face challenges in forming their own definitions of identity, gender, political consciousness, and social responsibility, and these are themes often explored by contemporary artists; the ICA uses its unique physical and artistic resources to build on these connections. ICA Teen Programs also place teens at the center of the museum experience and support their engagement in their local communities and global society. The ICA serves more than 7,000 teens each year, and the museum has emerged as a local and national resource in the field of museum arts education for teens.

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## Los Angeles County Museum of Art Los Angeles, CA

For over 10 years, the High School Internship Program at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) has offered students from Los Angeles-area public schools an opportunity to learn and work at the museum. The program provides participants with an introduction to the museum as both a workplace and an exhibition site. During the school year, the program is scheduled one day per week after school. The interns are introduced to the museum, exhibitions, and staff. They also are given opportunities to participate in special projects, act as facilitators during museum events, work with exhibiting artists, and assist teaching artists during public events. Through intensive training sessions, participants gain knowledge about one special exhibition, gallery teaching techniques, and public-speaking skills. At the conclusion of their training, from January through March, the interns lead exhibition tours one morning per week for students in grades 9 through 12.

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## Ogden Museum of Southern Art New Orleans, LA

The Ogden Museum of Southern Art's Teen Docent Program serves New Orleans-area public school students with the goal of increasing their exposure to the arts, developing leadership and critical-thinking skills, and empowering youth to be role models and share their talents in the community. While the program provides Teen Docents with a safe, creative environment for out-of-school hours, job training as docents and summer camp counselors, and a stipend, the museum gains the benefit of formally trained programming assistants. Through an outreach component, Teen Docents also create original works of art to share with community members. Additionally, encounters with artists and visits to other cultural institutions broaden participants' knowledge of the arts and related career opportunities. This program addresses the critical lack of arts education and résumé-building activities available to the majority of students in post-Katrina New Orleans. In 2015, the Teen Docent Program was one of 12 programs selected to receive the National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award, the nation's highest honor for out-of-school arts and humanities programs that celebrate the creativity of the nation's young people.

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—Cristian Garcia-Velazquez, Teen Participant,  
Art Institute of Chicago



Hannah Zurko, Associate Educator for Teen Programs at the Contemporary Austin, participates in a group session.



Sienna Kwami, ICA teen, and Lindsay C. Harris, Astor Teen Programs Coordinator at the Brooklyn Museum of Art.

ICA teen alumnus Nick Shea taking a reflective moment during the first day's presentations.



Teens and educators gathered for group discussions.

# ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS

On the second day of the Teen Convening, participants discussed four key topics. Teens and educators alike shared their unique perspectives.

## Question 1

### What are the needs of teens as they grow into adulthood? And how can museums address these needs?

In a word, what teens need the most is “space”—to explore, grow, and thrive. Teens crave space of their own outside of school and home where they can “express themselves,” find “community,” meet “like-minded peers,” and “create their own identity.” Within this “safe space,” teens want to feel respected, supported, and empowered. Thankfully, museum teen programs already help fulfill these needs by “giving teens a voice,” encouraging them to share their opinions, and making them comfortable to speak their minds and ask questions in a way not always possible in structured classrooms.

The need for “respect” and “being validated” was reiterated by several teens, including Maite Nazario of the High Museum of Art, who shared, “When I’m respected, then I feel like I can voice my opinion and be valued.” Sienna Kwami of the ICA/Boston echoed this sentiment in a separate discussion: “I think that having your opinion matter means more to teens than anyone can think it does.”

Many teens expressed the need for “support,” “guidance,” and “mentorship.” Teens want to be around “inspiring adults they can look up to” and “positive role models.” Victoria Barrett of the Brooklyn Museum believes teens benefit from having access to “adults who can teach us things that we’re not necessarily learning in school but are still needed for adulthood”—from the practical (learning how to use Excel and write résumés) to emotional self-care. Beatrice Española from the ICA/Boston shared, “In high schools, I think mental health needs are really neglected; teens need support more than anyone else because we’re developing.” Museum teen programs can help to fill this gap by exposing teens to adults

who are “paying attention to teens” and who “have their back.”

Museums empower teens when teens are given opportunities for self-direction and decision-making. Cristian Garcia-Velazquez of the Art Institute of Chicago appreciates this because “it’s up to you what you want to do with that space.” By providing “real-world work experience” and “job shadowing” opportunities, museums “create a space for exploration” of different professions, topics, perspectives, and ideas not found in school. Prince Owsu-Yeboah, from the Contemporary Austin, stated he “would like to see more mentorship programs, and not necessarily only for the artists, but for teens who are interested in different aspects of the museum—the financial, advertising, and how museums work from the ground up.” Developing professional skills, such as “leadership and public speaking,” and taking on new responsibilities also helps build self-confidence, which is vital as teens transition into adulthood.

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***“I think that what museums really provide for teens is a space that is equalizing. ... Just having an outside space where teens are taken seriously, but also listened to or given a chance to be listened to on the same level as an adult, is very important.”***

—Rebecca Martin, Teen Participant, High Museum of Art

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***“I think teens need to learn how to transition from being a teenager to an adult, and also to learn how to be assertive, and speak their minds. ... If museums create an environment where teens are actually respected, and where they’re taught how to make arguments that are respectful, how to negotiate, how to compromise, how to make consensus, then that would really help a lot of teens.”***

—Tatyana Graham, Teen Participant, Brooklyn Museum

## Question 2

### What are the differences between learning in an art museum setting and a classroom setting? What are the pros and cons to each?

Teens unanimously agree that art museums provide much more “freedom” and “flexibility” for learning than the often “restrictive” and “structured” school classroom setting. The most notable difference between learning in an art museum and a classroom setting is “free will,” or as Shannon Green, Teen Team Teaching Artist from the High Museum of Art shared, “Coming to the museum to learn is a choice. ... You choose to be there.” Also, as Charlie Diaz from The Contemporary Austin noted, “museums aren’t grade-emphasized” so if you’re doing something, you’re doing it for yourself: “It’s really voluntary and it’s based on your enthusiasm rather than a requirement.”

Teens identified a few pros and several cons to learning in a classroom setting.

Alex Cantey of Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art said, “When I think of a classroom, I think of ‘getting to work’ so I think I’m more productive. ... When I’m at a desk, I’m more inclined to be more focused.” Schools present a wide range of topics and show how different subjects are “interconnected.” Although many teens view the classroom’s structure as a con, several teens appreciate that some structure is “helpful to learn and to grow.”

Cons to classrooms include: they often feel “constricting,” “systematic,” and “less organic”; there’s “not much room for creativity”; they’re “focused on meeting standards”; and there’s no “individualized learning.” Teens don’t always feel comfortable asking or answering questions in school due to fear of “being wrong” or “feeling stupid,” which also makes them hesitant to participate or engage in classroom discussions.

Teens found it difficult to come up with any cons for learning in a museum. Overall, teens see the museum’s more flexible learning environment as a pro, but some teens suggested that “less structure” could also be a con.

According to teens, the greatest benefit to learning in museums is that they enable you to “have conversations” and are “always trying to spark a discussion.” Teens recognize that museums have more flexibility “to make time to talk about

current events” and “subjects that people typically stay away from in public schools.” And when these conversations occur, there is often a “greater level of acceptance for everyone’s ideas”; teens’ “opinions are heard,” their “viewpoints are acknowledged,” and dissenting opinions are welcomed.

