

# Museum Assessment Program

## Community & Audience Engagement Assessment Final Report: Summary & Recommendations



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## Summary

Tudor Place, nestled within the historically and architecturally significant Georgetown district of Washington, DC is a high-quality, destination for visitors seeking compelling architecture, gardens, museum collections, and archives tied to nationally important members of the Peter family, whose relationship to the first national president speak to our country's earliest leaders. The 5.5-acre historic site, often called "Georgetown's backyard," benefits from a quiver full of assets, including seasoned veteran staff and volunteers, a handsome endowment, and the admiration of key members of several communities, many of whom have "grown up" with Tudor Place since its opening as a publicly accessible museum in 1981.

Now in its fortieth year of operation, Tudor Place finds itself at a crossroads in some respects (not unlike other museums at this time) embracing opportunities to engage existing audiences more substantially, establish new relationships for the sake of heightening diversity, catalyzing greater inclusion, and landing in a position where greater equity and accessibility will ensure future vitality and relevancy in our changing cultural landscape. Negotiating this field of change will require the organization to continue in its efforts to both access its various constituents' needs, desires, and what they can (or want to) bring to the table, while also best shaping internal staff, volunteer, and leadership success through clarity of message, provision of human resources, and ongoing analysis of programs and projects to gauge their support of the overall institutional mission.

With data driven decisions and transparency of intent in its messaging, Tudor Place can (as it already has begun to do) become a resource to communities outside of its traditional audiences. There are many "hooks" that can be employed to that end. Educational outreach beyond its grounds, whether in person or remotely through digital platforms, can overcome geographic bias, and provide underserved (or under-engaged) persons with the benefit of well-crafted educational programs and lesson plans. Researchers and budding museum professionals have tremendous fodder for learning by engaging with curators, archivists, and collections managers who genuinely love the material culture they steward. Gardeners, gardening enthusiasts, and naturalists have in Tudor Place an idyllic setting for fulfillment. Historic preservationists and those interested in architecture also can find satisfaction in the property's built assets.

Challenges to overcome are not overwhelming; however, they are worth mentioning, with the greatest being staff and constituents overcoming the pandemic-induced torpor from which so many suffer. Moreover, maintaining forward momentum institutionally while many on staff are new and remain unfamiliar with the organization's culture can and may well require deliberate, periodic group "check-ins" to ensure that everyone is working toward a common goal and not falling prey to departmental or sub-departmental silos. However, Tudor Place is aware of where it is now and has a vision for where it wants to be, as well as investment at all levels—staff, governance, volunteers—whose task it will be to realize their future selves through collaboration among each other and collaboration with various persons, organizations, museums, and historic sites who are striving to be consequential resources for their communities.

## Recommendations

### High Priority

#### Mission & Planning

- Consider developing a hierarchy of constituents based on needs/expectations that best intersect with the institution's current assets (including human resources). Then develop a hierarchy of desired constituents, who either may not be engaged at all or may be engaged to a lesser degree than desired and determine what institutional assets are lacking and need increasing. This may result in a very concrete goal such as, "By 2023, Tudor Place wants to increase its staff diversity and/or its leadership diversity by X%, or Tudor Place wants to engage in X number of programs that address topic X."

- It may be useful to integrate, as a line item in your planning process and implementation measures for programs, events, etc., some form of metric that would allow staff and leadership to gauge how much impact or success is achieved specific to community engagement goals. By doing so, staff would have a rubric for success in “moving the needle” that speaks directly to the organization’s DEAI aspirations.

## Governance

- Continue to evolve the board of trustees. Have its members reflect the demographic realities of Washington, DC.
- Consider paring down the maximum number of board members to be no more than 14, as this may prompt greater buy-in from each person, particularly when they formally commit to action as a Doer/Donor/Door Opener by signing the Tudor Place Board of Trustees 2021 Statement of Affirmation.
- Consider establishing a Friends or Advisory Group that would serve as a gateway for interested parties who may be good candidates for leadership roles with more responsibilities involved. The expectations for members of such a group would not be as involved as those for traditional board of trustee members. However, there would be a certain prestige in being invited to participate, and a certain prestige at being groomed for greater roles later. The recommended number of people in this group would be about double that of the maximum number of board members.
- Consider including on your website headshots and even short videos of board members who offer a very brief testimonial as to why they are involved and support Tudor Place. Such devices help promote brand recognition while prompting those who are represented to remain committed to serving to their best ability. Such content can also be woven into “highlight reels” for social media posts about the organization and where it is going from a governance (and other) perspective(s).
- Consider establishing a Friends or Advisory Group that would serve as a gateway for interested parties who may be good candidates for leadership roles with more responsibilities involved. The expectations for members of such a group would not be as involved as those for traditional board of trustee members. However, there would be a certain prestige in being invited to participate, and a certain prestige at being groomed for greater roles later.
- Consider developing a young museum professionals affinity/affiliate group and task them with co-plementing one curatorial event each year. This special level, which could be had at an additional \$15 per year (or some other figure you decide) would allow such members access to one or two special events, offering moderate refreshments/snacks, at places they normally would not have access to or at places, such as the bomb shelter, at special times of the evening or early morning or during holidays. This will create a sense of added value that builds pride in being included.
- Using a host of platforms (social media, direct email, focus groups, etc.) ask various communities with which you would like to more energetically engage how Tudor Place could be relevant (or more relevant) to them. As reported in the self-study, reflect on how not assuming relevance opens the organization up to exciting possibilities for future engagement.
- In an attempt to answer the self-reported vexing question of “who are we?” consider approaching that identity-seeking quest through the lens of “who are we not?” In other words, there are certain cultural and aesthetic gifts, unique material culture resources, geographic realities, and even historic roots that coalesce to define the framework of Tudor Place. Because that framework is the result of certain human

