



# Museums Reimagined

## SYMPOSIUM PROCEEDINGS

August 2025



# Table of contents

<b>EVENT SUMMARY AND KEY THEMES</b>	1
Event goals and design	1
Key themes	2
<b>WELCOME REMARKS : A COMMITMENT TO BAY AREA MUSEUMS</b>	4
<b>PANEL DISCUSSION: THE UNIQUE FEATURES OF THE BAY AREA</b>	5
A legacy of innovation and interconnection	6
Community expectations and philanthropic partnership	7
Collaboration and regional identity	7
A Bay Area of opportunity	7
Toward a collective future	8
<b>BREAKOUT SESSIONS</b>	9
<b>CLOSING REMARKS</b>	16
<b>POST-EVENT SURVEY: SHIFTS TOWARD TRUST AND COLLABORATION</b>	19
The path ahead	20
<b>CAPTURING THE IDEAS OF THE DAY: GRAPHIC RECORDINGS</b>	21
<b>ADVISOR AND ORGANIZING TEAMS</b>	26
<b>AGENDA</b>	27

# Event summary and key themes

In August 2025, the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation convened local grantees for Museums Reimagined: Envisioning the Future of Bay Area Science Museums. The gathering brought together more than 50 museum professionals from the largest organizations in the foundation's Bay Area science and technology museum portfolio: the California Academy of Sciences, Chabot Space & Science Center, the Exploratorium, the Lawrence Hall of Science (The Lawrence) and The Tech Interactive. The event was designed not only to share ideas across organizations, but across the many roles within the institutions, including scientists, marketing, finance, operations and community engagement. The event was one of several symposia organized to celebrate the Moore Foundation's 25th anniversary, an opportunity to both acknowledge the work of grantees and provide a forum for them to envision their work over the next 25 years.

These proceedings summarize the day's events and key themes.

## Event goals and design

Moore Foundation Program Officer Jennifer Frazier started the Museums Reimagined symposium by framing the event as a working convening that balanced celebration with collective problem-solving. She emphasized the distinctive role of Bay Area science and technology museums as places of curiosity, wonder and direct connection — where communities engage with scientists on issues from gene editing to sea-level rise. At the same time, she acknowledged the many challenges museums currently face: eroding public trust in science, a shifting funding landscape, and the specter of censorship. The day was designed to both celebrate the ongoing work these organizations do to engage communities with science, and to provide a space to think together about how to address shared challenges.

The goals of the convening were to:

- **Strengthen connections** among colleagues .
- **Surface shared opportunities and challenges** faced by Bay Area museums.
- **Identify promising directions** for future focus and experimentation.
- **Celebrate the work** of Bay Area science museums.

These goals were achieved through a combination of presentations, group discussion, and other opportunities for participant input. The morning set the context for the event, including a panel on how the Bay Area's rich science ecosystem, vibrant technology community, a history of community organizing have shaped the region's museums. The primary focus of the day was on gathering participant ideas for how to envision the future of science museums through breakout groups. These groups focused on areas participants identified as critical to the future of museums such as trust in science, sustainable funding and community engagement. During these breakout groups, participants surfaced areas of challenge and opportunity, identified overall themes, and proposed areas for experimentation. The agenda concluded with report-outs, reflections and next steps, with informal time over lunch and a late-afternoon reception to continue conversations and build networks.



Jennifer Frazier, Program Officer, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation during her opening remarks.

## Key themes

Four key themes emerged from the day's discussions, with an overall vision for Bay Area museums as a connected, responsive civic infrastructure for science.

### 1. Collaborating for impact

Throughout the event, participants emphasized that the Bay Area's greatest asset is not any single museum, but the collective impact of five science museums within region. Rather than competing for audiences, donors or visibility, participants asked what would be possible if institutions aligned efforts and shared infrastructure.

Actionable ideas included:

- Joint fundraising or advocacy working groups (focused on outcomes such as ballot measures or shared government relations strategies).
- Cross-institution working groups to establish shared AI standards and protocols for transparency with visitors.
- Department-level convenings across museums to reduce duplication and share expertise.
- A shared museum/STEM passport that links exhibitions and programs across institutions.
- Collective metrics and an annual synthesis that reflects the museum's shared impact.

The shift was away from “my museum” and toward “our collective impact.”

## 2. Designing with communities, not for them

Across sessions on new audiences, trust in science, and contemporary science, participants named a common tension: museums often design experiences for communities rather than with them. While the five museums have made significant shifts toward including the community in design, there was broad agreement that there was still much work to be done for community members to be treated as collaborators, not end users.

Examples of possible actions included:

- Quarterly conversations across the museums to synthesize trends and share progress on community engagement.
- Partnering with communities through pop-up science experiences in neighborhoods rather than expecting people to visit museums.
- “Living laboratories” where visitors help define research questions and engage in active science alongside researchers.

Participants emphasized the importance of making museum's work relevant to communities, and that relevance comes from listening — asking communities what matters to them, where they already gather, and how they define meaningful science engagement, and asking them to design alongside them.

## 3. Earning trust through transparency and relationships

Trust surfaced not only around trust in science, but cultivating trust around institutions themselves — how they make decisions, how they use new technologies, and whose interests they serve.

Examples of questions that emerged:

- How do we cultivate trust by making the scientific process visible — including uncertainty, revision and disagreement?
- How transparent should museums be when using AI in exhibitions or visitor experiences?
- How do we make space for those that are skeptical about science, instead of making them feel museums are not for them?