Another big pro is that museums emphasize learning that is “discovery-based,” “experiential,” “self-guided,” and “self-paced.” Prince Owsu-Yeboah of The Contemporary Austin likes that museum learning is more “trial and error, you really discover what’s right and what’s wrong by yourself, and there isn’t really a right or wrong answer; it’s something that’s left to interpretation.” For Princess Gonzalez from the Art Institute of Chicago, being in a dynamic environment filled with information, art, and artifacts “gives you a little adrenaline rush to motivate you” to explore all there is to see.

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***“When you have a preset curriculum, I think that’s good because it introduces you to stuff you otherwise wouldn’t have probably even thought to take, so there is a lot of benefit in that. But I think the difference is at a museum you’re like your own curriculum setter. ... You can pick and choose what you like. ... It’s up to you how inquisitive you are.”***

—Christa Villavasso, Teen Participant, Ogden Museum of Southern Art

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***“There is a structure in museums. But maybe it’s that the structure is open in a way that allows the people who are a part of that structure to determine it or to see it. I think we try to be more transparent about that structure and invite everybody in to collaborate around what that looks like best for the group, so it’s responsive in a way that maybe the classroom structure can’t always be.”***

—Hillary Cook, Assistant Director of Youth Programs, Art Institute of Chicago



Teen Princess Gonzalez from the Art Institute of Chicago sharing her thoughts during group discussion.

### Question 3

#### What does growth and/or success look like in an art museum teen program? For teens, how do you measure your own growth within your program? For educators, how do you mark growth within the young people you work with on a daily basis?

Growth and success in an art museum teen program are much more than increasing attendance and meeting objectives. From “allowing teens to make decisions and have meaningful responsibility” to developing “leadership skills,” finding their “own voice,” and gaining “confidence,” teens view their programs’ growth and success in qualitative, rather than quantitative, terms.

Several teens shared that teen programs are successful when they create a “respectful” and “safe” place where all teens feel welcomed and love coming to it. Darcy Olmstead from the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art feels that success in a teen program looks like “a place where everyone respects one another ... and everyone feels like they can speak out whenever they wish and that their voices can result in action. ... They feel like they can actually get stuff done.” Montiah Norton from the Ogden Museum of Southern Art defines success in teen programs “as teens getting as involved in the museum as possible, having the best time possible, learning as much as they can,” and always looking for ways “to get better.”

Receiving “validation” and “feedback from adult leaders,” as well as their peers, is helpful for teens in measuring their own growth. But teens also look inward to assess growth. Teens shared how their participation in teen programs has helped them to feel “less ashamed of wanting to speak in school” and “more comfortable with my voice.” Prince Owsu-Yeboah from The Contemporary Austin knows that he’s grown “because now I’m able to come up with my own original ideas and articulate them better than I did before I started the teen program.” Other teens noted they measure growth by their increased willingness to “challenge” themselves and try new things.

In addition to “informal debriefs,” “midyear check-ins,” and pre-/post-program “surveys,”

educators measure growth within the teens they work with by observing “how they are able to apply what they have learned” to other interests and areas of their life. Cliften Bonner-Desravines from the ICA/Boston measures growth by whether or not teens “come back, they come on time, or even come early to help out ... just being there and they want to be there, and they want to share their time with me.” For Lauren Jackson of the Art Institute of Chicago, “growth looks like trust ... being able to say ‘I’m giving you this program, I know that you’ll see it all the way through, and that it’ll be amazing.’”

Both teens and educators agreed that success can be measured by how the teen program experience resonates beyond museum walls. “A successful teen program would not just encourage teens to be active in the museum but to be active in the place that surrounds the museum, where they live, where they’ve come from, and just build that sense of community everywhere,” said Darcy Olmstead.

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***“The teen program has really allowed me to be more respectful of myself and more accepting of myself because of the way that people treat me when I’m in the teen program. I don’t feel like I am the same person that I am when I started it. ... Sometimes I have a lot of doubts of what I’m doing or who I am and the teen program has really allowed me to be comfortable even with the doubts and I feel like that’s how I’ve grown. ... I’m OK with myself now more than I was before.”***

—Maite Nazario, Teen Participant,  
The High Museum of Art

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***“It’s really about them finding a voice, being able to be heard, understanding themselves, getting to know how they are the same and how they are different from their peers so that they can vocalize that and feel like [they’re in] a safe space to do so. And those who have already found their voice, what are they choosing to do with that voice? Are they making moves to do something productive or creative or instrumental with that voice? Those are kind of the two markers I look for.”***

—Amber Edwards, Coordinator of Education and  
Public Programs, Los Angeles County Museum of Art



Prince Owsu-Yeboah from the Contemporary Austin participating in the group reflection session.

## Question 4

### How does your teen program—and teen programs more broadly—challenge existing mindsets and perceptions about museums?

Teen programs challenge existing mind-sets of who goes to museums and what a museum is. “Just having teens in the museum” challenges the stereotype that museums are only for “high-cultured adults,” as well as the perception that they’re “not a place for teens.” Annie Titan from LACMA discussed how “museums can be very intimidating ... so just the fact that we are teens who work in the museum and talk about it with others” helps to change people’s perceptions of who makes up the museum audience. In a separate conversation, Rebecca Martin from the High Museum of Art echoed this by sharing how teen programs challenge the perceived notion that museums are “elitist, intellectual institutions” and reinforce that “museums can be accessible to demographics that are not typically thought of in terms of museums and museum visitors.”

Cristian Garcia-Velazquez from the Art Institute of Chicago shared that his museum is “breaking that barrier of who could go to a museum or who should go” by providing free admission for teens. Other teens also commented on how teen programs “help kids get into the museum who might not have been able to go before” due to perceptions of affordability.

In addition to challenging perceptions about audience and accessibility, teen programs also challenge the traditional mind-set of what a museum is—and what it can or should be. According to Tatyana Graham of the Brooklyn Museum, teen programs “help break down the limits on what you can do in a museum, what you can talk about in a museum, and what an art museum can represent.” Through teen programs, teens discovered that museums are “more than just looking at art.” Several teens commented that before participating in their teen programs, they never thought of museums as “a place to make art” or as creative, interactive spaces that spark conversations.

Teens from the Brooklyn Museum shared how their institution is “really big on social change” and that having discussions about current social issues inside the museum not only challenges the perceived mindset of museums as “passive,” “quiet” places, but also “challenges a lot of people’s minds.”

Ellen Balkin from the Ogden Museum of Southern Art sees museums becoming more like “community centers” with teen programs playing a role in this transformation: “Having teens in the museum to be ambassadors for the programming that we have here, to go out in the community, helps to change the perception of what museums are and what museums have become or are becoming.”

Finally, teen programs also help to change “people’s assumptions about what the typical teenager is like.” For example, Holly York from the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art shared that she was “really surprised to learn how interested our Teen Council is in politics, both national and local. I wasn’t like that as a teen. ... I think a lot of people are surprised at how invested these kids are in politics and they aren’t even old enough to vote yet.”

