

# ILRA

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**INSIDE:** We offer this special issue of the ILR in the hopes that the pieces in it – all written in the midst of the first weeks of the Covid-19 crisis, will help us come together as a field, keep learning from one another, and build collaborations, especially across field specializations and professional networks.

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BY KAREN WISE

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## S U B S C R I P T I O N I N F O R M A T I O N

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# INTRODUCTION

As our industry faces unprecedented challenges, we want to do our part. As an independent publication providing timely information for museum leaders, we are not tied to any particular branch of the field. It seems to us to be a good time to offer the ILR as a venue for voices from the field, and to remove both the paywall and the delay and the limitations that physical printing and shipping impose. And physical printing and shipping seem to go counter to the stay at home orders we are all under.

We offer this special issue of the ILR in the hopes that the pieces in it – all written in the midst of the first weeks of the Covid-19 crisis- will help us come together as a field, keep learning from one another, and build collaborations, especially across field specializations and professional networks.

And we do encourage you to share this unique array of observations, opinions, suggestions and concerns. Feel free to post it, tweet it, and use whatever means are best for you. Also, please do note that it is a formal publication as The Informal learning Review Special Edition 2020.

With all best wishes for you, your families and your organizations health and safety, and in the hopes that we all emerge soon from this crisis with a renewed sense of purpose, and the resources to do great things.

Mac West, Editor

Karen Wise, Associate Editor

Colby Dorsey, Manager

## HOW COVID-19 SPARKED CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THE SURVIVAL OF MUSEUMS: THE 2020 MUSEWEB'S GLAMI AWARDS

*By Simon Adlam*

This past March was my second year serving as a judge for the international museum media awards, the Museums and the Web GLAMIs <https://mw20.museweb.net/glami-award-finalists/>. As my colleagues and I gathered from around the world, via and Zoom and Google, a new pandemic was bearing down, COVID-19, and changing our way of life. Unexpectedly, some of us found time to step away from our judging duties in order to debate the importance of media to a museum's success. We quickly agreed that their survival was at stake, and that digital media was

the platform that would set them apart. By the end of the month, while also judging the merits of the nominees' media submissions, we discussed the fate of museums post-pandemic. We pinpointed two sets: those that were serving their audiences with robust digital engagement before coronavirus; and those that provided successful immersive, interactive, or linear experience onsite, but lacked the resources to leverage this media off-site. In the end, who will be the winners and losers in our new global reality?

Some museums have overhauled their digital platforms to be more responsive and focused on a user-driven experience and content specific to their needs. These have retooled their online presence with intuitive websites and apps focusing on the user's point of inquiry, built sound internal infrastructure, while offering real-time programming and support. A few museums added tailored content to their social media on multiple platforms allowing them to target new audiences. They all moved closer to the winners' table. Others have created outstanding new site-based media experiences, but being locked between four walls they are now struggling to deliver content to an audience that may no longer exist. Lacking rich digital presence outside those walls, their new onsite media creations will be a swan song for some of these institutions.

This pandemic is causing a massive museological shift, and viewing the candidates for these media awards, unexpectedly, led me to ask questions about our current paradigm – What is the value of a museum when it cannot function as a museum? Can a legacy organization adapt or will it go the way of the Mastodon? The answer could lie in the DNA of the winning submissions. There were entrants who could quickly adapt to their audiences' needs by using me-

dia to provide access to their collections and research assets, and some who could not. In the end, museums need to be agile in how they demonstrate their value to the communities they serve while being true to their missions. They should be swift in rethinking the tools needed to reconnect to their audiences. They should realize this is not business as usual, at least for the foreseeable future, but a seismic shift that will impact every museum's survival.

Five current resources:

New York Times, BBC & Al Jazeera

YouTube

LinkedIn

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## A CRISIS LIKE NO OTHER

*By Carol Bossert, Ph.D.*

I have been trying to resist making sweeping statements about the pandemic and trying to remember that the cultural sector has faced numerous downturns: the economic meltdown of 2008 and the Bernie Madoff scandal come to mind. It is unsettling to be reminded how tightly the fate of our museums is tied to the economy. But nothing in my experience of navigating the ups and downs of our sector prepared me for the swiftness with which museums closed their doors, laid off staff...and grew silent. To be sure, the performing arts took a similar hit, but with one important difference: they retained their voice. Performers took to social media to sing songs, tell stories and play concerts. There are notable exceptions of course, Shedd Aquarium's penguin-led tour and the tweets from the National Cowboy Museum, but where are the online gallery talks and museum-hosted public forums?

I don't think anyone can predict what the next eighteen to twenty-four months will be like for museums. The analogy

of the dimmer switch may be most apt. The world--our country--will not simply turn on like a light switch. It will fade up and fade down, perhaps going through several cycles until we have a safe vaccine and effective treatment. And while people may feel comfortable strolling through a botanic garden or visiting a small art gallery, only time will tell when we will feel comfortable attending a crowded blockbuster exhibition or putting our children on a bus for a field trip to the National Mall.

My hope is that the museum sector uses this time to address the question Stephen Weil posed to the field in 1994, "Are you worthy or just merely worthwhile?" Let's find that answer and shout it from the rooftop.

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# LET'S MAKE THIS MEAN SOMETHING: ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION IN THE POST-COVID-19 MUSEUM

By Sarah Burroughs

Our field, like many others, is experiencing a sea-change. It has been amazing watching museums of all kinds and sizes step up during the pandemic to provide much-needed education, entertainment, and encouragement. It has been bittersweet, however, for the disabled professionals, volunteers, and visitors who even just months ago were told that wearing a mask when sick in public was unprofessional, working remotely was impossible, and distance learning programs were a pipe dream. Clearly, these accommodations and cultural changes are possible.

After this pandemic has passed, we need to take care that we remember what it was like: How it felt to be afraid of spreading or catching an illness simply by stepping outside of our house; how vital remote work was to stay employed when you were home-bound, or the fear of being unemployed because your workplace could not or would not allow you to work remotely; how hard remote work or even just being cooped up at home could be, making you realize that it comes with its own challenges and is not, in fact, a vacation. Those experiences are what people with certain disabilities and chronic illnesses experience daily, 365 days a year.

I implore everyone to take this opportunity to enact lasting change. Encourage your teams, your executives, and your boards to examine policies that could be altered to make your institution more accessible and equitable to people with disabilities. If your programs and exhibits are interactive, keep these new habits of cleaning the touchables frequently and have that cleaning schedule clearly posted

on-site and on-line so that visitors who are immunocompromised can know when is safest to visit. Keep up those distance learning programs to be able to reach audiences that still face barriers to visitation, and be sure those programs are fully accessible. Be willing to truly analyze which jobs or volunteer work can be done at least partially remotely - for floor staff/educators this can be done by scheduling their interactive work so that their digital work is all on the same day. (Remote work has the bonus of being more equitable to people who are caregivers as well). If you have questions, find answers and resources from disability advocates that have a disability themselves, rather than receiving guidance solely from neuro- and bio-typical people who may mean well but may not always understand what is best practice. In fact, look to those resources regardless because you can't know what to ask if you don't know what you don't know.

Remember that there are positive things we can harness from this tragedy to make the world a better place in the future. You cannot be disability-inclusive without accessibility, and the world has been shown that accessibility is easier than most people think. We will get through this. When we do, let's make this have all meant something.

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## PLANNING A NEW MUSEUM DURING A CRISIS

By Ellen J. Censky, PhD

Imagine that you are in the middle of planning for a new building – doing all of the things you should be doing – engaging the community in helping to define what that new museum can be; engaging donors and key stakeholders and getting them excited about the future museum and

the impact it will have on the community; talking to local leaders and legislators about the economic and cultural benefits; negotiating for land; launching a feasibility study; and on and on. This is time consuming and best done in person. Now imagine that you are asked to close your mu-



seum to the public and stay safe at home. The stock market is in free fall. And you have no idea when things will recover and you will get back to normal or what the new normal will be. The question you ask yourself is should you still be moving forward on a new building project at this time.

This scenario is exactly where the Milwaukee Public Museum (MPM) was on March 15th. We were rapidly making decisions about staffing and maintaining a presence in the community for the near-term and how we would survive this crisis, and yet we had to make a decision about the future museum at this time too. MPM leadership had a long, hard discussion about this and the decision was made to move forward for several reasons – first and foremost, the reason that we need a new building is because we are not sustainable in the current building. It is falling apart around us and impacting our exhibits, our visitor experience and our ability to care for the collections that we hold in trust for the public. That reason did not change with the unfolding events of the coronavirus. Secondly, the community needs a new, forward-thinking museum that will be adaptable and able to respond quickly to rapidly unfolding events like this. The community needs a museum that is its “think tank.” Our new vision for MPM focuses on the inter-

section of nature and culture – drawing on the strengths of our collections and knowledge. This is timely as we watch a virus (nature) impact our culture (social distancing) and yet so many of us go back to nature to feel calm and grounded at this time.

While we have had to adapt our way of engaging the community in this process and are continuing to figure that out, our discussions with donors and key stakeholders have been very encouraging in that they are excited to know that we are still moving forward. It gives us something positive and uplifting to focus on in these times when everything seems so uncertain and negative. In the end, we will emerge from our homes and start to engage with each other. And MPM will have moved several steps closer to providing the community with the museum it needs to bring people together to understand this very intimate connection between people and nature.

*Ellen Censky is the President/CEO of the Milwaukee Public Museum. She can be reached at [censky@mpm.edu](mailto:censky@mpm.edu).*

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## WE ARE TRULY GETTING THROUGH THIS TOGETHER

*By Charity Counts*

I have participated in a variety of phone and video conference calls with Association of Midwest Museums (AMM) members and colleagues over the last 4-5 weeks, and have witnessed a rapidly evolving situation for museums. What I have observed has been both difficult, sometimes heart-breaking, but with glimpses of hope and inspiration for the future.