Participants emphasized that trust is built through relationships, transparency and humility, not just through delivering accurate content.

#### 4. Innovating responsibly and sustainably

The theme of innovation was not limited to new technologies, but surfaced across topics: engaging audiences, approaches to funding, and cultivating trust. Participants reframed innovation not as novelty, but as learning quickly while staying mission-aligned. Museums want to experiment, but responsibly.

Concrete suggestions included:

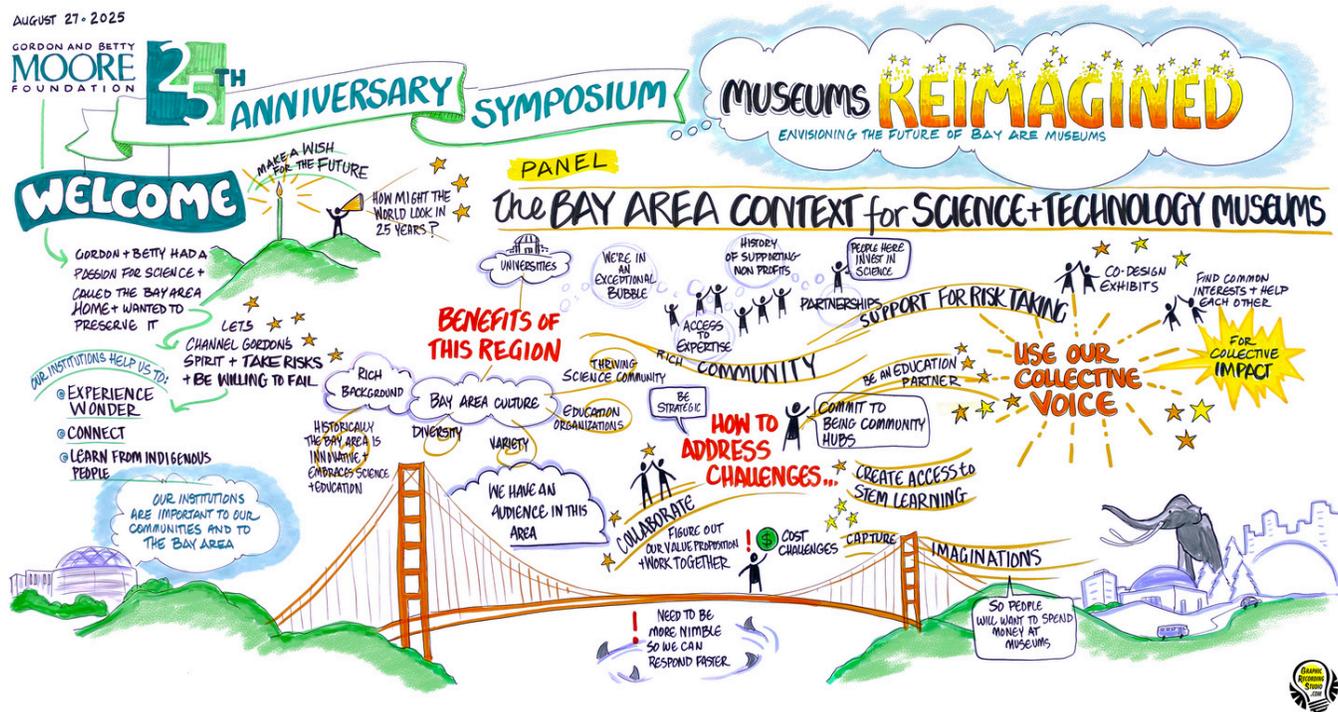
- Prototyping new experiences at a small scale before committing major resources.
- Testing alternative staffing structures or operational models that improve capacity and enable risk taking.
- Using AI as a tool for rapid prototyping — helping small teams iterate faster without increasing workload.

Participants noted that innovation must not compromise access, equity or mission — it should strengthen them.



Attendees engaged in discussions and in sharing of ideas and experiences for actionable solutions.

The convening revealed a shared recognition that many of the challenges facing museums today — declining trust in science, increased competition for attendance, rapidly evolving technology, and funding shifts — may not be able to be addressed by a single institution. Participants articulated the need for sustained structures that enable coordination, shared learning and distributed action across the region. This shift toward collaboration was strongly reflected in the post-conference survey, with collaboration becoming one of the priorities for participants after the event.



Graphic notes showcasing main themes and key takeaways from the morning sessions of the Museums Reimagined Symposium by artist Alece Birnbaum.

# Welcome remarks: A commitment to Bay Area museums

The convening opened with remarks from Aileen Lee, Chief of Programs/Incoming President at the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, who welcomed participants on behalf of the foundation team. Lee situated the gathering within the foundation’s 25th anniversary year — a moment to celebrate past accomplishments and to look forward with intention. “Like any birthday,” she said, “it’s an opportunity to make a wish for the future.”

Lee described Bay Area science and technology museums as “tangible representations of the positive outcomes Gordon and Betty aspired to have for future generations.”

**“These institutions embody the values at the heart of the Moore Foundation: a belief in science as a force for good, an appreciation for the natural world, and a deep love for the Bay Area as a place of creativity, discovery and community.”**

- Aileen Lee, Chief of Programs/Incoming President

“They believed in the value of natural ecosystems and really understanding and experiencing them,” Lee said, “and most of all, they called the Bay Area home, wanting to preserve the things that make it special.”