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***“I think museums are changing because they’re becoming community centers—from these passive entities and institutions where you’re going in and just looking to these active places that have people and groups that are responding to issues in their world. I think that’s really cool, and I think a lot of that comes from your groups and how you’re reacting to the museum and how the museum is reacting to you all. I think it’s all kind of intertwined too.”***

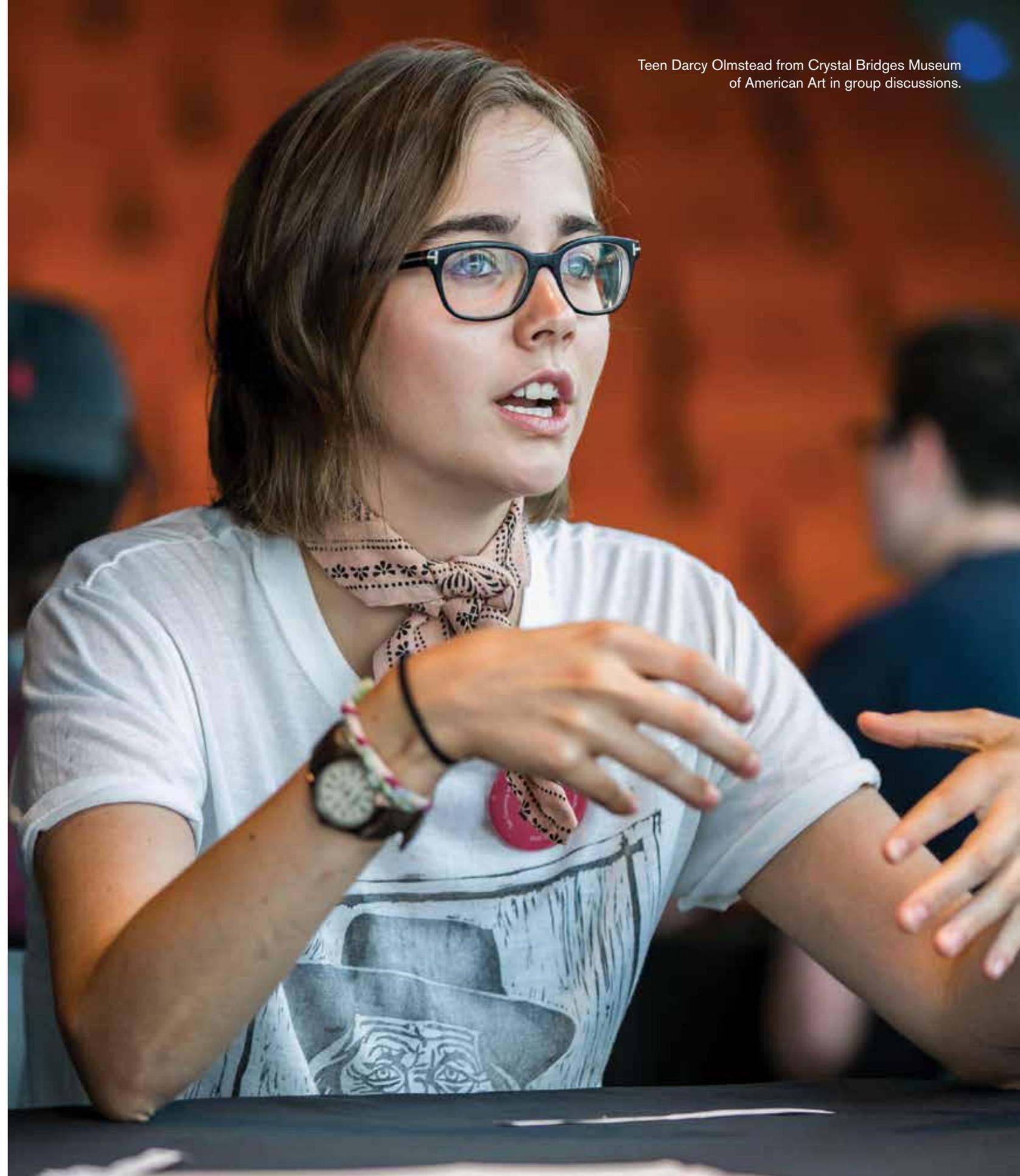
—Ellen Balkin, Education Manager, Ogden Museum of Southern Art

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***“What we’re doing in Teen Programs and in particular in Teen Lab is allowing the community to feel relevant in a museum setting ... so bringing in narratives from young people so that they feel as though they have a space for their voice to be heard. Feeling as though you don’t have to come in and say that everything is great because you’re in a museum. ... You can express your anger at things that are going on around the city, around the world in general. And that all can be fed into your creative practice and what you do when you’re inside of this space.”***

—Lauren Jackson, Youth and Studio Programs Educator, Art Institute of Chicago

Teen Darcy Olmstead from Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in group discussions.



# EDUCATOR ROUNDTABLE

## At the Educator Roundtable, museum staff came together to share ideas about their work.

We began this year's roundtable by thinking about schools and our relationships to them. This conversation quickly led to a discussion about the numerous support systems in teens' lives, from individual people (such as friends, family, and teachers) to bigger groups (medical systems, religious organizations, and social media). As one educator voiced, "I would love there to be a connection with the many environments that the teens are in. How can we have synergy and fill the gaps in the students' lives?" By working with the many people in teens' lives, we can increase the support that we give to them. As we talked about this potential collaboration, many questions arose: How do we balance our own programs' needs with the needs of other programs (such as schools)? How do we balance teens' need for autonomy with their need for support? How do we reach out to the people in teens' lives?

We didn't figure out how to address every question that arose, but we did explore many interesting ideas. **Highlighted below are some of the issues and solutions that we discussed:**

### ***"We're all serving the same audience, so how can we do that better?"***

Many museum educators want to expand their collaboration with schools. They find these partnerships to be both rewarding and challenging. Ideally, educators said, they want to create an "equal exchange" with schools, in which both parties respect the work that the other does and build off of one another so that museums, schools, and students are "lifting each other up." That way, what educators and teens do in museums can "feed back into what teens are doing in schools" and vice versa.

### ***"We will invite family members in."***

Educators have found that teens' families do not always feel welcome in museums. Part of the educator's role may be introducing family members to the museum and the resources

available there. For some staff, this has meant reaching out to family members and inviting them in for a tour, an event, or a personal meeting. Other times, staff has empowered students to invite people to the museum. Often, it means making the first interaction with a caregiver a positive one that highlights the museum's work and the student's work. Educators have found that the more familiar caregivers are with the museum's work, the more likely they are to support a teen's participation in the program.

### ***"Although you are not always going to get a response when you reach out, it's good to leave that communication door open."***

Each student is unique, as is each support system. This means that educators have to be flexible in the way that they communicate with teens' family members and schools. To reach out, educators use mass emails, individual emails, telephone calls, written letters, and social media blasts. They don't always get a response, but these interactions create a bridge that can make communication easier in the future. Some staff have experimented with copying caregivers on their emails to students. Others have invited students' families to orientations and events showcasing student work. New ideas were also raised, such as using social media (Facebook, blogs, and newsletters) to provide family members and school staff with updates about what students are doing.

### ***"Nothing about you without you."***

When teens come to museum programs, they often want a space that is separate from the other parts of their lives. As educators, how can we respect this space while also reaching out for the support that students (and museum staff) may need? One educator talked about their policy: "Nothing about you without you." This means "making sure that a student knows that we are going to have a conversation with their guardian or parent. And that we talk with the student beforehand about how that conversation will go." Talking with students before reaching out allows teens to maintain some power in the interaction.

This policy is helpful in non-crisis situations. If a student's safety is at risk, an educator may not be able to consult with the student first.

### ***"When we have to tell someone."***

As educators, we are mandated reporters. This means that if a student tells us that they are in danger or that someone they know is in danger, we have to take action. Educators talked about the importance of letting students know this at the beginning of the program. As one educator said, "I tell them: 'This is a safe space. We are forming a community, and we are going to put together guidelines for that community. Part of my role is that I have to make sure that I'm taking care of you. And, if you tell me something that I feel may be harmful to you or to other people in your life, I need to tell someone.'"