At the start of the pandemic crisis, our members’ greatest challenges were trying to understand and respond to the daily changes in information about the outbreak - *which data should I be looking at? should we close?* Their energy quickly shifted to focus on the wellbeing of employees and visitors, and museums everywhere had to close their doors. Museum professionals then found themselves navigating new challenges as they worked from home for the first time, away from their collections and each other - *What do I work on now? How do we collaborate with our coworkers? How can we possibly make upcoming*

*deadlines?*

The focus has shifted once again, in my observation, just two more weeks into closures. Leaders are now facing very difficult decisions due to a loss of revenue from ticket sales or canceled programs. They are considering government relief assistance options, trying to understand what the “new normal” will look like after places reopen, and worry that they’ve lost the momentum they may have built in the past 5-10 years. Meanwhile, their team members sit tight waiting for furlough or layoff notifications, trying to be patient and understanding. Professionals who typically work hands-on in creative departments or collections are challenged to stay motivated with monotonous computer-based tasks. Others are trying to balance work with home life, and finding it very difficult. Many are planning for projects in the future that have new variables related to visitor comfort and safety, and of course the uncertainty of how long social distancing will really last.

I am inspired by the efforts of museums to keep staff on payroll as long as possible, and to support their communities during this troubling time. They've been extremely creative and flexible, as they make resources and expertise available to their audiences and colleagues. I hope all of these new skills and experiences transfer to the sustainability of museums in the long-term. I know we all are.

Somehow, a pleasant side effect of all of this has also been that the members of our museum community appear closer than they have ever been. Museum people are helping each other in every way possible, sharing their expertise and closure decision-making experiences. I have person-

ally seen an increase in (virtual) gatherings with my own colleagues, and am grateful to my networks of museum friends for helping me get through this very difficult time. I am certain others are too, and hope that this sense of community we feel and recognize today continues to be as strong in the future.

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## REIMAGINING

*By Raylene Decatur*

Today, as never before, museums have an opportunity to reimagine vision, mission and impact. For decades we have discussed how our institutions might be more responsive to societal needs, relevant to diverse audiences and nimble in responding to a rapidly changing world. Now, we have that opportunity. Even as boards and staffs grapple with the initial phases of the Covid-19 crisis, we should be leading for the long view.

For some it will be more comfortable to push for a return to normal. To derail fear, grief and the loss of consistency with a steadfast return to business as usual. This is a trap, which fails to ignite the creativity and innovation that will lead the sector to a new era of service and relevancy. Reimagine, start with a blank page, and think boldly about

what opportunities this new environment holds!

### RESOURCES:

<https://hbr.org/2020/03/that-discomfort-youre-feeling-is-grief>

<https://hbr.org/1996/09/the-new-work-of-the-nonprofit-board>

<https://hbr.org/2020/04/the-restorative-power-of-ritual>

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## HANDS-ON, HANDS-OFF, OR SOMETHING NEW

*By Mel Drumm*

As a Museum professional with years of service in a science museum, science center and a children's museum, the global pandemic is unlike anything I have experienced or imagined possible. I thought I had experienced it all – from opening a new STEM Center days before 9/11, to an unexpected and prolonged closure of our outdoor site the

day before our signature summer camp program – distilling each situation to find opportunities in seemingly impossible situations.

Through a series of regional partners including a science center, nature center, aviation museum, and a growing

STEM center at a community college, we have cheered over our unprecedented year-over-year attendance and membership records. We have promoted hands-on activities and shoulder-to-shoulder attendance densities since 1982. With a sudden hard stop on all that we have fostered for thirty-eight years, we are faced with never-imagined questions that will question if our future forecasting remains of value or if we need a new course forward.

While memories are short, life-changing events are never forgotten, and become indelible when they touch people personally or impact their children. A recent article by Colleen Dilenschneider<sup>1</sup> shares research that a return to more traditional attendance patterns at science centers or children's museums might be challenging in the near future. Dilenschneider's data highlights that science centers and children's museums provide tactile experiences and that people often associate a hands-on approach as key to a successful visit. My organization, the Ann Arbor Hands-On Museum, has spent decades promoting social, hands-on, high density experiences. It has been our secret sauce. Dilenschneider's data resonates with my staff and, if the public's memory is indeed long, this period may result in new, or renewed informal science experiences, just as the hands-on approach did for countless families decades ago and up to now.

What might have been our most unique and successful differentiator may indeed be our liability in the near future. Fortunately, our organization is agile, flexible, and focused on leveraging regional resources of like-minded STEM orga-

nizations. Recently, we launched an initiative we call Unity in Learning (UIL). UIL positioned us for stability, growth, and flexibility without incurring major capital investments, adding physical infrastructure, or recruiting new staff. We created a one-stop shop for educators, families, and the entire community. As we begin to rethink our business model in light of Covid-19, UIL continues to offer us (and our partners) deep regional reach without the traditional budget. We have recently been further supported by the regional philanthropic community as one gift to UIL may support a multiplicity of program sets.

The best advice I may offer colleagues during this unprecedented time is to remain open to the unexpected as nontraditional solutions may provide security and stability in times of stress and uncertainty. Be prepared, or warned, to understand the opportunity costs involved in new ventures, mergers, and partnerships. Some of them are not for the faint of heart.

#### ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.colleendilen.com/2020/03/25/how-is-covid-19-impacting-likelihood-to-attend-different-cultural-entities-data/>

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## QUESTACON 2020: THINGS CAN ONLY GET BETTER

*By Graham Durant*

Since opening in 1988, Questacon only closed to the public on Christmas Days. That changed dramatically in 2020. In eastern parts of Australia 2019 was hot and dry. Fire authorities warned that the upcoming bushfire season could be bad. No-one expected just how bad it would be. Intense bushfires broke out in multiple locations around the Sydney area and in adjacent parts of the State of New South Wales. The first impacts for Questacon came in November 2019 when 4 schools from bushfire affected areas had to cancel their trips to Canberra to avoid travelling through places with bushfires. Questacon's various outreach teams also had to take additional precautions travelling through and to areas at risk of bushfire. The

situation was to get much worse.

Late in 2019 a series of large fires spread through the forests and fields to the east of Canberra. These fires were of such a scale and intensity that the plumes of smoke were clearly visible from space. On January 1st 2020, the prevailing winds directed those plumes of smoke towards Canberra and for several days after that Canberra had the worst air quality in the world. Outside Questacon the skies darkened and took on an eerie orange hue. Inside Questacon staff and visitors alike were smelling smoke and coughing. The science centre had to close on grounds of public safety.

The city was not particularly well-prepared for monitoring the health effects of the smoke. At the start it was not easy to get good information about the levels of smoke and particulates and the associated health risks. Was it safe to open on January 2nd? Questacon stood up its Management Response Team and went into assessment mode. Websites showing weather, wind speed and direction and bushfire activity started to be intensely scrutinised. Contractors were brought in to start measuring particulate levels inside and outside of the science centre. It was the 0.25µm particles that posed the biggest risk as these are the particles that get deep down into human lungs. What health advice could be found suggested that a level of 25 particles per cubic metre of air was the maximum safe level. There were days in January in Canberra when the outside level was over 5000. Every morning throughout the crisis the Questacon Management response team met at 7.30 to determine whether it was safe to open that day. Taking into account the particulate measurements by contractors, the wind speed and direction and predictions of smoke levels across the city, a daily decision was made to open or close. Front of house staff were on standby for notification by 8am whether to come to work or not. If Questacon was to close that day then notification had to go out through social channels and to the media by 8am. Vulnerable staff were asked to stay at home and smoke masks were issued to all working staff.

In all Questacon had to close for five full days and one half day during the month (January 1, 2, 5, 6, 8 and 9). It was a challenging time. New procedures had to be initiated. New risk assessments had to be made. New monitoring and personal protective gear had to be acquired and across Australia supplies of masks and air-quality monitoring equipment were low. The intense smoke forced the cancellation of the STEM X Academy for primary and secondary teachers, and the postponement of the Questacon National Invention Convention.

The impact of the bushfire smoke was significant. It hit the tourism industry and it hit visitor numbers. December and January are summer holiday periods in Australia and usually the busiest time for Questacon. 2020 visitor numbers were down 22% from the same period in the previous year with significant impact on revenue. Parts of the New South Wales South Coast were burning badly and major roads were closed. Canberra became a central point for holidaymakers and others who were either evacuated or prevented from returning to Melbourne or Sydney via coastal routes. To support people who were affected, Questacon offered free entry to those who had been displaced because of the bushfire activity, a gesture which was gratefully received and utilised by approximately 1000 visitors during this time.

There were many lessons to be learned from the bushfire smoke events. Although Australia is bushfire prone the intensity of the fires and associated smoke was unprecedented. The air in Canberra homes were affected, air-conditioning systems were drawing smoke into buildings and although still with unsafe air quality, the various museums and galleries were places of refuge. Each national institution had to make its own assessment about whether to open as each building had different characteristics and in some cases could close galleries to maintain air quality. On days when the air quality in Questacon was poor but good enough to open, access was restricted to minimise air flow from outside into the building. A number of staff were granted special leave to volunteer as members of the regional firefighting crews.

And then it hailed. On January 20th an intense storm cell passed into Canberra and a very intense hailstorm with golf-ball sized hail hit the city. Roofs and windows were damaged, trees were stripped of leaves, birds and fruit-bats were left dead or dying on the ground. Thousands of cars were damaged and many subsequently written off. Questacon was right in the firing line for the high velocity hailstones. Roof-lights, solar panels, roof-top chillers, outdoor exhibits and shade structures all suffered extensive damage. The cars of staff, volunteers and visitors were battered and broken by the hail. Some of the vehicles destroyed in the storm belonged to families who had been evacuated from bushfire ravaged areas. Staff provided assistance in whatever way they could to support distraught visitors. In one instance, a family whose car was destroyed by hail had also lost their home in the fires, and their surviving possessions were all in the vehicle.

Then the fires returned. First time around it was the smoke. Now it was the flames. Large bushfires in the National Park to the south and west of Canberra started advancing towards the city in February driven by strong south westerly winds. Canberra had been hit with a bushfire in 2003 that entered the suburbs from this direction and destroyed 500 homes. Not surprisingly, residents were nervous with this new threat to the city. The fires advanced to some 10 km from the city, some suburbs were told to activate their bushfire survival plans and then fortunately the wind changed eliminating the immediate threat. Changing weather patterns brought rain to dampen down the fires and progressively the bushfire threat was reduced and finally eliminated by the end of the month.