Her remarks traced a line between the Moore Foundation’s origins and the work of the region’s museums today. By igniting curiosity and enabling inquiry, Lee observed, Bay Area museums model the kind of curiosity-driven engagement that Gordon and Betty Moore envisioned when they established the foundation. These institutions, she said, “allow discovery and inquiry for the next generation — what Gordon and Betty would have hoped for all of us.”

Looking ahead, Lee emphasized that Museums Reimagined was not only a celebration but a forward-looking conversation — one of five symposia across the Moore Foundation's program areas designed to “lean into the challenges, but most importantly, the opportunities that the



Aileen Lee, Chief of Programs/Incoming President, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation

future holds.” She invited participants to think boldly about what museums might become over the next 25 years, recalling how much these organizations have evolved since her own early visits. “I was thinking about my first museum experiences,” she said. “If we could have seen then the digital transformation and the changing information ecosystems that shape our world today, what might we have done differently? It’s exciting to think about the future in that same way.”

Lee praised the collective strength and resilience of Bay Area museums, calling them “powerful anchor institutions” that have continually adapted to meet new demands. She noted the significance of taking time to innovate even amid financial and operational pressures:

**“It’s easy to say you’ll look forward when things are going well,” she said, “but it’s even more powerful to do so when you’re struggling — and to do it together.”**

She closed by invoking the Moore Foundation’s co-founder, Gordon Moore, whose philosophy continues to guide its work: “If we don’t fail occasionally then we’re probably not trying hard enough.” Lee encouraged participants to embrace that spirit of experimentation and risk-taking throughout the day’s discussions, adding, “I’m hopeful we can channel Gordon a little bit today.”

## Panel discussion: The unique features of the Bay Area

Erica Barrueto, Chief of Staff and Vice President of Exhibits, The Tech Interactive

Rena Dorph, Director, The Lawrence Hall of Science

Robert Semper, Chief Science Officer, Exploratorium

Moderator: Jennifer Frazier, Program Officer, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation

To frame the day's conversations on the future, the convening featured a panel on the unique context of the Bay Area and how it has served as a source of innovation for the region's museums. Moderator Jennifer Frazier highlighted that while there have been other national conversations on the future of museums, opportunities and challenges are defined by place, including possible partners, the communities museums work with and for, and the values and priorities of the people in the region.



Panel moderator Jennifer Frazier alongside panelists Erica Barrueto, Rena Dorph and Robert Semper

## A legacy of innovation and interconnection

Panelist Robert Semper described the Bay Area as a region where “science, art, learning and technology have always been intertwined.” He recalled that physicist Frank Oppenheimer founded the Exploratorium in the Bay Area not only because of his connections to local universities and scientists, but because the region already had a thriving ecosystem of informal science education. “This region probably has the highest per-capita concentration of science institutions in the country,” he said, noting that organizations such as the California Academy of Sciences, Chabot Space & Science Center, The Lawrence, the Exploratorium, and The Tech Interactive have continually evolved while remaining deeply embedded in their original missions.

Semper emphasized that the Bay Area’s culture of innovation extends beyond its institutions to its audiences, supporters and funders. “There’s an audience for this work,” he said, “and a set of people — boards, companies, funders — who believe in it.” He recalled meeting Gordon Moore with Frank Oppenheimer in the early 1970s to discuss how companies could contribute to science education, observing that this blend of public curiosity and private commitment continues to sustain the region’s museums today.

## Community expectations and philanthropic partnership

Rena Dorph described the Bay Area as a place where museums can continue to be responsive to community needs, including expectations to showcase diverse perspectives. At The Lawrence, she said, that commitment has been foundational. “We’ve been able to stay the course,” she explained, “because of the support from the University of California system and the funders, partners, and people in the region committed to that work.”

Dorph pointed to the region’s dense network of scientific expertise and its tradition of community-based organizing as key conditions for innovation. “When we want to lift up new voices,” she said, “there are people here who know how to organize and work alongside us.” She also underscored the distinctive role of the Moore Foundation, noting that its investment is unusual among funders because it supports not only individual institutions but the relationships among them.

## Collaboration and regional identity

For Erica Barrueto, The Tech Interactive’s story reflects the Bay Area’s identity as a region where community and technology meet. The museum’s founders — a group of local residents and technology leaders — wanted to create an institution that would empower youth and families around engineering. This group set out to bring hands-on science education to San Jose at The Tech Interactive, and that collaborative spirit continues today.

Barrueto emphasized the region’s open, collegial culture, in which museums frequently share ideas and seek advice from one another. “We visit each other’s institutions, talk about what we’re learning, and take those lessons in new directions,” she explained. The Bay Area’s workforce—people with backgrounds in art, science, and engineering—provide a rich talent pool that makes impactful work possible.

## A Bay Area of opportunity

The panelists were asked to reflect on how being in the Bay Area might help the region's museums address current challenges.

Rena Dorph emphasized that being in the Bay Area positions museums to confront future challenges because, despite rising operating costs and the need to become more nimble in a

rapidly changing world, the region has “intense local motivation” to ensure access to STEM learning for all communities. She noted that funders, schools, and partners continue to view museums as essential public resources and are looking to them for leadership. Dorph suggested that Bay Area institutions could harness this momentum by becoming a more intentional regional ecosystem — coordinating rather than duplicating efforts, differentiating their strengths, and thinking collectively about how each organization adds value to the region so that visitors benefit more from engaging with all of them rather than any single museum.