These were some of the many ideas that were raised during the educator roundtable. Coming together let us begin to discuss the numerous questions that come up in the work that we do. We all wanted to continue the conversation. Toward the end of our meeting, we began discussing the importance of talking about the sociopolitical issues taking place in our world today. How can we create a safe space for students to talk and listen? How can we prepare ourselves to discuss the issues at hand? How can we make sure that all voices are represented and heard in the museum setting? We did not have time to fully examine these ideas. As we build our own relationships with one another, these conversations can continue. In the same way that we strengthen our partnerships with students' families and schools, we can continue to build our partnerships with one another.

—Melissa Rocklen, MSW, LICSW

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*This year's roundtable facilitator was Melissa Rocklen. Melissa is a clinical social worker and artist who specializes in working with youth and collaborating with institutions to build their social-emotional support systems.*



Lauren Jackson from the Art Institute of Chicago participating in the Educator Roundtable.

Teen Cristian Garcia-Velazquez from the Art Institute of Chicago sharing his takeaways on the last day.



# LESSONS LEARNED

## Art Institute of Chicago

### Hillary Cook

Assistant Director of Youth Programs

### Lauren Jackson

Youth and Studio Programs Educator

### Cristian Garcia-Velazquez

Teen Council Member

### Princess Gonzalez

Teen Lab Member

Being part of the Convening was such an astounding experience. It all started with the weekly online forums that were mind-blowing. Seeing what teens from all over the nation thought about a certain topic that was presented gave us insight into how these teens would act upon these questions. The conversation about what a museum and what traditional schooling do for education is something that really didn't go through my mind initially. It was unbelievable to see the ideas from the other participants, and how they have or will help the schooling system to work more efficiently. Actually being at the Convening was incredible. It's crazy to see what teens have achieved for their museums and communities. I know for a fact that many of the teens in other museums went out to serve those who can't get to their institutions, and that is something that I want to bring back to the Art Institute. Outreach is a mission for every museum, and teens could be an essential part of doing that. The Convening really showed me that museums want teens to be part of the communities that they live in, and to set the future that they want to see instead of a future that is imposed on them. The stigma of teens is changing, and events like these help that happen.

—Cristian Garcia-Velazquez, Teen Council Member

While in Boston, I enjoyed the kindness of teens and instructors from other museums as well as the welcoming arms of those from the ICA. Participating in the Convening has introduced me to a diverse group of artistic individuals. Experiencing the streets of Boston with such great people was the highlight of the trip. Being given the opportunity

to collaborate and discuss with other teens has enlightened me. The exchange of ideas gave us the opportunity to bring back innovative concepts that could help with the success of our teen programs at the Art Institute of Chicago. Many of these ideas include incorporating the urban community within the museum. After coming to the Convening, I will be bringing back the same passion and effort for change to my teen program to enlighten others.

—Princess Gonzalez, Teen Lab Member

There's something about having a national conversation at a conference that throws into high relief not just the threads that unite all of our work, but also the very particular concerns of your home museum and local young people. I am so grateful that we were invited to be a part of that conversation through this year's Convening. The experience of traveling with teens and watching them prepare their presentation on the Art Institute's teen programs emphasized, for me, the power of asking youth to represent a museum on a national stage. Cristian and Princess are bringing back ideas, questions, and calls to action that will have an exponential impact as they find ways to make the Art Institute another center for dialogue about youth programming during the regional Convening. This process also showed me the places where we have more work to do to ensure that young people—both those who participate in our programs and those who currently don't—have equitable access to museums in their teenage years and beyond. It is increasingly clear to me that the future of our field should lie with these youth who care so deeply about the museums in which they work, who have so much to contribute, and who are already asking the hard questions that museums need to answer to remain relevant.

—Hillary Cook, Assistant Director of Youth Programs

Conferences can be scary. Meeting new people, trusting that your work will shine through without physically inviting people to see your programs in action, and hoping that you don't trip when you present are all things that our teens got to experience firsthand because this conference was so uniquely for them. Being invited to the ICA/Boston for this

year's Teen Convening was an honor that did not go unnoticed by our youth. A conference that is for teens and by teens is a refreshing concept, allowing youth to be featured predominantly in the work that we do in museum education. With each online forum, they gained more confidence in themselves and more knowledge about what other teen programs have to offer institutionally. As an educator at the Art Institute of Chicago, it is a joy to help teens develop their voice and talk about what they have gained by being a part of Teen Programs here. Taking that work to a national level allowed teens and educators the opportunities to commune, share resources, and talk about the challenges and the work that still needs to be done to further our collective goals for young people and individual goals for our respective institutions. More and more, it is increasingly valuable to understand the agency and power that teens have if given the right platform. I hope museums continue to work toward providing teens opportunities to discuss what they think is valuable about cultural institutions, and how we can create spaces for them to learn, trust, and grow.

—**Lauren Jackson**, *Youth and Studio Programs Educator*

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## Brooklyn Museum

**Victoria Barrett**  
Sackler Center Teen Leader;  
Teen Movie Night Curator

**Tatyana Graham**  
LGBTQ Teen Night Planning Committee

**Lindsay C. Harris**  
Astor Teen Programs Coordinator

So many teens are so inundated with schoolwork and jobs that they don't fully engage with the world around them. We either don't have the opportunities, don't have the time, or we're not supported to do so. Although we all come from different backgrounds, we share a need for wanting to be a part of something bigger and a desire for creative and critical engagement.

During the ICA/Boston Teen Convening, we dissected one topic: "After the Bell." We tapped into the shared experiences and roots of this topic as it relates to school and the spaces after, before, and between. Over the course of the three days we were there, we began to highlight other pertinent themes in our lives, such as social justice, school, and friendships. After getting to know the other teens and educators, we realized how unique and different everyone was, which served as a pleasant disruption to what can seem like, for us,

a mundane stream of stimulation. The Brooklyn Museum is a bastion to all things unique and diverse, so what we found surprising was how the other teens reacted to what they saw as "radical" and what we've accepted as the everyday. For example, seeing how fellow students excitedly reacted to our LGBTQ Teen Night Planning Committee helped us to appreciate more fully just how "radical" we are in Brooklyn.

At the Teen Convening, we let our ideas flow, we articulated our rights as young people, we learned how to not let ourselves be underestimated, we were confident in our voices, and we stepped outside of our comfort zones by discussing issues that we don't typically discuss.

Throughout the Teen Convening, we were consistently valued for our work, ideas, and experiences. We were told we're awesome! Teens are not less because we've been on earth for less time than some people. Those of us participating in the Teen Convening are fortunate enough to be involved in organizations that facilitate our empowerment, but so many students are constantly subjected to institutions that don't. Being in an environment such as this one at the ICA/Boston and seeing youth voices being held up on a national scale only strengthened our belief that people are ready to hear what youth have to say.

The Teen Convening was a truly amazing experience.

