

ABSTRACT

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Engaging Millennial Donors: Young Philanthropists Circles in Montreal Museums

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Abstract:

The current economic context together with the decrease of public funding is forcing museums in Quebec to increase their fundraising revenues. As cultural institutions have to diversify their philanthropic strategies to renew their donor pool (Comeau, 2013), museum foundations develop a creative and collective kind of giving targeted at young people: donor circles.

In Montreal (Canada), four museums have been using this philanthropic model since 2011 to actively engage a new and wider audience. For an annual fee of \$250 to \$295 (CAD), millennial business professionals, aged 20 to 40 (born between 1976 and 1990), can become part of the circle. Inspired by the University-alumni relationship, the museums' objective is to build an empowering relationship with tomorrow's donors. The intention behind the creation of these circles is to involve (Silber, 2008) and educate the next generation of donors to museums' cultural and social missions, collections and exhibitions, as well as philanthropy (Bellavance, 2000). However, the approach tends to rely on social entertaining events like trendy galas and after-work events, which may not be the best suited activities to advancing the museums' goals and fostering significant long-term relationships with donors.

Intertwining museum studies and sociological methods, this presentation will describe the specificity of the young donor circle philanthropic model in Montreal based on research conducted in 2015 and 2016, including a North-American literature review, four case studies (Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal Museum of Contemporary Art, McCord Museum, Pointe-à-Callière Museum), and qualitative interviews with four museum foundation directors and four young

donors. The presentation will assess the impact of an emerging kind of cultural philanthropy. Comparing the strategies put into practice by four museums with the expectations of the younger donors, it will question whether Montreal museums' donor circles are currently being used to their full potential to anchor a long-term habitus and to build strong ties between millennials and museums.

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