Robert Semper agreed, observing that museums now have an opportunity to lead in cultivating “third-millennium thinking skills” — helping people navigate complexity and change. “Museums are stronger in that space than many formal education systems. Our future role is to be partners - not peripheral - to the education system.” He also urged museums to articulate clear value propositions for partners and audiences, and to understand the distinct motivations of funders, companies, cities, and universities.

Erica Barrueto added that coordinated advocacy will be essential. By combining networks and speaking with a unified voice about the importance of science learning, Bay Area museums can shape public understanding and influence education policy.

## Toward a collective future

In closing, the panelists reflected on what it means to act together as a regional community. Dorph recalled earlier Moore Foundation-supported convenings on co-creation and community engagement that allowed institutions to learn together before those ideas were mainstream. “I hope this convening creates new opportunities like that,” she said, pointing to emerging collaborations on AI, marketing, and leadership across institutions.

Semper shared a concrete example: both the Exploratorium and the California Academy of Sciences had discovered that transportation was a key barrier to school field trips. A collective effort, he suggested, could make regional solutions — such as coordinated partnerships with public transit — possible in ways individual institutions cannot achieve alone.

As the session closed, Dorph invited participants to be candid in the breakout sessions about the challenges they face, and Barrueto urged them to be “aspirational, but concrete” — pairing big ideas with actionable steps.



Jennifer Frazier, Program Officer, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation with Robert Semper, Chief Science Officer, Exploratorium

# Breakout sessions

The primary focus of Museums Reimagined were breakout discussions where professionals across Bay Area science museums could surface themes relevant to future of museums and identify opportunities, challenges, and areas for action. The breakout sessions were developed in collaboration with Sara Farooqi of Interdependence Lab.

Participants identified seven topics important areas for future of museums:

## **New funding and operating models**

What new funding sources and operating models might support our long-term sustainability?

## **Trust in science and the role of museums**

What role can our museums play in cultivating public trust in science?

## **AI and the evolution of museum practice**

What is the role of AI in how we carry out our work?

## **Engaging people with contemporary science**

How can we help people navigate climate change, AI, and other relevant areas of science?

## **Engaging new audiences**

How can we bring in new audiences, inside and outside our museums?

## **Bringing innovation to the visitor experience**

How do we bring relevant content and innovative experiences to our visitors?

These topics were identified in advance of the meeting, when participants were solicited for topics they thought were critical for discussion about the future of museums. Foundation staff analyzed responses for the key topics that emerged across responses.



New funding and operating models' discussion group helped identify opportunities and challenges.

On the day of the event, participants discussed these topics in two successive breakout sessions designed to surface areas of opportunity and possible action. The morning sessions focused on identifying themes related to the topic: each group worked from a broad guiding question, generated additional opportunity- and challenge-focused questions, and clustered them into themes. Facilitators captured key takeaways and confirmed the top themes to carry forward. The afternoon sessions shifted to synthesis. Participants revisited the morning's themes, identified a question they wished to explore further, and proposed an action or experiment that would advance efforts. Each group selected two ambassadors to bring synthesized ideas to the plenary.

The ideas generated by the breakout groups on each topic, as well as the ideas they shared with the group are summarized here:

### 1. New funding and operating models

The topic of how to fund and operate science museums in a changing funding landscape was identified as one of the most critical topics for discussion at Museums Reimagined. Two breakout groups focused on this topic, with the following themes emerging from the two groups:

- **Providing new experiences or events while staying true to mission.**  
Participants emphasized the importance of embracing flexibility outside of the traditional attendance-based funding models. An example would be to create innovative, impactful or experimental events that are tailored to a specific audiences (e.g., visual arts groups), but are still aligned with the organization's mission and strengths, and to measure resulting engagement and satisfaction. The hope would be that these specialized experiences or events would inspire broader investment from current funders and attract more visitors and new funders, including corporate donors.

- **Forming partnerships across institutions.**

Museums might partner with each other to drive revenue generation in institutions across the region. These regional partnerships would also be an opportunity for organizations to learn from each other about effective revenue generation and for external donors and funders to become direct thought partners. An idea the groups identified is to partner on a convening of Bay Area museums with potential tech companies regarding funding opportunities tailored to their interests.

When sharing back to the larger group, the two funding breakout groups proposed three different ideas for exploration and action.

- **Collective advocacy and resource development.**

Develop an understanding of possible interventions that would benefit all museums — such as a ballot measure, parcel/tourism tax, or a STEM passport — that would have the greatest impact. The group proposed forming a working group composed of government relations, marketing, and Chiefs of Staff to interview lobbyists and assess feasibility.

- **New metrics and shared storytelling.**

A proposal to move beyond attendance as the primary metric and communicate the collective impact of museums on the region and on STEM learning. The group proposed creating a shared annual impact report across Bay Area science institutions.

- **Working as a collective to focus on new funding and operating strategies.**

This collective would take inspiration from other sectors, looking to their business models for ideas, such as: reducing risk by acting as an ecosystem; exploring new audience segmentation to illuminate new revenue paths; and forecasting trends to strengthen resilience.

## 2. Trust in science

This group reframed trust not as a communications challenge, but as a relationship challenge. They identified several key areas for future investigation:

- **Understanding the barriers to trust and how to overcome them in an authentic way.**

Participants named that mistrust is often grounded in real histories and current inequities. They were interested in listening to visitors' reasons for skepticism and exploring how museums might acknowledge complexity rather than override it. One idea: create spaces where visitors can articulate why they doubted a conclusion and what evidence shifted their perspective.