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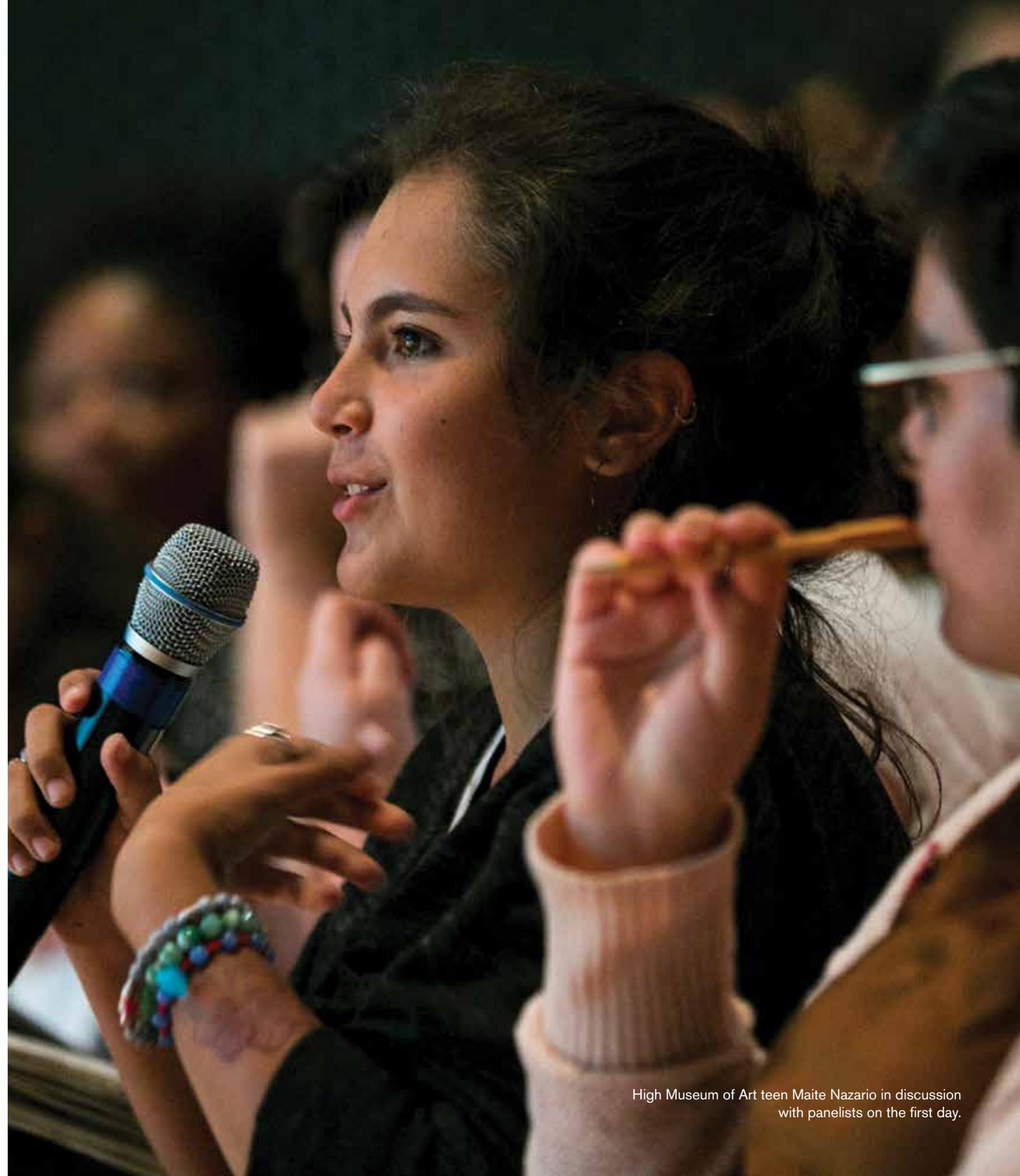
## The Contemporary Austin

**Hannah Zurko**  
Associate Educator for Teen Programs

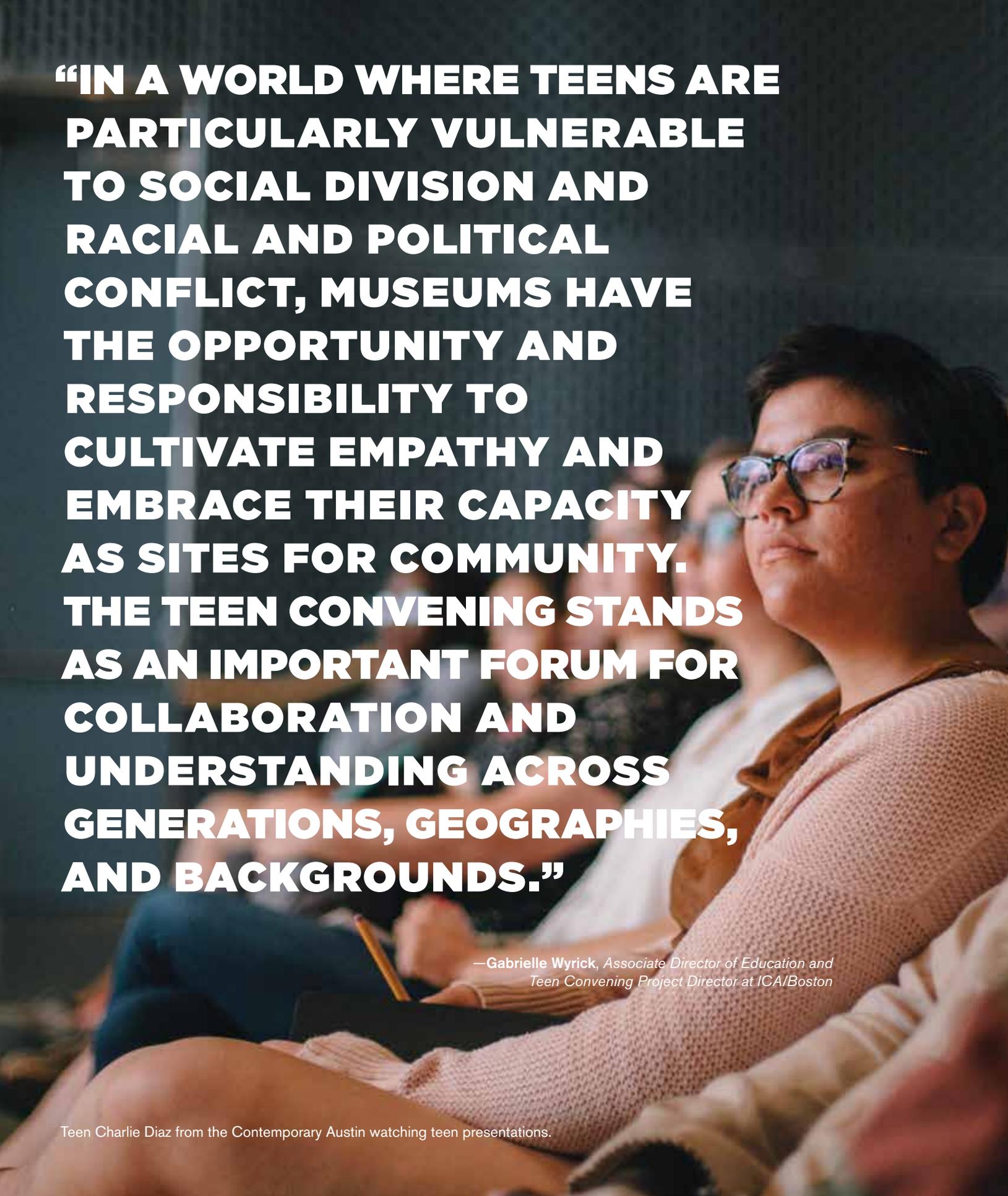
**Charlie Diaz**  
Teen Council Member

**Prince Owsu-Yeboah**  
Teen Council Member

The most important lesson I learned from being a part of the Teen Convening was how productive it can be to be a teen in a space that really values and respects teens' opinions and experiences. It's really different from a school environment, and thus, the results of the discussions were dramatically different. The teens were engaged and eager to participate, as well as share experiences and opinions that would often remain unvoiced in an unsympathetic setting. But, as was the case here, the things that often remain unsaid are often also the most helpful. By creating a space full of people who are willing to listen to teens and are honestly curious about what the teens had to say about teen programming, the most genuine and thoughtful responses were generated. During every



High Museum of Art teen Maite Nazario in discussion with panelists on the first day.



