

The National Medal for Museum and Library services is the nation's highest honor for libraries and museums that are serving their communities in exciting ways. Brooklyn Museum director Arnold Lehman and community member Virginia Ines Vergara traveled to Washington to receive the national medal and spoke to IMLS about how the museum impacts the community.

Arnold Lehman: The museum is one of the oldest fine arts museum that is in the United States and certainly one of the largest and we like to think of it as a world class institution that is really based within a community and that community is Brooklyn. The apprentice program has now been in effect for 11 years and that was a way to bring younger people into contact with the professional staff into contact with the collection and into a really intense interaction amongst one another. So I think it's an enormous win-win both for those people engaged in the apprentice program and for the museum because we learn from one another and we learn a lot.

Virginia Ines Vergara: I was drawn to the museum apprentice program because I think at that time it was really the one program where you could work with a group of other teens in the museum. And so it gave, and it continues to give teenagers responsibility that you don't have really anywhere else when you are in high school. And your duties include leading these tours and a huge question arises how are you going to get these people, the visitors to return? Also we got to write our own tours that we led, so that we were able to use our own input and what we thought and so this was a place where opinions were valued and that you don't often have in a high school setting where people really care about what you are thinking. Being there in the museum setting and really looking at art and the way art was behind the scenes really influenced my way of pursuing visual art, because in the studio you are your primary audience when you are making art, but I am always making that for a larger audience. So trying to think about what a viewer's going to see and almost detaching myself from that studio practice and trying to look at, which is very difficult when you are very connected to your work of what someone else is going to see when they look at that piece and I think that's all the Brooklyn museum has really helped me to achieve.

Arnold Lehman: Our sense for education is first and foremost to get people in the building. The word outreach for many of us is not a word that we use very often, because that means we are going out and sort of scouring the community for those people who could benefit from the museum. Our belief is that we can benefit from the community, it's more in reach. We want people in the building, we don't want people to feel that they're anything but the core of what we do and every program circles around that.