- **Making visible that science is a process, not a destination.**  
Exhibits often highlight finished discoveries — the “big S” of science. Participants discussed showing how evidence is generated, debated, and revised. Changing one’s mind becomes evidence of learning, not of failure. Trust may grow when visitors can see that uncertainty is not a weakness of science, but one of its strengths as new knowledge shifts understanding.

This group proposed the following areas for exploration and experimentation:

- **Conduct focus groups** across the Bay Area to understand how people form opinions about science, where they seek information, and what barriers exist. Such a local survey would provide more fine grain, actionable data than national surveys on public trust in science such as those conducted by Pew Research Center.
- **Gathering examples** from across museums to explore ways museums currently foster critical thinking — rather than simply convincing people to “trust science.”



Breakout group discussion

### 3. AI and the evolution of museum practice.

Participants approached AI with curiosity and caution, treating it as both a subject and a tool. Themes from the AI breakout groups included:

- **Listening before designing: What do audiences want from AI?**  
Museums do not yet know what visitors expect or fear. Participants advocated for research into how people prefer AI to show up in exhibitions — or not. Understanding this is foundational before any design work begins.
- **Assuring responsible and ethical use of AI**  
The group discussed the importance of responsible and ethical use of AI. They asked how standards of use might be set, and what guardrails or agreements have been developed for using AI in museum work (for example transparency with visitors about when AI is used). The group expressed uncertainty about what ethical AI use really means and how museums can navigate the rapid changes associated with AI.

- **AI as a tool to expand creative and research capacity.**

Smaller teams could use AI for prototyping exhibits, drafting narratives, or processing large datasets. AI was discussed not as a shortcut to content, but a tool that could enable more time for human creativity or help personalize experiences for visitors. For example, could AI be used to tailor experiences around complex topics such as biodiversity loss or climate change?

The group proposed two next steps for action related to the discussion:

- **Gathering and sharing AI policy examples** from across museums and other nonprofits.
- Seeking **pro bono technical support and peer learning** from existing networks, including board members and tech-sector partners.

#### 4. Engaging new audiences

In this conversation, the idea of “new audiences” shifted from simply reaching people to being more relevant to them.

- **Understanding who is missing — and why.**  
Participants expressed the need for shared audience data: who currently shows up, who doesn't, and what structural barriers make the museum feel “not for me” in the Bay Area. The goal is not to market harder, but to listen better.
- **Staying relevant to the community.**  
The group discussed the importance of staying relevant to the communities they serve, especially under-resourced communities in a potential era of financial downturn. Museums may seem expensive relative to other possible leisure activities. They also expressed the importance of ensuring that their communications and marketing reflect museum values.
- **Scaling impact beyond the building.**  
Recognizing that only a fraction of the community will visit in person, participants urged continued exploration and expansion of other models —volunteers embedded in community events, virtual programming, mobile or pop-up experiences. Museums considered: What does engagement look like when the museum travels to the people?

This group proposed the following areas for exploration and experimentation:

- Address the question: "What are organizations already doing to engage new and existing audiences?" by **developing a shared survey and forming a working group** to analyze and compare engagement practices.
- **Create a cross-institutional working group** to share data, collaborate on ideas, and ensure engaging new audiences, especially those who don't see themselves in museums, becomes an institutional — not individual — priority to address the question: How do we build long-term, sustainable programs that reach missing audiences?



Contemporary science breakout group discussion.

## 5. Engaging people with contemporary science

This group emphasized that engaging people with contemporary science such as gene editing or climate change is not just about coming up with clearer explanations. When science is new, politically charged, has a large societal impact, or is emotionally heavy, museums have a unique role: to hold space for inquiry rather than closure.

- **Invite questions rather than providing answers.**  
Participants discussed designing experiences that invite questions rather than dictate answers. Museums can help visitors develop a comfort with uncertainty — particularly around climate change, AI and biotechnology
- **Cultivating curiosity rather than amplifying anxiety.**  
The group named the emotional stakes of contemporary science. They advocated for experiences that resist doom narratives and instead invite questions and make space for important dialogue that centers not just the science but other considerations as technologies are implemented.
- **Understanding how people make meaning from science.**  
Participants recognized that individuals do not interpret scientific information in a vacuum; they make meaning through personal history, identity and values. Museums expressed interest in understanding how different audiences interpret evidence and how that affects engagement.

This group shared the following ideas for experimentation and action in the report out session:

- **Explore existing frameworks for how to engage the public with contemporary science.**  
Pesticides, COVID-19, and GMO foods were all referenced as opportunities to look at what worked and did not work for productive dialogue and engagement.
- **Learn from other cultural models**, such as Sites of Conscience, which address difficult histories through dialogue-based practice.
- **Replicate a UK study that asked non-visitors why museums feel “not designed for us” and then brought them into the museum to reflect on their experience.** Replicating this study across Bay Area museums could provide powerful insights. This could shape what types of exhibits and programs might be most effective at engaging the broader community in contemporary science.



Breakout groups allowed cross-sharing of ideas between the five museums.

## 6. Bringing innovation to the visitor experience

Innovation was not defined as novelty, spectacle or technology — it was defined as purposeful change. The group focused on different ways museums might innovate across program and operations, while staying aligned with mission and strengths. Areas of discussion included:

- Museums can be pulled toward trends or audience pressure at the expense of core identity. The question became: How do we innovate without losing ourselves?
- Prototyping new experiences within real constraints. With limited time and funding, participants explored models of lightweight experimentation — trying small pilots, co-designing across institutions, and testing ideas outside the museum walls.
- Immersive experiences as invitations to inquiry, not entertainment.
- Emerging technologies (e.g., AR/VR, interactive environments) could create spaces where visitors feel agency and presence. The goal is not to replicate entertainment, but to make wonder tactile and thinking visible.