conditions over time, by its nature the scaffolding will be a foundation on which to build connections to other communities. Look for the most relevant stories that you can tell and share the telling of those things with a reasonable and sustainable group of audiences (and co-creators). Work to find a balance between the bonding and the bridging you do with others. And, in the process, simply be forthright and genuine in your message, as you have worked to become throughout your revised guiding strategic plan, vision statement, etc. In that process you will find that Tudor Place will be largely, if not exclusively, a brilliant neighborhood historic site set within their historic district. For others, Tudor Place will be a National Historic Landmark that they see as part of a greater continuum of historic properties that tell part of the American story through a rarified lens. But there will be others whose experience will fall somewhere in between, and they can walk away with the benefit of being encouraged to think about subjects such as race, class, gender, and power that have shaped and will continue to shape our national character.

### Community & Audience Engagement

- Work to achieve a realistic three-year plan to further bond with existing, beneficial stakeholders while limiting the number of new stakeholders with whom you attempt to bridge in order to avoid institutional burnout and “watering down” the strength of either attempts at relationships.
- Continue to cultivate relationships with neighborhood organizations whose leadership and staff understands and supports your gravitation to greater DEAI.
- Continue to hone your harvesting of information, thus far achieved through the 2019 interpretive survey; post-visit surveys; educator feedback; online, via social media and trip advisor posts; and through Google Analytics, so that you may achieve heightened data on participants’ interests, concerns, expectations, experiences.

### Education and Interpretation

- Work to determine the course of action for creating exhibit space in both the new collections facility and the planned visitor center that will be located at the front gate. Obviously, one of Tudor Place’s strongest assets is the 18,000+ artifact collection (and its extensive archive) and showcasing these assets in non-period room settings might allow the organization to enhance the experiences of walk-in traffic while establishing venues that can be used as the backdrop for special programs such as Tudor Nights and meetings for partnering organizations.
- With there being a self-reported noted increase in the diversity of participants in family-based events with younger children and in rental events, consider providing testimonials from persons on your website (or other platforms) asking visitors to convey in their own words why they felt welcome/compelled to participate, and what could have been done differently to increase that experience. Transparency in message may help push engagement endeavors significantly.

### Marketing & Communications

- Move rentals from transactional to relational experiences by offering coverage of rentals to more fully engage audiences who otherwise may only have a singular moment with the steward of the historic site they used. Such testimonials can also provide links to service providers used as florists; caterers & bartenders; cake sources; rental services; and photography services.

### **Medium Priority**

#### Mission & Planning

- Though it tends to be a matter of institutional choice, given the dynamic nature of the past few years, in

terms of everything from social justice to pandemic response, it may be useful to consider shifting from a five-year strategic plan model to a three-year time frame so the organization can set a host of achievable goals within a shorter time period. This format may also grant leadership the ability to prepare for and plan a revised strategic plan without expending a greater amount of time on one with a protracted footprint.

#### Education and Interpretation

- Work to balance the number of tour offerings of the grounds with those offered for the house, as the gardens have proven to be a natural (no pun intended) draw for visitors.

#### Marketing & Communications

- Find a balance between the institutional voice of sobriety and historicity with messages that are entertaining and personal is key for the organization. Adopt a first-person voice for some of the institution's historical content to develop a persona that will or can be revisited periodically.
- Try to remain focused on the key values and focal areas of the organization and let the digital arm of Tudor Place continue to be a mechanism for not only DEI but a tool for heightened access, too.
- Consider building out the online presence of staff with short bios and images like the profile afforded the executive director under the Leadership tab on the institution's website.
- Consider establishing a college/high school student level membership rate at the \$35 level. This is a reasonable price point, when compared with the individual level membership rate of \$55.
- Consider establishing a "sustainer" level membership at the \$5000 level, whose perk may be a free rental of X number of hours, based on your overhead and competition criteria.

#### Low Priority

##### Education and Interpretation

- Consider mating wayside signage with geo-beacons, which push information to visitors who have enabled their smartphone's Bluetooth service. These small devices (occasionally called BLEs for Bluetooth Low Energy) are long-lasting and may be placed in discrete locations that would prevent their detection (and potential vandalism or removal). Placed in proximity to historically important points around Tudor Place or in areas that are natural places for instructions (where to go, what to see, who to ask for further information), these devices may add a dynamic medium that will enhance the visitor experience and set Tudor Place apart from competition in Georgetown. For more information about these devices visit: <https://www.braze.com/blog/geofencing-geo-targeting-beaconing-when-to-use/> and <https://localz.com/ibeacon-ble-hardware-commercial-comparison/>
- Consider adding an "April Fools" event in which visitors are introduced (unsuspecting or otherwise) to creative and fun additions to the Tudor House's period rooms. For instance, place a cellular flip phone and charging cord on a marble-top table or a lava lamp by a bedside, switching out a period-appropriate art for a blacklight velvet or psychedelic poster. Other sundry items that clearly would not have been found during the family's tenure could be included as well, with emphasis on material culture that would be appealing to a wide age range, from baby boomers to millennials.