Questacon staff had properties, families and friends affected by the various fires throughout December, January and February. The organization provided support services for staff who had been affected by these events, providing advice on access to the employee assistance program and

encouraging staff to engage in conversations with each other and with managers. The entire staff were tired and feeling a bit fragile by March. Those with respiratory problems were still suffering the effects of the smoke with dry coughs and increased asthmatic attacks. We had lost the summer but the crisis was over. We had lessons to learn, procedures, plans and budgets to adjust, and new air quality monitors to install.

The wall-to-wall media coverage of the bushfires was replaced by stories of a virus epidemic breaking out in Wuhan, China. It seemed a long way away at the time. Surely not. Questacon had produced a pandemic preparation plan in 2009 when H5N1 bird-flu was around. It was time to blow the dust off the plan and get it up to date.

Questacon is an Australian government agency constituted as a specialised Division in the Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources. The Department too was getting busy with its pandemic preparedness. Supply chains, production of medical devices, energy security, likely impact on industry and small businesses, impact on the Department itself and their staff. Questacon became caught up in all of this as the epidemic became a pandemic. The first priorities for Questacon were increased cleaning and more hand sanitisers throughout the Centre and scenario planning. Vulnerable staff were identified. COVID-19 arrived in Australia and the Government started imposing social distancing measures and closing things down across the country. School trips were cancelled by state education authorities and Questacon's outreach teams had to stop operations in regional areas. Closure of Questacon became inevitable as the number of cases grew in Australia and Government restrictions tightened. It was obvious that this time closure would be for a longer period and this was a much bigger issue requiring Departmental and Ministerial clearance. Questacon closed to the public on March 20th.

All-staff were involved in preparatory activities prior to closure so when the final decision was made it came as no surprise. The first focus was on communications to staff, members and other senior stakeholders. Casual staff were understandably anxious but reassured that we expected to keep them employed either at Questacon on in providing surge support for one of the various Government COVID-19 response teams. Strong interpersonal skills and science training suited them well for picking up temporary work of this nature. All-staff are being encouraged to acquire new skills during the downtime from operating a busy science centre. The next major challenge came with the requirement for a significant proportion of staff to work from home. This required a Herculean effort from

the IT support team who are still busy ensuring that staff and equipment are able to use the various remote working platforms some requiring to be more secure than others.

With the closure of schools and with families being told to remain at home there was an imperative to re-package existing digital content and to generate new relevant content. A social media campaign was launched to keep members and the public at large connected with Questacon. Social distancing now requires all meetings to be conducted remotely. This is creating new insight into staff homes, families and pets all of whom now pop up in management meetings. Social hook-ups and hang-outs now provide a way of keeping in touch across the organisation. Our online shop is doing more business now. Many face to face activities are being replaced with virtual projects. An upcoming 3-day virtual National Invention Convention with delegates linking up across Australia will be the first big test.

But what of the future? When will we open again? What will our world be like when we do? Will families visit a busy and often crowded hands-on science centre after several months of hands-off activities and social distancing? How do we re-build educational tourism in Canberra? Will regional schools return? Our online booking portal suggests that schools are hoping that they may be able to travel again from October. That may be optimistic. Will we be free of COVID-19 in 6 months? Will there be a vaccine by then or are we in for a much longer period of closure? How will Australia and other countries recover from the economic impact of the coronavirus outbreak?

This month Questacon was due to start producing its next decadal plan. We can still do this but it will be a different plan from one we would have produced just 4 months ago. In all our previous scenarios we did not see this coming. We had some plans in place for each of the elements but not all together and not at the scale that has hit Australia and the world. Two weeks into closure the organisation is starting to find its feet again. As happens after bushfires there are green shoots of recovery amongst a blackened landscape. With new enforced ways of working a creativity dividend is starting to appear. Old ways of working are being questioned and priorities being re-assessed. A new and improved Questacon will eventually emerge from the troubled start to 2020.

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# SURVIVING AND THRIVING AS MUSEUM PROFESSIONALS

By Sarah Erdman

I have two young kids. When schools were first canceled, there was a color-coded schedule floating around that claimed to be an ideal “covid learning” set-up for parents. The child development person in me wanted to either laugh or shake my head, because the expectations were beyond idealized and bordered on inappropriate for most children. However, the human in me went “I get it,” because, we are craving some sense of control and there isn’t any to be had.

The museum world is not immune to this feeling either. The closures are giving many museums an identity crisis, who are we without our visitors? Do we even matter? What will we be when we reopen, if we re-open? More distressingly, the growing number of layoffs has pulled the rug out from under really talented museum professionals. For many, the loss of income means they are focused on what day to day living is going to look like. Others may be experiencing their own sense of “what now” as their work shifts, vanishes or changes and they try to figure out where they fit in the new reality.

Right now, all of us need to focus on surviving. This is unprecedented and we need to allow ourselves the grace to breathe and grieve and figure out how to get through the day. After we land in whatever our “new normal” is we can worry about thriving, individually and as a field.

And we can survive and then thrive. We can because the museum field is supported by incredibly thoughtful and smart people who have been thinking about museum “what ifs” for a long time. Maybe not related to a pandemic, but definitely looking at the museum field and saying “it’s time for a change.”

When you get to the point where you feel ready to think about what comes next, I would encourage you to look beyond your usual sources. This is the time to listen to different voices and viewpoints about museum work. We will not be going back to how it used to be and museums of every size and variety will be taking unsure steps in this new direction.

There are numerous conversations already in progress about how the people the museum truly depends on are not respected as much as they should be, up to and including being appropriately compensated. The people discussing this are smart, they’ve lived it and you should

seek them out immediately. When I had the idea for The Care and Keeping of Museum Professionals (available on Amazon <https://www.amazon.com/Care-Keeping-Museum-Professionals/dp/1794487018> in paperback or e-book) I joked that it was “part self-help book, part group memoir.” A place where the writers shared their own experiences so the readers could either learn something, or find solace that they were alone.

Almost every writer in the book I had met, or communicated primarily with, on Twitter and other digital platforms. There are so many smart, thoughtful people who are making their thoughts available and I encourage you to check them out. I can recommend a number of people through Twitter, and when you follow them they will lead you to other people that I haven’t discovered yet. There are lots of tutorials to get you comfortable with Twitter if it is new to you, but you may find other platforms that suit you better.

However you choose to engage, and at whatever level feels right for you now, I hope you find people who challenge and comfort you, who give you a chance to discuss and a chance to listen. Don’t expect to find all the answers, or provide them, but take a minute to hear what others are saying.

## PEOPLE WHO ARE SAYING SMART AND INTERESTING THINGS ON TWITTER

Caveats:

- This is not an exhaustive list
- This list is not in any rank order- purely based on looking through my Twitter
- Use this as a starting point- look at who they are retweeting and talking to and find other voices

@PorchiaMuseM  
@museum\_matters  
@LaceyWilson4  
@EmpatheticMuse  
@AmeliaTGrabow  
@erodley  
@shineslike  
@SankofTravelHr  
@AnnaWoten  
@AAM\_LGBTQ  
@Wittwering  
@charliehersh

@debreese  
@hillr12  
@jp\_exhibitvcs  
@1Facilitateher  
@abbynewk  
@BeardedMuseuMan  
@SusieWilkening  
@CuratingCamille  
@museumqueer  
@artstuffmatters  
@murawski27  
@deankrimmel

@edgerington  
@wolverinewilson  
@aaproctor  
@kayleighbindc  
@wagmnw  
@artlust  
@ehmee  
@leslieposter  
@CollardStudies  
@LadyNaturalist  
@JuliaKennedy\_  
@hannah\_rfh  
@BlairMoskowitz  
@DinaABailey

@\_BlackMuses  
@greebergalyssa  
@joyfulmuseums  
@seededucation  
@MarkBSchlemmer  
@glibertlisak  
@xela415  
@sacha\_coward  
@heyshaelyn  
@museum\_matters  
@AlliHartley1  
@2brwngirls  
@LibbyJ1853  
@meglovesmuseums

@mikedoesmuseums  
@mamileham  
@Adriannerussell  
@ninaksimon  
@Museumptnrs  
@TinctureofMuse  
@Monica\_muses  
@danamuses  
@neysela  
@magmidd  
@erinblasco  
@AMTransparency  
@TheMuseSocial  
@museumhour

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## SCENES FROM AN EXTINCTION EVENT

By Kelly Fernandi

### KEEP CALM AND ACCOMMODATE

As an exhibit provider, all we can do is remain flexible and make things as easy and painless as possible for our hosts. For museums that currently have our exhibits sitting in dark galleries, we are extending through the summer without cost if availability allows. For others, we'll work with current and future hosts to facilitate the smoothest transition possible. And for those in more dire straits, we will explore other options.

### THE SHARED THREAT

At the heart of it, we thrive by helping museums thrive. But with this level of disruption, the threat does indeed become existential, depending on the duration and what the new normal holds. If traveling exhibits become a luxury item outside of museums' survival mode budgeting, or if society as a whole becomes touch-averse, the future is bleak for hands-on exhibit providers.

### EVOLVE TO SURVIVE?

The irony is that I thought we were. We just spent the past two years evolving - intensely. Our newly launched Amazing Pollinators is a complete 2.0 evolution from the exhibit structures we've been building for 32 years, including the numerous gamified components and interactives. But all this next-gen aesthetic and experiential novelty was built on the strength and success of our decades-old engagement model - a model with physical immersion and interactivity at its core, reinforced not only by hundreds of

hosts and millions of visitors, but by a mounting body of brain research and learning studies. As Ben said, "Involve me and I'll learn."