This group shared two ideas for future exploration and action:

- **Work across institutions to define what innovation means to them**, and approaches for balancing innovation and risk.
- **Testing prototypes of innovative experiences with audiences** before investing in scaling.

# Closing remarks

Janet Coffey, Program Director, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation

Rebecca Johnson, Director of the Center for Biodiversity and Community Science, California Academy of Sciences

Adam Tobin, Executive Director, Chabot Space & Science Center

The final session of Museums Reimagined returned the day's discussions to a central question:

## **How can Bay Area science and technology museums continue to serve as essential civic spaces for discovery, dialogue, and innovation in a rapidly changing world?**

Adam Tobin began by naming what makes the region extraordinary: five major science centers within a short distance of one another. This proximity, he noted, represents a powerful resource that extends beyond each institution's local reach. The Bay Area's deep culture of scientific innovation helped these museums take shape, and that same spirit continues to sustain them today.



Adam Tobin sharing his thoughts during the final session.

Yet Tobin also described the dual realities the field inhabits — “a tale of two cities”: institutions with extraordinary creative potential facing structural challenges that can’t be ignored. He urged peers to confront those issues directly, to “name and interrogate them,” and to think structurally about solutions rather than accepting incremental fixes.

He emphasized that some of the rationales that once justified the creation of science centers still hold, while others must evolve. The moment, he said, demands renewed willingness to question long-held assumptions about what science museums are for and how they operate. The need for what they provide — spaces for public engagement with science — has never been greater.

Across the discussion, collaboration emerged as a recurring theme. He distinguished between routine partnership and strategic collaboration: aligning work across institutions at a high level, recognizing complementary strengths, and collectively taking risks that no single organization could bear alone. He encouraged participants to seek out perspectives beyond their own organizational roles, noting that the most valuable conversations of the day came from exchanges between staff and directors who rarely share the same space.

Tobin's reflection closed with an invitation to reexamine fundamental ideas — such as what “informal learning” now means — and to accept the complexity of change without false dichotomies. “If each of us experiments and calibrates risk within our own institution,” Tobin concluded, “together those efforts can add up to something greater.”

Rebecca Johnson, Director of the Center for Biodiversity and Community Science at the California Academy of Sciences, continued that thread of community.

For her, the power of the convening lay in being among peers who “speak the same language.” She reflected on how rare it is for museum professionals to be at a meeting where they don't have to explain what makes their institutions different from universities or research organizations. That shared context, she said, enabled them to have deeper conversations, such as those about trust — trust in science, trust in institutions, and trust among colleagues.

Johnson also described the day itself as an experiment in creating a “space of trust,” one that allowed participants to be candid about difficulties and vulnerabilities. Building on that foundation, she saw an opportunity to extend collaboration beyond internal partnerships to a public level. “Visitors don't necessarily know that we collaborate,” she observed. “They see individual institutions.”

She likened the Bay Area museums to a team with “different superpowers,” whose combined effort could achieve what none could do alone. In the face of global uncertainty and external pressures, she suggested that the most resilient path forward may be the local one — rooted in regional cooperation and shared purpose.

### **“Making those connections visible could strengthen the region as a whole.”**

“The world outside is changing fast and often feels chaotic. The best response may be local and regional — by strengthening our connections with each other and building on what's already here. Today felt like a strong beginning.”



Rebecca Johnson, Director of the Center for Biodiversity and Community Science, California Academy of Sciences

Janet Coffey, Program Director for the Moore Foundation's Curiosity Driven Science Initiative and a lead on the Moore Foundation's Bay Area Program for over 14 years closed the event. She thanked those who made the event possible, and to the participants for the energy and thoughtfulness they brought to the day's conversations.

**"Twenty-five years ago, Gordon and Betty Moore established this foundation to benefit future generations. The work you and your colleagues do every day – at your museums and in your communities – is central to realizing that vision. It's inspiring to see how you transform challenges into opportunities with creativity and pragmatism. That spirit was evident throughout the day, and it gives me great optimism for the future. I look forward to continuing to learn and work together in the years ahead."**

- Janet Coffey, Program Director, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation



Images of event participants.

# Post-event survey: Shifts toward trust and collaboration

Participants had an opportunity to reflect on the day's events during the closing session through a post-conference survey. The reflections of the participants echoed themes in the closing remarks: an increased focus on collaboration and trust.

Participants were given an opportunity to give free responses to the question: "After today's convening, what are the three areas you are most interested in pursuing to support the future of museums?" These responses were then coded and compared to the results from the preconference survey, where participants could enter any topic they felt was important to the future of museums. Of all topics, collaboration had the largest shift as a priority: from 8% to 19% of people listing it as a priority (Figures 1 and 2).

Trust in science had the second largest shift, from 9% to 16% (Figures 1 and 2). This shift may reflect an interest in cultivating trust that is not limited to science, but in building trust generally with communities, partners, and funders as trust came up in almost every breakout group discussion.

## Increased Interest in Collaboration and Trust in Science

Priority topics for conference attendees **before** and **after** the event. Percentage of responses. Each attendee selected three topics before and after conference.