**“IN A WORLD WHERE TEENS ARE PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE TO SOCIAL DIVISION AND RACIAL AND POLITICAL CONFLICT, MUSEUMS HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY AND RESPONSIBILITY TO CULTIVATE EMPATHY AND EMBRACE THEIR CAPACITY AS SITES FOR COMMUNITY. THE TEEN CONVENING STANDS AS AN IMPORTANT FORUM FOR COLLABORATION AND UNDERSTANDING ACROSS GENERATIONS, GEOGRAPHIES, AND BACKGROUNDS.”**

—Gabrielle Wyrick, Associate Director of Education and Teen Convening Project Director at ICA/Boston

Teen Charlie Diaz from the Contemporary Austin watching teen presentations.

part of the Teen Convening, I felt like the way I feel and my experiences were valued regardless of my age.

—Charlie Diaz, Teen Council Member

Going to the ICA/Boston was both an amazing and unforgettable experience, and a wonderful learning opportunity. I was able to have my voice heard and be around other like-minded individuals. I was really impressed by how the teen event was marketed and the turnout. Having the presentations as well as the guest speakers lead into the Teen Night that same day created a lot of hype. The fact that there is one large event creates anticipation among the guests, and an excitement is generated that then leads to exposure because you get people talking. Having performances and open mics was a great way to incorporate the community and put a spotlight (literally) on young artists. This also adds to the amount of people who come to the event because not only do you have people wanting to come to perform, but also the performers will more than likely invite an audience of their own. I would like to incorporate performances and open mics in our events in the future.

—Prince Owsu-Yeboah, Teen Council Member

The experience of attending the Teen Convening was a powerful and concentrated reminder of why I love my job working with teens. A colleague once told me, “The kids are always awesome.” It is absolutely true. At the Convening, teens lead the show, and each and every one of them is amazing and inspiring. There is a never-ending amount to learn as an educator, and the conversations and questions that happened during our time in Boston brought new perspectives to ideas and plans that have lain dormant for some time. The energy was refreshing. The exchanges and discussions between educators and students have encouraged me to return home to speak up louder about what occurs in teen programming and the exciting work ahead.

—Hannah Zurko, Associate Educator for Teen Programs

## Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art

Holly York

Associate Museum Educator

Alexandria Cantey

Teen Council Member

Darcy Olmstead

Teen Council Member

The national Teen Convening was an eye-opening experience. Each night Alex and I would return to the

hotel still blabbering about all the ideas and people that had influenced us that day. For one, everybody we met lived in a different environment from us. I believe Bentonville, Arkansas, was the smallest town represented in the entire Convening. We aren't used to the large and diverse cultural representation that is common in urban environments, so trips to places like the ICA/Boston can be extremely valuable in understanding and shaping our worldview. We learned a lot about the educational and community values of art and museums, which was accentuated by brilliant and entertaining people.

Other than the discussions and Teen Night, my favorite activity was designing a “perfect” museum. We separated into groups of four and worked together to figure out what we wanted. From our discussions, I learned about the various needs of a museum and everything a space is capable of being. This activity epitomized an idea that ran throughout our days at the Convening: Teen opinions are valid. The fact that adults were listening to us and we had the spotlight on many issues was influential for a lot of us. At least for me, it solidified my passion for art museums. Now I can say with certainty that I could see myself in a career in the art world. Having experiences like this, at this age, is very reassuring, especially when teachers and other adults are pushing me toward other careers, and my school is receiving very little arts funding. I've had a rare glimpse into the real world, where art is very much a necessity.

—Darcy Olmstead, Teen Council Member

The Teen Convening was a collection of new experiences for me. I experienced diversity in people, opinions, and places that I'd never seen before in northwest Arkansas. I will never forget the people I met. Each one affected me in some way and I am better for it now. I got to engage with people in compelling conversations and debates, hearing opinions I could build off of and ones I argued against. I found different versions of what it means to “have a voice,” and ideas I thought to be unrealistic didn't seem so much of a stretch anymore.

Every day Darcy and I both got up excited for the day ahead of us. We participated in workshops, discussions, and lunches that brought together ideas everyone had an opinion about. We even broke into small groups and designed a museum and school mixed together. We had to really think about what we wanted, why, and how it would all be paid for. The activities reinforced my passion to always include museums and art of every form in my life no matter what I am doing, as well as the belief that art is a voice for change.

—Alexandria Cantey, Teen Council Member

A couple of years ago, the Crystal Bridges Teen Council set a goal to attend the national Teen Convening and we were thrilled to receive an invitation this year. Sharing our teen programming with other youth organizations on a national level was an opportunity of a lifetime.

I didn't expect to become emotionally invested in the short few days of the Convening. Hearing from teens around the nation about the impact of teen programs on their lives brought new insights, and I enjoyed connecting with teens and educators during the roundtable discussions. Even after the end of our scheduled days, Darcy, Alex, and I continued chatting about the topics and issues that affect teens throughout the country. The exchange of varying perspectives and other teen programs was influential on all of us.

I am proud of the actions that Darcy and Alex developed during the last day to take back to the Teen Council: involve, create, and build. I am excited to see these actions take form. Participating in the Convening has given me the drive to help our teens develop more meaningful experiences for youth and expand our audience. This opportunity not only impacted myself and our attending representatives, but also continues to inspire our entire Teen Council. References to the Convening come up in our weekly meetings, and the Teen Council is looking forward to hosting a regional Convening in spring 2017.

—**Holly York**, *Associate Museum Educator*

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## High Museum of Art

### **Erin Dougherty**

Head of Public Programs and Community Engagement

### **Shannon Green**

Teen Team Teaching Artist

### **Rebecca Martin**

Teen Team Member

### **Maite Nazario**

Teen Team Member

The High was so honored and excited to be invited back to the ICA Teen Convening for a second year. The time and space to reflect solely on teen programming are so valuable and restorative for a museum educator. I appreciated knowing a little bit about what to expect. However, I was surprised by how different this year's experience was. It really is a program that each group makes its own, and I enjoyed and learned as much this year as last. What I appreciated the most was getting to brainstorm and discuss with—and simply enjoy being with—other educators and teens who are working together.

As with last year, I left inspired and ready to host our second regional Teen Convening this coming spring.

—**Erin Dougherty**, *Head of Public Programs and Community Engagement*

Being a part of the ICA Teen Convening was by far one of the greatest experiences I've been able to have as a teenager. I was able to meet so many amazing, intelligent people with whom I could bond over our mutual love for art as well as our passion for problem-solving.

My love for art has always been present, but the Convening served as a wake-up call in the sense that I now realize how much I truly value art as well as education. In addition to reaffirming my passion, the Convening helped me grow as a speaker and communicator of ideas, specifically within the context of presentations and discussions.

The forums and discussions I participated in allowed me to think critically about complicated issues, such as the relationship between art and the education system, and to hear and respond to the opinions of other teens as well as adults. The fact that a group of teenagers' opinions were not only being heard but also being asked for, was eye-opening, as it can be a rare occurrence in daily life, adding a level of significance to the experience that I was not expecting. These conversations were not only thought-provoking but also meaningful because we were allowed to express our opinions and hear those of others in return as we all discussed a mutual passion: the arts.