### A THREATENED SPECIES?

I'm not denying that VR, AR and other technological leaps in learning will become increasingly immersive, responsive and effective. They will. And this pandemic will surely accelerate their development and use. But to me, this digital future only increases the need for in-person, hands-on experiences. Today, more than ever, we face an overabundance of screen time. I'm not ready to submit to inevitability, to dutifully reassign my energy toward creating tomorrow's 3.0 low-touch learning experiences. There are plenty of folks well along that path. I may join them in time, but for now I choose to keep calm and accommodate along our current course toward a post-COVID, vaccine-fortified world where I hope to find museums (and Minotaur) still standing and society ready to reengage. I don't think we've seen the end of classrooms, live events, team sports, or face to face interaction. So I'll continue embracing physical engagement as a powerful learning tool that will continue to hold a valuable place in the new world. I wish you all as painless a journey as possible, and I look forward to keeping in touch.

### RESOURCES I'VE APPRECIATED

• AAM's Museum Junction Open Forum Digest (daily email) <https://community.aam-us.org/home>

- As a small business, I've been reading everything I can find on SBA EIDL and PPP loans. I've found this one to be the clearest.  
<https://www.uschamber.com/report/covid-19-emergency-loans-small-business-guide>

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## LET'S GET TOGETHER

*By Seth Frankel*

In the world of exhibit planning and design consulting, we tell ourselves and our collaborators that we're excellent at working remotely. Even prior to this pandemic, it's been a common refrain in proposals and pitches. Zoom has been a verb in our daily work vocabulary long before virtual birthday parties and church services were the only option. Even so, we all know it's not a perfect replacement for working shoulder-to-shoulder. Ideally, remote communication is a tool used between sessions of analog face time to increase the quality and frequency of collaboration.

More than ever, the value of being in each other's immediate proximity rings true. Museums are inherently

collaborative in nearly every regard—each of our beloved institutions is an entity far greater than the sum of its parts. As we all strive to meet the challenges of today, let's look forward to collaboration that is made stronger, more complete and more beautiful by sharing space and place as we build institutions of purpose and impact together.

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## DAILY MEME

*By Phelan R. Fretz Ph.D*

When I closed my museum on Saturday March 14, my head swirled with an initial set of emotions; anxiety, fear, worry, panic and a sense of losing my footing. What has now set-in a month later - along with physical distancing and physical separation - is a different kind of negative emotion beyond just fear, anxiety and worry. What I see in my staff as we work together to solve the many unknowns we find ourselves facing, is a deep sorrow, distress and grief. During the pandemic, my staff have lost so much, whether it's enjoying a favorite restaurant, attending a yoga class, missing a concert or sporting event, visiting family, hugging a friend, or a spouse losing a job.

So how are we combating the negative emotions surrounding us so we can move our institution forward? We are

building community and holding each other accountable for our work. On the Monday following the arrival of the pandemic in Vermont, I started sharing daily coronavirus memes, songs and videos with my staff. We exchanged photos of our youth, poems, viral music videos of creativity in quarantine. In some ways, we got to know each other even better than before. We took the time to connect and to be there for each other, to bring laughter and caring everyday. The personal conversations, Zoom staff meetings, defining meaningful work, seemed to be working. The team felt full of purpose. Then today, I received a note that a staff member's grandmother died of the virus. Cycles of grief and recovery.

As a scientist, I'm always wondering about what the data



are telling us. A colleague at University of Vermont tracks twitter. She must be having a field day. What was an early novelty, zoom meetings, has now become mundane. As our original emotions of shock transitioned to a collective working toward the future, I decided to take a look at my memes. What can they tell us, and me, about my emotional state at any time in the past month?

Early on, as we all were wrestling with the new pandemic norms, I shared: [Didn't wash hands](#), [Washing hands](#), [Don't touch your face](#). Then, in pursuit of adding some humor as we started to feel trapped in this reality, I shared: [Where's Waldo?](#) [Kid's list](#) [Original Zoom](#) [CVS toilet paper](#) [Unplug 2020?](#) [Relative importance graph](#). And more re-

cently, I feel more philosophical; wondering where this will take us... [No annoying people](#) [Dog Yoga...](#) [Couch Choir](#).

None of us know where this will take us. In the coming months, what work looks like for all of us will continue to change, and we will use the missions of our institutions to guide the work we do. In difficult times, work ties us to other people in such an intricate way. As we pursue our goals, let's not forget the people that made us successful.

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## MY PERSPECTIVE FROM SEA LEVEL

*By Patrick Gallagher*

Before I launch into my perspective of the cultural community today and my thoughts of the future, let me first give a bit of a reality check for running a professional services firm with four offices in different states and one office abroad. I have always understood that in the consulting world you are always at risk of the economy and how any unexpected turn impacts states, cities, philanthropy and operational and development funds for non-profits. We experienced it in 2008-2010, but this current turn of events rockets past that into a stratosphere of the complete unknown. Now with the uncertainty of cash flow and all or my team working from their home offices across the country and overseas, we are completely redefining the workplace environment. They are all heroes in this battle and like the rest of us, are facing different types of challenges managing families, emotions, and frankly getting out of bed each morning.

Am I frightened? Absolutely. Am I challenged? Yes. Am I concerned about the future? More than you know. I am also a person who travels 80% of the time and I am now starting week 5 sitting at my desk in front of a computer. So, I am dealing with putting a light into this darkness while spending 8 to 10 hours a day on Zoom supporting my clients, museum directors, operations managers, curators, contractors, etc., on how to prepare for what is next. Mastering new terms for meetings, presentations, communications, billing, collections you name it have all been recrafted. All in all, it is working far better than anyone would have expected. When this is over, we will have learned so

much about ourselves and our clients and will have found new and better ways to be their partners.

So, in the short term what are we doing with our clients? First and foremost, our financial services group is assisting with developing new operation plans, new staffing plans, and applying for support through the CARES Act. In the midst of this, we are also managing the anxiety of board members and reinforcing why keeping our museum culture alive is so important. We are hosting webinars so museum staff have places to go to find information and support. Many museum professionals have not had to do this kind of modeling so we need to be there to support them. We are also stepping into assist clients with broadening their perspective on their virtual presence. I have spoken with so many museums that feel they were caught a bit flat footed when they had to close their doors and did not have a robust virtual presence in place. Our digital team is launching webinars to begin the discussions of a what a virtual museum can be and should be, it is not just collections online or a robust website. When this is all behind us there will be very serious discussions of what the virtual museum really means.

More than anything we need to just be trusted partners to our clients and support in any way we can.

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# LEARNING FROM ADVERSITY

By Judy Gradwohl

Call me a starry-eyed optimist, but I fervently believe that we will pull out of the pandemic shutdown with new strengths. When I can lift my head from concerns about staff and financial health, I see that we have already learned new skills and strengthened our community—inside and out. Six weeks ago, I never would have dreamed that we could keep our culture strong and continue to advance our mission while dispersed in homes across the County. We miss each other and we miss our visitors, but we rallied to continue our research, from home and socially-distanced in the field, and share our science broadly on our website and social media.

I'm also seeing unprecedented levels of cooperation across the museum community. It was an anxiety-filled week waiting to see how the Small Business Administration loan program would roll out. With a changing landscape of rules, and a driving need to meet the criteria for forgiveness, it was uplifting to see the volume of messages from museum leaders nationwide offering information, sharing advice they had received, and providing updates. Information is no longer power, it is a form of altruism that lifts us all up.

These are undeniably dark times. Right now in San Diego, it looks like early social distancing has been effective at holding this wave of Coronavirus at bay, but there has been a terrible toll in lives and livelihoods. It will be some time before we understand how our area will bounce back and which aspects of our lives have changed for the foreseeable future. The Nat has a diversified source of revenue so we are holding on by a thread—for the short term.

Despite the pall of disease and destruction, I value the slower pace of life and the hummingbirds that are my new office mates. I'm also trying to balance short-term concerns of financial viability, with planning for reopening. The pandemic has affected us all and changed how we work and play. We can learn from every experience, and we need to think about how this strange and disturbing period could change and improve us all over the long term, personally and professionally.

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# GLOBAL VIRUS, GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITY

By Patrick Hamilton

The coronavirus has brought into sharp focus what an extraordinarily interconnected world on which we all live. There is no walling off the virus. It sweeps around the world swiftly because we humans move around the world rapidly. We do so because as a species we love to see new places and meet new people but also because we benefit enormously from the incredible richness and diversity of natural resources and human creativity and innovation throughout the world.

But with the benefits of globalization come responsibilities. We have established highly sophisticated interconnected global systems of making, sharing, buying and selling but rudimentary means of regulating the adverse consequenc-

es of these actions, whether that be quickly identifying and containing the acute danger of a new infectious disease or managing the chronic threat posed by humanity fundamentally altering the composition and therefore the behavior of the global atmosphere.

The Coronavirus eventually will subside, but not without extracting a grievous toll in human suffering. The full extent of that pain is still being determined by the efficacy of our actions to slow the spread of the virus. But we will survive and learn from this severe shock to our society and it's not too early to begin thinking about what those lessons should be. I have some suggestions:

- Other highly infectious diseases will arise in the future and we must develop the international cooperation necessary to spot them early so that we jointly can act quickly to contain them.
- Disease outbreaks are acute traumas. The months it takes for them to run their courses may seem interminable while in the midst of them but they are finite in duration.
- Burning fossil fuels and clearing forests and in so doing releasing huge amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere will have consequences that in terms of timelines relevant to people are forever.
- We must develop the international cooperation necessary to slow and eventually stop the global changes in climate that we have set in motion for the benefit of the present and all future generations.

The coronavirus teaches us that we now live on a human-dominated, interdependent planet. But this planet now also is home to the healthiest, wealthiest, best educated, most innovative, creative and connected populace in history. The future of Earth will be determined by human decision making, either by default or by design; either by accident or by intention.

So what do we want our future Earth to be? I submit that it is one in which we all are cognizant of the cumulative implications of all of our individual choices and actions. It is one in which we all benefit from living on an interconnected world while all taking responsibility for avoiding the adverse consequences of living on a planet where humanity now is the dominant agent of change.

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## WILL COVID-19 DISRUPT HOW WE DEVELOP VISITOR EXPERIENCES?