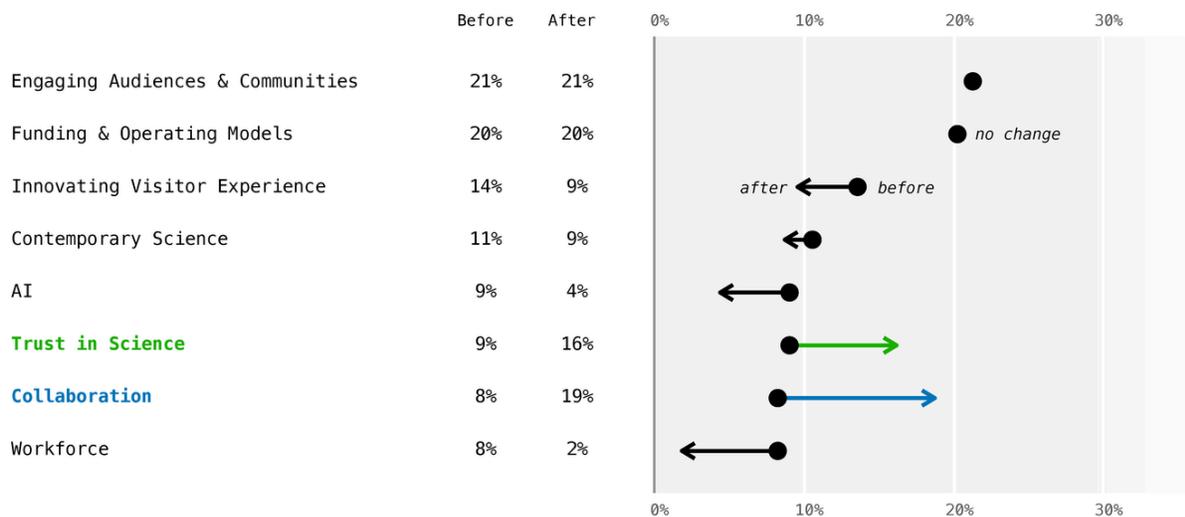


Figure 1: Comparing priority topics before and after Museums Reimagined, visualized by RJ Andrews.

## Increased Interest: Collaboration and Trust in Science

Priority topics for conference attendees before and after the event.

Percentage of responses. Each attendee selected three topics before and after conference.

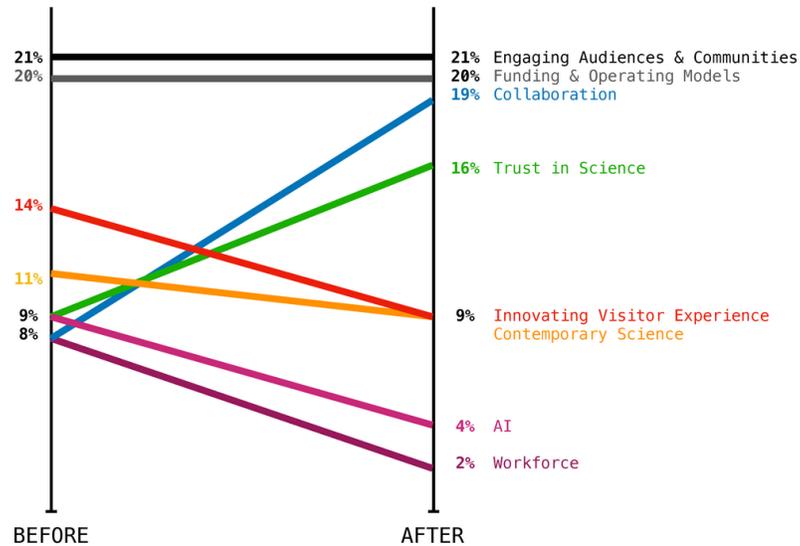


Figure 2: Comparing priority topics for participants, before and after Museums Reimagined. Visualization created by RJ Andrews.

Engaging new audiences remained a top priority (21%) before and after the convening (Figures 1 and 2). These responses primarily reflected engaging communities typically underrepresented in science and science museums such as “audience development outside of our core socioeconomic visitors”; “creating a welcoming and relevant environment and content for traditionally underserved museum audiences”; or “reaching low-income audiences through sustained engagement”; “expanding museum accessibility and affordability.” It also included a desire to cultivate new audiences generally, by creating offerings that would attract those not already coming to science museums.

Other survey questions found that all participants had “fresh thinking and new ideas” stimulated by the event, and that 94% met a new colleague they planned to stay in touch with.

## The path ahead

These proceedings document the issues participants from across roles in Bay Area museums see as most pressing for the future of their institutions. They not only document the ideas the community generated together, but provide ideas for ideas at a scale for experimentation in the future of museums. These ideas emphasize collaboration, working together that's made possible in a region with five science museums and a rich science ecosystem. This convening was not only a chance to celebrate Moore Foundation grantees, but to continue to foster a community of museums as unique as the Bay Area.

# Capturing the ideas of the day: Graphic recordings

Alece Birnbaum captured the ideas of the day through live graphic recording, with key themes, quotes, and ideas rendered in real time through words and images. Participants also had a chance to contribute ideas to two graphic boards, sharing their individual vision for Bay Area science museums 25 years in the future and radical ideas. All graphic panels recording the day's events are shared here.



AUGUST 27 • 2025

GORDON AND BETTY MOORE FOUNDATION

25<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY SYMPOSIUM

MUSEUMS REIMAGINED

ENVISIONING THE FUTURE OF BAY AREA MUSEUMS

WELCOME

MAKE A WISH FOR THE FUTURE  
HOW MIGHT THE WORLD LOOK IN 25 YEARS?

