

August 13, 2020 Muse-ings

Intro:

This piece was co-authored by the members of Museum Workers Speak, a collective of museum activists pushing for social change.

Piece by Museum Speaks:

Let us be frank: museum workers were already in crisis before the effects of COVID-19 hit. Too many have been scrambling to get by, living paycheck-to-paycheck, piecing together multiple part-time jobs, taking out loans, and struggling to pay them off. [Pay disparities](#) between leadership and frontline staff have perpetuated racial and economic inequity in institutions that profess to serve the public good. Employer-paid health insurance or paid time off is a pipe dream for many.

It is within this context that Museum Workers Speak first formed in April 2015. Born out of a "[rogue session](#)" that met at the AAM conference to discuss pressing issues in museum labor, the conversation grew into a collective of museum activists pushing for social change at the intersection of labor, access, and inclusion. Since then, Museum Workers Speak has continued to advocate and organize from outside the walls of museums to build solidarity and exert pressure on museum leadership to protect workers. Now, as museums react to the unprecedented financial threat of an ongoing pandemic, we are seeing the usual inequities at play in museum responses. Countless workers from hundreds of institutions have been [laid off, furloughed, or had hours cut](#) -- particularly part-time, emerging, and mid-career workers -- while executives take paltry pay cuts, if any at all. Those at the top are prioritizing the longevity of their institutions and collections over the well-being of the staff who keep them running. It has become clear to us that when our institutions will not stand in solidarity with us, we must stand in solidarity with each other. This is why we have come together to organize a mutual aid relief fund for museum workers. As prison abolitionist organizer Mariame Kaba states, "[Everything worthwhile is done with other people.](#)" In considering our "[maps](#)," we are guided by the [principles](#) and [history](#) of mutual aid organizing in the US, particularly [prison abolitionist](#) models that advocate for community based aid, rather than charity based aid. Specifically, these principles include the following:

- People don't create need, systems of oppression do. We believe museum workers should decide and control the means of giving aid;
- Transparency and accessibility are paramount;
- Mutual aid organizing goes hand in hand with constant work to expand our understandings of oppression and the various ways White supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism impact us and our work;
- We listen intentionally to our community for feedback on how to grow the project;
- Amplification of other activist projects in the field is essential;
- A commitment to radical trust and the "dignity and self-determination of people in need or crisis" is paramount: if you tell us you need, we believe you ([BigDoorBrigade](#), n.d.).

To these ends, we organize with and for fellow museum workers, centering equity, trust, solidarity, and empowerment of our members without means-testing or conditions for receiving aid. Our vision is one of radical redistribution, in which individuals leverage whatever privilege they can to support their peers who have been treated disposably by museums. We learned long ago that the institutions do not love us, that museums do not have our backs. But as museum workers, we can lean on one another for support and solidarity.

We encourage you to learn more about [Museum Workers Speak and apply to our fund](#), follow us and spread the word on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#), and [donate](#) to our Museum Workers Relief Fund. If you would like to get involved in Museum Workers Speak and add your voice to the movement, please consider filling out [this form](#).