*By Carolynne Harris*

As a consultant who plans museums and large exhibit projects, I've started thinking about how the core of what we do may be impacted. Will the COVID crisis encourage exhibit and museum developers to finally take a hard look at our processes, which really haven't changed much in the past several decades. Though listening to our communities, new technologies for engagement, and including varied perspectives in storytelling has improved, we generally still build museums and exhibits based on the idea that they are substantially physical incarnations of ideas and objects. Some museums and practitioners have embraced flexibility and 'updatibility' in their concepts, but in reality, once installed, most exhibits do not change much over a long period of time (1 year? 5 years? 15 years). Museums don't staff for true updatibility and flexibility, and rapid response. Material concerns are more about durability and accessibility which can mean expensive and semi-permanent in nature. Is this an opportunity to truly scrutinize how we develop exhibits and museums and develop processes that are completely different? What would that look like?

Similarly, fears of privacy and lack of resources have hampered museums embracing things like facial recognition in

museum interactives. Touch-screens may not be very favorable going forward, so will those reservations dissipate and we will start to see a focus on hands-free "hands-on" exhibit elements? How can we find creative solutions to physically engage our visitors when touching things, cleaning things, and big group activities will forever be impacted in the age of COVID?

Finally, as someone who includes stakeholders, community voices and potential visitors in the process for developing projects - how will we do this while we have to be distant? Ideation workshops suffer virtually - but can they be designed to be successful? What will visitor concept testing look like when potential visitors may not want to engage with strangers and props? How do we engage in meaningful ways with communities moving forward?

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# INTENTIONAL PRACTICE WHEN IT MATTERS MOST

By Randi Korn

Intentional Practice is about zeroing in on what is most important and reorganizing teams and work to achieve that one important thing. My work helping museums articulate the impact they want to achieve among the public was fulfilling a year ago. Today, it is on the back burner. I am not devaluing it, but first things, first. Growing up and into my 20s, I had many wonderful conversations with my grandfather. Oddly, I remember only one piece of advice he gave, maybe because it was the most important advice an elder can offer: health before wealth.

A few nights ago, I participated in a virtual #DrinkingaboutMuseums get together. We are in uncomfortable and uncommon times, yet according to participants, museum leadership was wanting their staff to operate as if we weren't. People were struggling with continuing to do what they have always done, yet they weren't sure why they were doing it—working from their dining room table while homeschooling their children when they had a chance.

Who among us can ignore what is happening? I imagine no one. So why pretend otherwise? We are at a pivotal moment where museums can still make a difference in people's lives (which is how I define impact), but before doing so, they may need to step back. If museums are to make a lasting difference, they have to prepare themselves before doing so. What do such preparations look and sound like in times like these? Prior to preparations, though, we have to acknowledge and let ourselves feel the harshness of our situation.

Viktor Frankl, author, Holocaust survivor, and “thrivor”<sup>1</sup> who became a neurologist and psychiatrist, wrote: “Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”<sup>2</sup> With space, the power to choose will emerge with the weight of enormous responsibility. Museums have always felt a great responsibility towards their publics, but a changed environment requires different decisions. Frankl also said, “When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.”<sup>3</sup>

So, after letting ourselves process utter shock, sadness, and anger, the challenge Frankl notes above is before us. Creating new practices and daily habits (the hardest part of Intentional Practice) is no small matter, and both require

fortitude and relentless focus. However, our physical and mental well-being is paramount, because without physical and mental health, little else matters. If we take care of ourselves first, then we will be able to take care of our families (as flight attendants say, “Place the mask on your face first and then help others”), and then we will be able to change our professional selves to fit the situation and do good museum work, albeit it might be different museum work. Will museums operate with a new, deeper purpose? Will they think about the needs of humanity differently? After caring for themselves and their families' health and well-being, will they become experts at fueling wellness and positive attitudes? Will they radiate new versions of themselves, and with their community, share and exchange new learnings and practices that strengthen us all? First look inward with your family and ask, what attitude do we want to exude? Which actions will we take?

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Elizabeth Lesser, Executive Director of the Omega Institute, refers includes “thrivor” when discussing Frankl because of the productive life he led in spite of his horrific concentration camp experience. Lesser read from Frankl's book during a Zoom gathering on 4/2/2020.

<sup>2</sup>Frankl, Viktor. *Man's Search for Meaning*. First published in 1946 in German, and it has been republished many times. Its original title, translated into English, was *From Death-Camp to Existentialism*.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

*Randi Korn founded Randi Korn & Associates, Inc. (now RK&A). She is the author of Intentional Practice for Museums: A Guide for Maximizing Impact <https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781538106365/Intentional-Practice-for-Museums-A-Guide-for-Maximizing-Impact> She can be reached at [korn@rka-learnwithus.com](mailto:korn@rka-learnwithus.com).*



# INTROSPECTION: THE NEW IMPERATIVE

By Emlyn Koster

In today's coronavirus-redefined scale of far-reaching setbacks to society, the economic recession in 2009 barely ranks as a crisis. Yet it was the launch point for a look back at the impacts of The Great Depression in 1929 by Schwarzer (2009). She concluded: *When the funds began to flow again, museums quickly forgot the shock of the Depression as well as their moments of innovation on behalf of the public ... An opportunity to be societal role models for the wisest possible use of resources and talent was lost.*

Schwarzer (2009) cites the exception of the Duluth Children's Museum which was founded in 1930 to bring hope to its community. She also recalls how the Carnegie Corporation funded test-site studies into how educational theory could improve programs, how buildings and operating hours could better serve communities, and how museums could develop entrepreneurial revenue streams. She also noted: *Yale professor Edward S. Robinson recommended what he considered to be the most logical step of all: museums should hire "full-time psychologists" to assess visitors' behaviors, opinions and needs around the clock.*

Fast forward, a multifaceted partnership between The Families of September 11 and Liberty Science Center began when the reopening of this museum, located across the Hudson River from the World Trade Center, was guided by trauma psychologists (Gaffney and Koster, 2016). The museum helped with the installation of the nearby assistance center for families of the disaster's almost 700 New Jersey victims and contributed to the development of a school curriculum aimed at building resilience in a world needing to confront terrible events.

The CEO of the UK's Museums Association thinks that London's major museums should develop exhibitions on pressing national issues, such as immigration and Brexit, but anticipates that this will be resisted by conservative elements in the sector (Lowe, 2020). Such a situation echoes the discussion at last fall's ICOM conference when a proposed new mission statement for museums, including that they are spaces for critical dialogue, became controversial and voting was postponed (Haynes, 2019).

With the museum sector having faced repeated calls for a wholehearted orientation to external relevance (Koster, in press), the current pandemic must not result in repeats of what failed to happen after The Great Depression. Appeals for ongoing funding based on their collections, popularity

and economic impact with assumptions of pre-pandemic continuity will surely not suffice. The chasm between nature and culture—between museums of natural history and museums of art and history—must be filled by a new transdisciplinary approach. Today, we know that the Earth's health equals the health of human civilization and the health of natural systems on which it depends (Horton and Lo, 2015). Crist (2020) links the pandemic and climate change with this reminder: *Humans are part of nature, not separate from it, and human activity that hurts the environment also hurts us.* Also regarding the pandemic, Zimmer (2020) draws attention to research that the virosphere—the world of virus diversity with the Earth's biosphere—is a needed new context for collective understanding.

In the post-pandemic world, museums need to deeply activate themselves in new contexts, starting locally. Gijssen (2008) opined: *We need to advocate for an enhanced broader imperative for the museum—one where it is part of a larger ecosystem—imbedded in its local environment ... In such an ecosystem, the museum becomes critical to the long-range health of a place, central to think-tanks, planning initiatives, and community transformations ... It becomes one of those organizations a mayor calls upon when a crisis hits or new long-range plans are being developed.*

In 2009, Schwarzer (2009) reminded us that brightening the world was part of the mantra of the museum sector in the roaring 1920s. A century later, Janes (2009) observed: *[The] majority of museums, as social institutions, have largely eschewed on both moral and practical grounds, a broader commitment to the world in which they operate.* Only through deep, broad and continuous introspection can museums become and remain truly relevant.

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## ENGAGING STAFF THROUGH EMAIL DURING COVID-19 CLOSURE OF SCIENCE CENTRE SINGAPORE

By TM Lim

*Shared here are 2 examples of email engagement with my staff to encourage everyone to make the best of the situation imposed upon us.*

### **(1) Creativity under constraints**

Due to the COVID-19 lockdown or stay home confinement in cities around the world, many creative ideas started to circulate on the social media.

Several choirs or singers while under social distancing or in separate localities creatively put together performances as if they were in a cyber concert. Some artists even converted certain pop songs with COVID-19 related content, such as the version in Frozen by Elsa, instead of 'Let it Go' she sang 'Stay at home!' Another one with a team of guys singing the Bee Gees' 'Staying alive' with a twist to 'Staying inside!'. And in Singapore, too, we have our '10 People, one meter, one Singapore!'

Our creative mind sometimes can be evoked to come out with something out of the ordinary when it is under constraint. The angst or frustration brought about by constraints has been identified as one of the key origins of creativity from interviews of many Nobel Laureates, as published in the book commemorating the 100th Anniversary of the Nobel Prize in 2001.

The sudden surge under the current pandemic situation of ideas, art works, songs, recipes, writings, graphics, animations, innovations and expressions, etc., show us how a creative mind can make the best use of the constraints we live in. Instead of ranting negativity it generates beauty and positivity.

While we are now working under constraints, let us intrigue and surprise one another with how we as creative people of Science Centre Singapore could come out with new things that make our work and life even more meaningful, empowering and endearing than before. Let us collectively co-create a new norm that we as a people who survive COVID-19 can give back to the nation and community that help us sail through the storm.

### **(2) Stay Home, Stay Healthy, Stay Calm and Stay in touch**

In compliance with the Circuit Breaker Measures announced last Friday by our PM and the Multi-Ministerial Taskforce to manage the COVID-19 pandemic situation in Singapore, we will close our operation from 7 April to 4 May 2020.