GORDON + BETTY HAD A PASSION FOR SCIENCE + CALLED THE BAY AREA HOME + WANTED TO PRESERVE IT

OUR INSTITUTIONS HELP US TO:  
EXPERIENCE WONDER  
CONNECT  
LEARN FROM INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

OUR INSTITUTIONS ARE IMPORTANT TO OUR COMMUNITIES AND TO THE BAY AREA

BENEFITS OF THIS REGION

UNIVERSITIES  
WE'RE IN AN EXCEPTIONAL BUBBLE  
ACCESS TO EXPERTISE  
RICH SCIENCE COMMUNITY  
THRIVING SCIENCE COMMUNITY  
BAY AREA OUTSIDE DIVERSITY  
RICH BACKGROUND  
HISTORICALLY THE BAY AREA IS INNOVATING + EMBRACES SCIENCE + EDUCATION

WE HAVE AN AUDIENCE IN THIS AREA

PANEL

THE BAY AREA CONTEXT FOR SCIENCE + TECHNOLOGY MUSEUMS

PEOPLE HERE INTEREST IN SCIENCE  
HISTORY OF SUPPORTING NON PROFITS  
PARTNERSHIPS  
COMMIT TO BEING COMMUNITY HUBS

SUPPORT FOR RISK TAKING

CO-DESIGN EXHIBITS  
FIND COMMON INTERESTS + HELP EACH OTHER

FOR COLLECTIVE IMPACT

USE OUR COLLECTIVE VOICE

HOW TO ADDRESS CHALLENGES...

COLLABORATE  
FIGURE OUT OUR VALUE PROPOSITION + WORK TOGETHER  
NEED TO BE MORE NIMBLE SO WE CAN RESPOND FASTER  
COST CHALLENGES  
CAPTURING STEM LEARNING

IMAGINATIONS

SO PEOPLE WILL WANT TO SPEND MONEY AT MUSEUMS



Graphic notes with key themes heard from participants and speakers during welcome and panel discussion.



Graphic notes highlighting main themes from participants about their vision for the future of science museums.





- NEXT STEPS:**
- SHARE SYNTHESIS
  - GATHER TWICE A YEAR
  - REFLECT

## REFLECTIONS

WE HAVE 5 SCIENCE CENTERS IN THE BAY AREA

WE'RE AN INNOVATIVE REGION

NAME + INTERROGATE OUR CHALLENGES - MANY ARE STRUCTURAL

WE HAVE TO **EVOLVE**

THE NEED FOR WHAT WE DO HAS NEVER BEEN GREATER

**COLLECTIVELY AS A COMMUNITY**

USE OUR SHARED EXPERIENCE AS A STRENGTH

WHEN WE **COLLABORATE** WE STRENGTHEN THE REGION

THINK BROADLY ABOUT OUR IMPACT

**SHARE THE RISK + THE EXPERIMENTATION**



Graphic notes from the closing remarks of the Museums Reimagined symposium.

# Advisor and organizing teams

## Organizing committee

Janet Coffey, Program Director, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation

Sara Farooqi, Interdependence Lab

Jennifer Frazier, Program Officer, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation

Holly Potter, Chief Communications Officer, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation

Jennifer Ryan, Program Officer, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation

Tupou Tongilava, Communications Manager, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation

## Breakout group facilitators, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation

Briana Abrams

Amy Adams

Judy Boshoven

Laura Cohen

Rebecca Ju

Jennie Mathur

Ana Tamargo

Emily Volstadt

## Museum advisory group

Erica Barrueto, Chief of Staff and Vice President of Exhibits, The Tech Interactive  
Rena Dorph, Director, The Lawrence Hall of Science

Rebecca Johnson, Director of the Center for Biodiversity and Community Science, California Academy of Sciences

Robert Semper, Chief Science Officer, Exploratorium

Adam Tobin, Executive Director, Chabot Space & Science Center

## Proceedings team

Jennifer Frazier, Program Officer, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation

Judy Boshoven, Adaptive Management and Evaluation Officer and Technical Special, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation

RJ Andrews, Data Storyteller, Info We Trust

Tupou Tongilava, Communications Manager, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation

# Agenda

## Activity

### **Informal breakfast**

#### **Welcome and introduction**

- Aileen Lee, Chief of Programs/Incoming President, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation
- Jennifer Frazier, Program Officer, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation
- Sara Farooqi, Facilitator, Interdependence Lab

#### **Panel: The Bay Area context for science and technology museums**

- Erica Barrueto, Chief of Staff, The Tech Interactive
- Rena Dorph, Director, The Lawrence
- Rob Semper, Chief Science Officer, The Exploratorium

### **Break**

#### **Breakout group discussions – Round 1**

- New funding & operating models
- Trust in science & the role of museums
- AI & the evolution of museum practice
- Engaging new audiences inside and outside museum walls
- Engaging people with contemporary science (climate change; AI)
- Workforce sustainability & organizational resilience
- Bringing innovation to the visitor experience Morning close

### **Morning close**

### **Lunch (provided)**

### **Afternoon orientation**

#### **Breakout group discussions – Round 2**

#### **Breakout group report out**

### **Closing and next steps**

- Adam Tobin, Executive Director, Chabot Space & Science Center
- Rebecca Johnson, Director of Biodiversity and Community Science, California Academy of Sciences
- Janet Coffey, Program Director, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation

### **Networking reception (optional)**