The experience as a whole was, in a word, moving. The bonds created were as meaningful as the thoughts exchanged, and in every part of it there was something special to be found. Thanks to this experience, I have been able to make long-lasting friendships with people all over the country, reaffirm my passion, share ideas with others just as passionate as I am, and most importantly, connect with many different people over one thing we all love: art.

—**Rebecca Martin**, *Teen Team Member*

The Teen Convening was one of the most amazing experiences of my life. I met the most amazing, passionate people, who were all interested in making the world a better place through art. We had very intense, intellectual conversations about the educational system and how it can learn from museum education. We also discussed the importance of giving teens responsibility and respect. The discussions often included how teens need to be challenged at an intellectual level and how they should

be encouraged to “be the change” in their communities. In Boston, I got the opportunity to meet other teens who were just as involved with art and its purpose as I am, and it gave me hope that our generation can be one of change, positivity, and equality. Each individual teen had his or her own purpose and goals, and it was truly energizing to see how passionate all of us were to try and make our marks in the world. The teens came from various states and backgrounds, and it was interesting to hear all their different perspectives and opinions.

All the teens had an opportunity to give presentations about their museums and programs, and I got to learn a little bit about where they each came from and the things that their museums do differently. All the people who attended were great, and I became friends with them really quickly. For me, speaking in front of all the people was a character- and confidence-building experience. Each teen also had a supervisor, and all the supervisors were friendly, passionate, respectful, and involved. I also loved that all the educators were interested in what the teens had to say and respected their opinions and beliefs. It was so enlightening to hear the educators' perspectives on all of the issues and their attempts to fix certain problems. The ICA was very wonderful and welcoming, and the atmosphere was very warm and positive. We did tons of activities that were fun and educational. The ICA also hosted an amazing Teen Night where we all had fun roaming the museum. My favorite parts of the trip were the conversations and all the beautiful people.

While I was in Boston, I also got the opportunity to see the city and its wonderful sights and have a little taste of its culture. I absolutely loved it, and I'm extremely grateful for the experience.

—**Maite Nazario**, *Teen Team Member*

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## Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston

### **Gabrielle Wyrick**

Associate Director of Education;  
Teen Convening Project Director

### **Carlie Bristow**

Teen Programs Assistant

### **Cliften Bonner-Desravines**

Teen New Media Program Associate

### **Sienna Kwami**

Teen Arts Council Member

### **Beatrice Española**

Fast Forward Member

Spending the first half of the summer collaborating with Sienna on our Teen Convening presentation, my love for the ICA and the people in it grew, and I became confident in my place in the museum. Then the Convening started and my love for all things museum education exploded. Three days of thinking about a future where art and school are integral on a larger scale was so enriching because from the start there were no facades. We all entered wanting to learn and listen. The constant energy of amazement and support allowed us to speak about ourselves and the perils of education (mainly high school). At a discussion, I talked about how very specific abilities, such as mathematical aptitude, are valued over others. I then trailed off unconfidently, but my film teacher Cliff said, “I know exactly what you're saying. A school has the ability to make or break a person.” Hearing my own teacher affirm the reality of such a poor and often-overlooked part of most schools helped me forgive myself for not being a cookie-cutter student. From that point on, I was more inclined to value the ways I am different. While I was thinking critically about institutions and seeing the art of other young people, it sparked a vision for the future of museums to break down traditional aspects and embrace inclusion in all areas. I take away from the Convening a new awareness of intention; a museum is by no means prohibited from being a platform for social change, as shown by the Brooklyn Museum. Participating in the Convening also solidified my belief that education, not just arts education, needs to be an experience in which we are in touch with ourselves, instead of a disconnected and rushed erasure of identity. Xoxo to everyone who participated, it was real!

—**Beatrice Española**, *Fast Forward Member*

Through our discussions about the differences (and similarities) of traditional school and teen museum education, I was able to notice just how progressive museum spaces are and how important they are to the development of teens as they transition into adulthood. The basic structure of the Teen Convening alone was a sort of culture shock for me. A constantly overlooked demographic, teens were now being placed at the forefront of their own education; I was finally able to have a say in what I needed as the student, not what the educator thought was best for me. The best example of this was when the discussion moved to whether or not teen programs should adopt a more structured layout for their teens. The educators respectfully listened, took notes, and eventually agreed with us as we explained how the unstructured layout of teen programs is what made them such unique learning spaces and how

the elimination of “the box” that many schools create was what allowed us to grow beyond the space provided. It made me even more appreciative of the differences between my time at school and on the Teen Arts Council. I have been able to grow as I near graduation because the ICA space eliminates “the box.”

—**Sienna Kwami**, *Teen Arts Council Member*

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## Los Angeles County Museum of Art

**Amber Edwards**

Coordinator of Education and Public Programs

**Annie Titan**

Museum Intern

**Anabelle Doliner**

Museum Intern

It was an honor to represent LACMA at this year’s national Teen Convening. I didn’t realize how varied teen programs at different museums could be, so it was interesting to see this diversity. I loved the alumni and educator panels, as well as the roundtable discussions.

It was overwhelming, but very eye-opening, to learn about the different kinds of inequality that exist in the way a museum is run. I am grateful for this, however, because I wish to pursue a career in this field and am now more informed about these institutional bureaucracies. I enjoyed spending a few days with fellow teens and adults, and was blown away by everyone’s creativity and artistic talent!

An unexpected takeaway I got from this Convening was seeing how different our cultures and backgrounds were, and we all live in the same country! It was fascinating to speak to teens from different states and learn how different our lives are. Yet, we all share a passion for art and museums, and we strongly connected with one another on that level. Because of this conference, I feel more prepared to go into college as an art history major with a focus in museum studies. I hope to bring my new knowledge to my college’s museum education department, and I owe this all to the ICA and the incredible teens and educators at the Teen Convening.

—**Annie Titan**, *Museum Intern*

When I found out I was going to the ICA Teen Convening, I really wasn’t sure what to expect. Even in retrospect, the experience is one

that I find hard to characterize—it was challenging, refreshing, full-hearted, and completely unlike anything I’ve ever been a part of. Out of everything, the part of the Convening that I remember the most clearly and with the most gratitude is simply meeting my fellow teens. Hearing about the lives and experiences of this incredibly diverse group of people was remarkable—the things they’ve overcome, the changes they’re making in their institutions, and the goals they have for their futures are all inspiring and eye-opening. These are people who will no doubt do cool, amazing things, and I feel so lucky to have been able to meet them.

—**Anabelle Doliner**, *Museum Intern*

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## The Ogden Museum of Southern Art

**Ellen Balkin**

Education Manager

**Suzanna Ritz**

Curriculum Coordinator

**Montiah Norton**

Teen Docent

**Christa Villavasso**

Teen Docent

I was thrilled when we received an invitation to attend the ICA Teen Convening. However, I didn’t fully understand the magnitude of the experience in which we were about to participate. We engaged in moving roundtable and panel discussions that provoked thoughts not only about art and museum education, but also about how teens can effect real change in themselves and in their own communities. Both educators and teens came away inspired by the vast variety of teen programming produced across the country, and with new ideas to implement in their own hometowns.

Coming from a relatively small city, the ability to meet with fellow program administrators and participants allowed for a rare opportunity to talk about the development and facilitation of teen programs, where those programs are now, and how they can improve and grow. I’m excited to now be a part of a unique community of educators who value teen voices, and I look forward to continuing conversations with this group of like-minded individuals. Our teens were equally excited to interact with students from all over the country—discovering that they were much more alike than different—and left inspired

to implement new programming ideas conceived in Boston.