The invisible virus is creating vast impact locally and globally, with many norms disrupted and many lives affected. We are not even sure if we will re-open by 5 May because the Circuit Breaker Measures may or may not break the

community spread in view of the unknowns surrounding the virus.

While we will be homebound in the coming month, except when out for essential tasks like getting food, needing healthcare services, doing voluntary work, and maybe getting repair needs for household function, let us make the best of the situation by going more into our hearts, our minds, and our souls. We can use our creativity to innovate, our curiosity to learn, our love to care, our sense to observe, our faith to hope, our soul to reflect, our logic to reprioritize, and our conviction to act.

Under such a thought-provoking time in human history, a new norm will emerge, a new economy will evolve, and a new world order will develop. The disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic will cause a paradigm shift. We

will have to prepare to adapt, adopt, adjust and sometimes abort ideas and even certain ways of work/life.

But one fundamental core that makes us human will never change, and that is to love one another as we love ourselves. And I am heartened to see how love is expressed in our SCS fellowship through mutual care and support over this period.

Over this closure and work-from-home period, we shall stay home, stay healthy, stay calm and stay in touch.

*TM Lim is the CEO of Science Centre Singapore. He can be reached at [lim.tit.meng@science.edu.sg](mailto:lim.tit.meng@science.edu.sg).*

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## A NATIONAL AUDIENCE AND COMMUNITY STUDY FOR COVID RESILIENCE

*By Peter Linett*

I'm humbled and excited to share with you what my colleagues and I have been working on days, nights, and weekends for the last three weeks. It's for you, for your cultural organization, and above all for the people and communities you serve.

We're collaborating with our friends at [LaPlaca Cohen](#) and other partners, funders, and advisors to conduct a rapid but nuanced study of cultural audiences and the wider American public to help during and after COVID — essentially an emergency edition of [Culture Track](#), but with new questions built around the idea that relevance and resilience are two-way streets: *What do people and communities need from their cultural organizations, and what can cultural organizations expect from their communities and audiences?*

We believe that means asking people what they're going through, what they need, how they're meeting — or aren't meeting — those needs; how creativity, learning, and digital cultural experiences fit in right now (or don't); what they miss or long for in the lockdowns; and what *kinds* of arts and museum experiences would be most valuable to them when we can start to gather again.

Understandably, many cultural leaders, marketers, and planners are focused on questions about when audiences will be ready to resume attending the opera or visiting a science museum with their families. Other researchers have been [asking those questions](#) or [will be soon](#), and we're planning to explore them, too, in a different way — as part of a holistic look at needs, behaviors, values, and perceptions during the pandemic and beyond.

With generous lead funding from the [Wallace Foundation](#) and additional support from [Art Bridges](#) and [FocusVision](#), we'll be using both qualitative, humanistic methods and a large-scale quantitative survey designed in consultation with both practitioners and research methodologists. We're delighted to be working again with [NORC at the University of Chicago](#) to survey a [representative sample](#) of the U.S. population, including people from marginalized and challenged communities. And we've been honored and a little amazed to have heard already from more than 100 cultural organizations in 20 states that want their audiences included in the study — before we announced the project.

That's a powerful collective beginning. But we need more

representation and range. Most importantly, we want the audience-list side of our sample to include the participants and audiences of small, culturally specific, community embedded, social justice-focused, POC-led, and POC-serving arts and culture organizations. That kind of intentional oversampling (the social science term) will let us shine more light, not just on the past and the strange present of the cultural sector, but also on its most hopeful future: **on what relevance and service and engagement could look like if we can use this crisis, rethink not just restart, and emerge from it different than we went in.**

There's much more to say and ask. We're developing a project website, but for now I'll point you to [this still-evolving FAQ page](#) with information about how you can include your audiences in the survey. **Please share with your local and national networks**; we're in this together.

I'm also eager to hear what *you're* going through and how this research could help your organization or practice. What do you most urgently need to know about your audience or your community in order to make decisions, serve, plan, strategize, experiment, and recover?

<https://sloverlinett.com/news-notes/special-announcement-a-national-audience-community-study-for-covid-resilience/>

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## THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS, OR EVERYTHING YOU KNOW IS WRONG (OR HIGHLY SUSPECT!)

*By Margaret Marino*

It's amazing just how fast what started out as a normal, promising year turned on all of us—and how much the entire world suddenly has in common. It makes your head spin. One day you have an enthusiastic crowd taking selfies of the animatronic dinosaur, and the next day the poor dinosaur is hanging its head in the dark, seemingly as depressed as the rest of us.

We are all joined together in the COVID-19 pandemic, but we are far from equal in terms of its impact on our organizations, our preparedness for its challenges, our financial health, or how essential we are to our communities. It's a massive brain upheaval that has required us to rethink everything we know or thought we knew about our business, what we do, and even how we have guided our personal and professional journeys.

After more than forty years working in many different kinds of museums, I can't remember a time when I have questioned so completely the general wisdom and practice of our field. I admit that I have often joked that I am the Forrest Gump of the Museum field. In other words, it seems I have been in the middle of every major controversy that we have confronted in museum practice—from the

idealism of the sixties, to the Mapplethorpe controversy, the ethics of repatriation, Native American rights, and on and on. But of course I have, and so have all of you.

If I were to choose one word to describe what I have been through the last few weeks, as well everyone around me, the word would be contradiction. We've gone from extolling the virtues of group learning, to encouraging our audiences to explore their own interests by themselves. Our enormous enthusiasm for hands-on, has turned to hands-off (and how long will that last?) And this contradiction is not limited to the field, but to how we are managing our organizations. From generational issues in the use of digital media to our mutual disdain for spending all day every day on-line; (never has the outdoors been so enticing;) from strongly encouraging teamwork and collaboration to guiding the work of sixty individuals—from custodians to Ph.Ds "for their own safety." How will we ever recover our "good" habits after practicing all of these "bad" habits?

I'm reminded of the wisdom imparted to me by a close mentor when I first considered moving into management in museums: be yourself, trust yourself, and be humble in your ability to address every problem, as many are out of



our control. As I sit at my makeshift desk in my bedroom, I realize how fortunate I am to be in the latter days of my career and to know that no matter what decision I make, it could be wrong or very right, it could be smart or—in hindsight—very, very dumb. The only thing we can absolutely be sure of is just how interesting it is going to be to face these things head-on with the determination so many

museum folks have to make it better

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## NEVER WASTE A GOOD CRISIS

*By Jennifer Martin*

We've heard this time and again. At times like this, ever more so. But what does it mean to 'not waste a good crisis'? What does it mean for your science centre or museum?

In general, we know that radical and rapid change demands response. In fact, we as leaders we are sometimes encouraged to spark a 'crisis' if we want to trigger positive change in our organization. **Kotter**<sup>1</sup> would challenge us to start by generating a sense of urgency, forming a coalition of change agents within our team, then developing a new vision or mandate to illustrate the change we want to give life to. Further, his eight-stage change model is a great outline of the followthrough needed not just to initiate positive change, but to embed it into the culture of your organization.

Above all, this approach to change in organizations emerges from what Kotter calls "the big opportunity". So where does this crisis stuff come into play?

In my very first CEO role I was leading the old and the new at once. The original science centre started as a planetarium in 1967, and was well entrenched in the community. The new facility, with new exhibitions and programs was set to open in three years. An interesting juggling act to be sure, but then the bottom fell out of our existing operations. The extension of a light-rapid-transit line was underway, and construction started right on the original science centre property. So close are the train rails to the planetarium building that I swear a little sway in a passing LRT train and they would collide. The messaging of construction of the new science centre became conflated with the LRT construction, and our audience thought we were closed. Attendance tanked and revenues with it. Now what? And, how do I not-waste-a-good-crisis and turn this into an opportunity for positive change?

\* \* \*

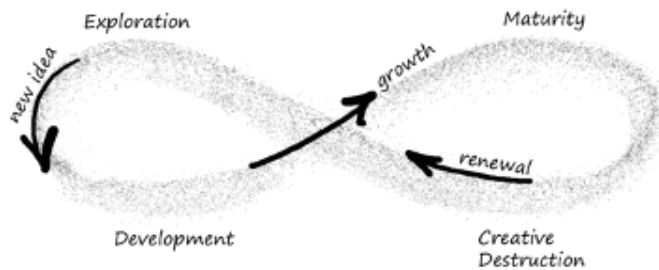
What is your readiness for positive change? In the business world it's fairly easy to distinguish between entrepreneurial startups and mature organizations. We see it as well in the products and services offered. In mature stages, managers are often tasked with breathing new life into their product; think Heinz trying out purple ketchup to spark sales.

But do we think of our science centres and museums in this light? Or even our programs and services? When is it time to wind down an old standard (the electricity demonstration, perhaps) and generate new offerings (adult focused cocktail nights)? Do we actually need a crisis to make this kind of change?

I had the privilege of working with Frances Westley when we were both on the board of a non-profit organization in Toronto. At the time she was leading the **Social Innovation Generation**<sup>2</sup> at the University of Waterloo, and I was the Vice President of Visitor Experience at the Ontario Science Centre. Westley and Brenda Zimmerman wrote a book called **Getting To Maybe**<sup>3</sup> (2006), which also happened to highlight a project I had led at the science centre. Their overall premise is that leaders who harness the forces around them in their community, can have great impact not only on their end goals, but also in positively changing the system in which they exist with others.

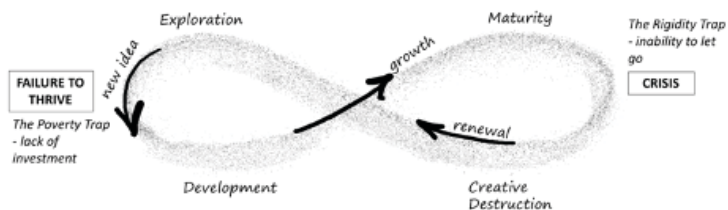
Westley and Zimmerman developed a model for thinking about organizational readiness for change called the **Resilience and Adaptability Cycle**, adapted from the work of ecologist C.S. Holling. This model has resonated globally in several forms, notably in the great resource **Liberating Structures**<sup>4</sup>, there referred to as the Ecocycle. In it, we see

that organizations are in an infinite loop of change, with repeatable stages that shift from one to the next, and in which different leadership skills are needed.



Picture your museum or science centre on this loop. Are you at a stable state, leading small changes (maturity), or are you actively working on new ideas as a means of revitalizing your organization (exploration)? Times of renewal on a grand scale mean that old programs and properties are being shut-down and replaced (creative destruction). Perhaps you've been part of one of these dynamic periods in the past. This can be a useful way to picture your museum, knowing that nothing ever stays still for long. Even success eventually falters.

Westley and Zimmerman go on to then expand our thinking by putting trigger events into this model. Maturity falters, often due to a crisis brought about by lack of attention or preparedness for change. This can happen because a change in the community suddenly reduces the museum's relevance, for example a new aquarium opens and the museum leadership did little to anticipate the impact a new visitor experience might have. Right now Covid-19 is an unprecedented period of crisis; one that is shaking the virtual foundations of all our organizations, communities and world-wide systems. You may have already developed a Risk Register (preparedness plan) that included pandemics, but I doubt any of us anticipated this level of change.

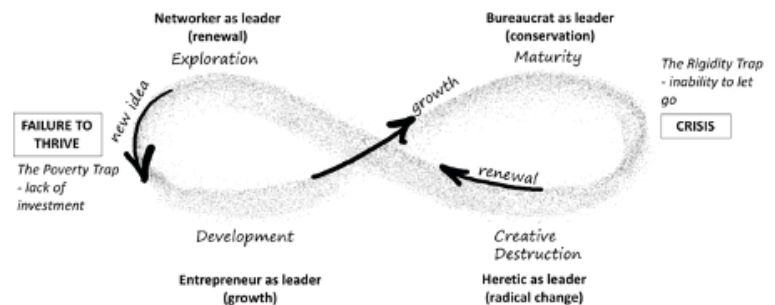


So what happens when things change rapidly, and how do we lead? As noted here there are some significant dangers/traps, especially during the more radical curves in this flow. During a crisis it is tempting to hang on too long to things that worked in the past. The authors call this the Rigidity Trap. By delaying the inevitable we lose time, momentum, and possibly opportunities. As frightening as this can be, throwing your hands up on the roller-coaster-of-change and preparing for the 'creative destruction' phase

is the most important thing a leader can do. Renewal will come sooner if we are leaning into this momentum, not trying to fight it.

Equally, there can be challenges on the 'positive' phase of this cycle. From creative destruction to exploration will emerge new ideas and opportunities. However, if we don't invest in these sometimes fragile ideas, in both time and financial resources they will suffer. Yes funding may be a serious challenge, but the Poverty Trap will certainly lead to failure of the new, if your brightest minds aren't free to work on these ideas and ready your organization for the development phase.

Being a leader in these different phases can bring out the best (and sometimes the worst) of us. There are certain leadership strengths that flourish and others that will be counter to the needs of the organization, particularly when the dynamics of change are at their highest.



A maturing museum needs to focus on the organizational systems that support stability and, which may have been disrupted or non-existent in the previous stages. Here I'm thinking of fundamental budget reporting, Human Resources policies and practices, and other standard operating procedures. Bureaucracy has important contributions to the safe and functional operations of any organization. An entrepreneurial leader will likely be frustrated by this work, and may not even see the value in it.

Equally, a bureaucratic leader may too long resist the need to let go of controls and embrace the rapid change that leads to the creative destruction phase. To enable change on this level, one needs to seriously challenge the norms and best practices of our sector; to be the heretic, and topple many or all of the 'sacred cows' of the museum.

As exploration of the new horizons and renewal of vision and even possibly mission of the organization are underway, a leader who is out in the community listening the needs of audiences, partners, governments and funding stakeholders, is essential; the Networker. A vision can only be developed by learning of the needs locally and

more broadly in society, and developing opportunities to lead based on the unique skills and attributes of the museum. Let that vision loose on your team, and watch the ideas flourish. And recognize that once in motion, and invested in, these ideas will need a growth-mindset leader to ensure they take root; the Entrepreneur.

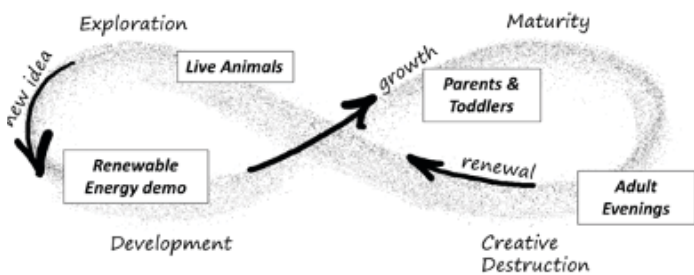
This is rightly a lot to ask of any one individual CEO or Executive Director.

I think there are at least two ways to reflect on this challenge. Smaller scale changes to a museum can be led by one person, if they understand that their preferred leadership style will not be a good fit at times. This presents a great opportunity to develop bench-strength in your leadership team; deputize someone to take on a part of this cycle and be their sponsor/champion. You don't have to (or perhaps should you) do it all. Along this path, you may just develop your successor!

Which leads me to the other way of viewing the leadership role within the context of this model: when is it time to leave an organization you love? It can be incredibly stressful and disheartening to try and push through a cycle of change, when your ability to lead is diminished (and with it likely your passion for the role). Where do you see yourself in this cycle of change for your organization? A sobering question to be sure.

\* \* \*

I've focused on the entire museum for the most part, but the resilience and adaptability cycle/ecocycle can be applied very effectively to other levels of work in the organization. Imagine placing the major programs and services of your museum or science centre along these curves. Where would each fit, and importantly, are there some ready to be let go? Is the Adult Evening program getting stale, attendance dropping, and/or another cultural institution stealing your position in the community? Perhaps it's time to be the heretic leader and recommend taking the adult audience segment through this cycle to re-energize your team and a once-popular program.



\* \* \*

So back to my crisis moment, and pending premature closure of the original science centre. How did I handle the construction 'collision'? After some admittedly sleepless nights I chose to adapt to the crisis, and "creatively destroyed" the existing operations by emptying out all of the exhibits to make way for a temporary exhibition, *Body Worlds*. Given the size of the old facility, there simply wasn't room to do anything else. We were scheduled to leave the original building in two years, so this change was inevitable, just not this soon. It certainly was a shock to the system, but also foretold what the new facility would be like.

We followed *Body Worlds* with two smaller travelling exhibitions, then closed the original building with *Titanic: the Exhibition*. It was radical change to be sure, but allowed us to keep staff employed, test the market for future feature exhibitions, and ensured we stayed in the public eye while the new facility construction progressed. We successfully defeated the perception that we were closed due to construction.

I could have closed the old facility and focused solely on the development of the new. It would have been less stressful, and we made our share of mistakes in this transition. But I would do it again, given the opportunity, because I'm convinced that the exploration of new opportunities was hugely beneficial to how we transitioned from a stalwart organization of the past, to meet the new and changing needs of our community.

**FOOTNOTES**

- <sup>1</sup>John Kotter, <https://www.kotterinc.com/8-steps-process-for-leading-change/>
- <sup>2</sup><https://uwaterloo.ca/waterloo-institute-for-social-innovation-and-resilience/about>
- <sup>3</sup>Westley and Zimmerman, *Getting to Maybe* (2006), publisher
- <sup>4</sup><http://www.liberatingstructures.com/31-ecocycle-planning/>

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# PIVOTING FOR THE SHORT AND LONG TERM: MAKING MUSEUMS ACCESSIBLE DURING COVID-19 AND BEYOND

By Shawn McCoy

As a company specializing in museum and exhibit design, COVID-19 is forcing our creative team to begin thinking about the ways in which the virus will affect how visitors move through spaces, interact with environments, and engage with one another. This new reality will force museums to look at their facilities, exhibits and operations both in the short-term (when museums can open back up to the public prior to the introduction of a vaccine) and the long-term (when a vaccine is widely available).

In conversations with our existing museum clients, we are already looking for new ways to reimagine current, and sometimes underutilized, spaces (i.e. outdoor areas) to allow guests the opportunity to experience the museum while still abiding by new social distancing norms. We are also looking at timed ticketing to limit the number of guests within a space, allowing them to enjoy the exhibits in a less congested manner.

Obviously, different museum types create different challenges and opportunities. Science centers and children's museums represent bigger challenges due to the hands-on nature of their experiences, while it may be somewhat easier for more passive museums, such as traditional history museums and art museums, to adapt to changing visitor requirements and perceptions.

A number of museums are leveraging their digital assets and 360° photography to provide virtual tours of their galleries and collections, while some institutions are re-purposing their in-museum Augmented Reality apps to allow guests to learn more about their collections while the guest remains at home. Some museums have even developed mobile games to make their virtual content more

enticing for younger viewers.

For the short term, educational programming may take on a more important role in informal education, given that this medium allows more control over the audience and their distance from one another, while eliminating hands-on activity.

Finally, as we look to create new solutions for both the short and long term, we must remember that museums not only fill an informal educational need but also fill an important social need within our society. Therefore, we must keep in mind that any new approach should provide the opportunity for our guests to learn with and amongst one another.

## VIRTUAL MUSEUMS

<https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/covid-19-pushes-museums-to-embrace-the-virtual-world>

## AUGMENTED REALITY

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jenniferhicks/2020/03/20/these-galleries-arts-organizations-and-museums-are-keeping-art-accessible-during-covid-19/#55784a911d1c>

## BEST APPS FOR VISITING MUSEUMS

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/best-apps-for-visiting-museums-1438358127>

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## MUSEUM AUDIENCES, WITH CLOSED MUSEUMS?<sup>1</sup>

By Leticia Pérez Castellanos

A few days ago I was reading and writing about the so-called “non-audiences” of museums. It turns out that they constitute a good percentage of the population in most

countries<sup>2</sup>. I began to reflect on it in a Twitter thread ([see here](#)) and I was planning to write an entry on my blog (<https://eldivanmuseologico.wordpress.com/>).