At the Ogden Museum of Southern Art, we talk a lot about community building, but this core value is especially relevant to our Teen Docent Program, where one of the most significant accomplishments is the creation of a close-knit, supportive group of individuals who care deeply for each other and the arts. Our participation in the ICA Teen Convening added yet another invaluable facet to this ever-evolving community.

—**Ellen Balkin**, *Education Manager*

It was an honor for me to represent the Ogden Museum of Southern Art at the ICA Teen Convening, and a wonderful opportunity to share struggles and triumphs with teens and fellow educators from all over the country. It really affirmed the positive impact that teen programs have and also motivated us to work together to increase that impact on our community.

The emphasis on youth voices in programming throughout was thrilling to witness, as was interacting with teens who have discovered their passions and are pursuing their goals with creativity, joy, humor, and support from caring and wise educators.

Hearing from the teens in a space that respected the authenticity of their voice and listening to how much they cared about addressing the serious issues that face our world today, such as social justice, climate change, and economic pressure, really opened my eyes to thinking about how to approach these issues through our work in the arts and education.

—**Suzanna Ritz**, *Curriculum Coordinator*

Participating in the ICA Teen Convening was truly a life-changing experience. For the first time, I got to travel to a new city, meet people from all across the country with diverse and unique perspectives, and have conversations on topics that matter and have a great impact on me. It was refreshing and empowering to be in a learning space where everyone was able to freely express themselves and where teens’ opinions were valued equally, and maybe even more, than adults’.

The Teen Night was amazing. Teens from all over the city came and shared their art in the form of their words, clothes, and dance moves. I also made lifelong friends with the people I met, with whom I still communicate months after the Convening. The experience inspired me to be

more outspoken and outgoing in learning environments such as school and museums, but also in life in general.

—**Montiah Norton**, *Teen Docent*

The trip to Boston was an unforgettable experience. I got the opportunity to visit a wonderful city and explore it with enthusiastic locals my age. I learned so much, not only about art and museum education, but also the magnitude of possibilities that art presents in terms of social change and uniting communities. I was able to discuss my passion for photography and film with a professional photographer and filmmaker, which gave me a fresh outlook on how to pursue those passions. I was astonished by how quickly I made close bonds with teenagers who live all around the country, and had the privilege to hear about the impact their programs have on them personally and on their communities.

—**Christa Villavasso**, *Teen Docent*

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# “THERE’S SOMETHING ABOUT HAVING A NATIONAL CONVERSATION AT A CONFERENCE THAT THROWS INTO HIGH RELIEF NOT JUST THE THREADS THAT UNITE ALL OF OUR WORK, BUT ALSO THE VERY PARTICULAR CONCERNS OF YOUR HOME MUSEUM AND LOCAL YOUNG PEOPLE. ”

—**Hillary Cook**, *Assistant Director of Youth Programs, Art Institute of Chicago*



ICA Teen Amireh Rezaei-Kamalabad leads teens through a tour of the galleries.

# ONLINE FORUMS

For the month leading up to the Teen Convening, all participants took part in a series of four online forums.

During the online forums, teens discussed a wide range of topics, including what makes a memorable learning experience, how to increase access to accommodate a larger number of teens, and how art museums can have a greater impact on the local community.

Many teens agreed that they are more likely to remember what they are taught if it's "hands-on," "interactive," and "tangible"—something teens can connect with and "incorporate in real life." Making teens "feel like part of the learning" is key to creating memorable learning experiences. Information is best absorbed and retained when teens are engaged in conversation and exposed to "different perspectives." As Montiah Norton, from the Ogden Museum of Southern Art, shared, "having a flow of ideas in both directions is really important, so people feel like their opinion matters, and also all of that information is transferred, so everyone's gaining something from that experience."

Teens feel that social media, particularly Instagram, is an important way for museums to spread the word to more teens about their programs; teen council members can be ambassadors by promoting teen programs and events on their own personal social media accounts. Hosting teen-organized events such as teen nights helps to introduce the museum as a "welcoming," "relaxed," and "fun" space for teens to be in, and makes them want to come back. Another way to bring in more teens is by providing space for them to display their own art; for example, the Art Institute of Chicago hosts "pop-up exhibits" that present teen-created work in its galleries. Museums can also reach more teens—and increase general awareness—by creating "mobile art vans" that deliver educational and art-making experiences around their city.

In addition to welcoming teens, museums need to "become a part of the community" by providing "a meeting place, a place for events, and a place to share experiences." One suggestion was to have

a monthly "community day" where community members are invited to visit the museum. Museums should also invite local artists to create artwork in the galleries, especially locally focused work; this would help to "unite a community, because you see what other people are going through" and also "get knowledge of what's going on in the city."

While it's important to make space for the community in museums, many teens recognize that not everyone has the means to get there, which is why more community outreach is vital. Christa Villavasso, from the Ogden Museum of Southern Art, talked about a program at the Ogden where the teens create a puppet show based on an artwork in the museum; then they visit libraries and the children's hospital to talk about the artwork and perform the inspired show. Just by bringing more art to the community, museums can have a positive impact, because, as Tatyana Graham, from the Brooklyn Museum, noted, "Art is just a perfect way to transcend all barriers—language barriers, cultural barriers—so it allows a lot of different people to understand concepts, or rethink concepts."

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**"HAVING A FLOW OF IDEAS IN BOTH DIRECTIONS IS REALLY IMPORTANT, SO PEOPLE FEEL LIKE THEIR OPINION MATTERS."**

—Montiah Norton, Teen Participant,  
Ogden Museum of Southern Art

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

**AFTER THE BELL** Teen Convening  
ICA/BOSTON, AUGUST 10-12, 2016

## DAY ONE

## WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 10

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10 AM

**Teen Presentations**

12:30–1:45 PM

**Lunch**  
Tours of the galleries led by ICA Teen Arts  
Council Members

2 PM–3:30 PM

**Public Panel**  
**Moderators:** Amireh Rezaei-Kamalabad and Nick Shea

**Panelists**  
Rahn Dorsey, Yana Minchenko, Gerald L. Leavell II,  
Marit Dewhurst, Gabrielle Wyrick, and Aric Crowe

6–9 PM

**Summer Teen Night!**

## DAY TWO

## THURSDAY, AUGUST 11

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9 AM

**Breakfast**

9:45–12:15 PM

**Artist Workshop**  
Led by Gerald L. Leavell II

12:15–2 PM

**Lunch**

2–4:30 PM

**Discussion Sessions**

## DAY THREE

## FRIDAY, AUGUST 12

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### EDUCATOR TRACK

9 AM

**Breakfast and Regional Convening Overview**

10–Noon

**Educator Roundtable**  
**Moderator:** Melissa Rocklen, ICA Social Worker

Noon–2 PM

**Educator Lunch**

### TEEN TRACK

9 AM

**Breakfast**

10–Noon

**Teen Roundtable**  
**Moderators:** Nick Shea and Amireh Rezaei-Kamalabad

Noon–2 PM

**Teen Lunch**

### EVERYONE

2–3:30 PM

**Group Wrap Session**  
**Moderator:** Cliften Bonner-Desravines, Teen New  
Media Program Associate

4 PM

**Convening Concludes**

Visit [icaboston.org](http://icaboston.org) to access past Teen Convening reports.



THE INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART/BOSTON