Suddenly, the scenery changed. The outbreak of the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) and the measures imposed by various governments, museums, among other public establishments, have closed their doors. This unprecedented scenario has put the sector in check around the world, as we are seeing and as documented in various articles<sup>3</sup>.

I found that for several days I did not know what to say, where to direct my attention. I timidly dedicated myself to sharing the digital books that I have coordinated from the series “Estudios sobre públicos y museos” under the ENCRyM publishing label ([More about this series](#)). A bewilderment came over me, what to talk about when the museums are closed, and they no longer receive visitors on site? Now, after some days of silence, of readings and opinions of colleagues who have inspired me, I can assemble some reflections.

Although I am a researcher, I have long been uncomfortable with the term “audience research,” because it implies a one-way interaction – “us” studying “them.” As I created my digital series, I was interested in a broader perspective, in the analysis of the relationships between audiences and museums ([museum alike spaces](#)). I wanted to explore relations of all kinds and in all senses, that are not exclusive to the physical place in the facilities of the institution. There are many approaches that go beyond the stereotype of a person with a clipboard (or tablet) raising a questionnaire IN a museum: historical, ethnographic approaches, analysis outside the museum, public perception, and so on.

In addition, it is clear that for several years, museum audiences have not been synonymous with, or limited to, being on-site visitors. The internet enabled one of the greatest forms of connection outside the walls. Today, online visitors to museum websites and those who follow museums on social networks also count. So now, in this in these days of emergency, have online visits to museums and followers increased or decreased? Have interactions changed? Longer, less time? Do users demand a specific type of service?

I don't know if these analyzes are already being carried out. It is clear is that while we regroup as a community, try to make sense of what is going on, and look for alternatives to this confusion, virtually all museums have turned urgently to digital strategies. Whether they are redoubling existing efforts or putting them together as fast as they can, this is the way all are attempting to stay current, visible and relevant<sup>4</sup>.

So how will my area of specialization -visitor studies- contribute? How can we move beyond metrics of number of unique visits, and stay times on websites and followers

on social media? I think we have to draw on everything we already know from the on-site visit ([around a hundred years of research](#)), from the little that is known about the so-called “non-visitors”, and of everything that is known or can be known about audiences (users?) in cyberspace. As has been said on countless occasions, if museums want to survive in today's world (this was said before COVID-19), their personnel and associated interest groups must be able to demonstrate their relevance: who will be responsible for contributing the evidence?, share experiences and challenges?, document results?

Mexican researcher Ana Rosas Mantecón tells us that being public is a role that is learned, adopted and carried out under certain conditions and circumstances, which is favored or not by the actions of a group of agents<sup>5</sup>. In the current scenario, what is our role to encourage more people to adopt this role? To provide the benefits of visiting museums? as we have argued. Yes, audiences are there even with our spaces closed for on-site visits.

*I dedicate this little note to a beloved colleague who suffers from this disease and who has faced it with courage (and is already better), and to other colleagues separated from their life partners (for various reasons they were on different continents when all this began), and to all my colleagues and dear friends who are going through difficult times on a personal and professional level. A solidarity hug.*

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Entry originally published at <https://eldivanmuseologico.wordpress.com/> on March 24th

<sup>2</sup>The last [National Survey of Cultural Habits, Practices and Consumptions](#) applied in Mexico (2010) found that 48% of the population had never visited a museum in their life, while 68% of the population in Spain declared not having visited a museum in the year before a study carried out by [the Permanent Laboratory for Museum Publics](#) (2012).

<sup>3</sup>Coronavirus: how will it affect museums and what can be done to mitigate the impact? o Art “hijacked” by a virus to name just a couple of examples.

<sup>4</sup>NodoCultura has shared several of these strategies on their Twitter or Facebook networks such as [#Museum-Bouquet](#) or [how to be an empathetic museum in difficult times](#). Alfonso Miranda (@A\_Mirandam) director of the Soumaya Museum in Mexico suggested that we share the art that is on the walls of our house, since we cannot go to the museum. And mexican Vania Ramírez (@lacajaderratas) compiled a thread “to tell you about some digital projects that you can enjoy from home” #MuseumsfromHome.

I am sure there are many more.

<sup>5</sup>Rosas Mantecón, A. (2017). Públicos: Historia y contemporaneidad. En L. Pérez Castellanos (Ed.), *Apuntes para pasar de la teoría a la práctica*: Vol. II (pp. 22-39). Publicaciones Digitales ENCRyM/INAH.

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## WHAT IS ESSENTIAL?

*By Stephanie Ratcliffe*

I knew in the early days of the pandemic that the definition of the word essential would become important. The first part of this thinking is easy—making sure the building is secure, maintained and monitored. Essential is also ensuring the live animals in our collection are properly cared for in the moral contract we put in place from the moment they entered our building. I have been pondering what is essential in terms of what helps us in this moment and new ideas that will pull us into the future.

If you are an innovative organization, there is always a set of rolling and shifting priorities. Some programs and activities are, at first glance, essential because they are beloved or deemed core to who you are. Another set, probably the largest, is a set of activities that provide stability in some way, earn funds or are expected by those you serve. Then, there is a messy set of activities on the front edge of your collective thinking. These ideas are half-formed, scruffy and unsettling in the most wonderful of ways. Staff that work on these edgier initiatives work tirelessly allowing them to take shape and unfold. These projects are unsettling to some because they foretell change. Change is hard, not because the end-result of the work is not desired, but because our every move in the process of change has to become intentional, thoughtful and strategic. So which of these activities will be deemed essential in a time of great financial stress? Which activities are we uniquely positioned to offer in service to the public? Is there something promising on the front edge of our experimental work, a wacky random idea that deserves staff and resources so it can blossom into a new dimension of our work. Just because we are in time of creative uncertainty we should not pull back on those creative impulses. These are the questions leaders contemplate as spreadsheets multiply so financial scenarios can be presented to boards:

“Save . . . as scenario one”, “save . . . as scenario two”, “save . . . as scenario three.”

In this time of crisis, what is essential from a leader? If the leader has done their job preceding the crisis then the organization can move forward without them because there is a solid and functioning scaffold in place. Leaders do not have all the answers in a crisis. If the right people are on the bus, and a fully-formed creative culture cultivated, then it propagates ideas and solutions easily and organically in the face of a challenge.

Working in a museum is a privilege in a wealthy privileged society. We are in the business of changing lives not saving lives. Exploring the meaning of essential in our work cannot compare to the work of those on the front lines of healthcare and public safety. They are the truly essential ones in this moment. We will become important again after this pause and I hope this shake up will force us, as a field, to take a hard look at what centers us as individuals and as organizations built on the premise of serving others. The revealing contours a crisis brings and is the chance to re-start with more clarity and deeper purpose.

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# SEIZING THE MOMENT

By Scott D. Sampson

In recent weeks, with humanity upended by a novel coronavirus ripped from the wilds of China, more science has made its way into the media than during the past several years. Daily we watch biological experiments play out in real time, contrasting communities that follow scientific guidelines—for example, around testing and sheltering in place—with those that don't. Now, I can easily imagine this spike in science coverage (and, dare I say, respect) disappearing in a few months, once the perceived threat has diminished. Yet, virtually all crises present opportunities, and science centers and museums seem poised to take advantage of this moment.

But what should we do?

Viral pandemics share at least one critical characteristic with global warming and species extinction: a common cause. In all these cases, the culprit, at least in an ultimate sense, is a broken relationship between humans and nature rooted in an outdated worldview. Perceiving ourselves as outside and above the web of life, we view nature as resources to be exploited rather than relatives worthy of our respect. From this vantage point on high, animals, plants, and ecosystems have little to no intrinsic value beyond the human services they provide.

Today it seems clear that we've finally reached a fork in the road. Down one path, the one we're now on, is a human-dominated future, with a largely homogenous planet depauperate in wild species and overrun with domesticated plants and animals. (To give one staggering example, at present the global count of chickens is a 20 billion, with a global biomass about three times that of wild birds.) As we accelerate headlong down this course, embracing the Fourth Industrial Revolution in its full glory, technologies will increasingly be needed to buffer humans against the heat, droughts, fires, storms, viruses, rising seas, and other natural phenomena raging out of control. Whether or not you regard this path as sustainable, surely few of us would characterize it as "thriving."

Down the other path, the one we still struggle to comprehend, humans view themselves as inextricably embedded within the natural world. Here we find a world that is both high tech and nature rich. Ecosystems, together with their resident plants and animals, are seen as having intrinsic value aside from any "ecosystem services" they provide. Rather than seeking ever greater dominion over life on

Earth, people now partner with nature to catalyze resilient ecosystems that grow healthier generation over generation. Along this route, in close collaboration with indigenous and other local human communities, we restore about half the planet to a state of wildness, stem the tide of extinctions, and seek to welcome a cascade of rewilding all the way into our urban centers. Sound a little more appealing?

So what does all this have to do with science centers and science museums?

Well, what if, instead of pursuing broad-based literacy in STEM or STEAM, we channeled that all that learning into more place-based and nature-based experiences? What if we focused less on a science of parts and emphasized instead a science of wholes, with systems thinking being an essential skill? What if we empowered children and youth, especially those from under-resourced communities, to address pressing issues in their schools, neighborhoods, cities, and regions? What if we hosted dialogues on the pressing issues of our time, co-creating with our communities visions for flourishing futures? And what if, along with boosting understanding, we sought to help people fall in love with nature and act on its behalf?

I recognize that some of our organizations already engage in some of these efforts, and that one can even find a few exemplars. But this work, arguably the Great Work of our time, is still all too rare. And it is certainly not coordinated in any meaningful way.

It is exactly at moments of disruption and turmoil, moments like this, that tipping points can be reaching, sending societies careening down previously unthinkable pathways. I, for one, would be thrilled to see science centers and museums work together with aquariums, planetariums, zoos, and botanical gardens to help humanity set a course toward a thriving future for all nature, us included.

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# DRINKING ABOUT MUSEUMS: AROUND THE WORLD IN ONE DAY

By Koven Smith

Drinking About Museums, an in-person informal gathering of museum professionals, was co-founded by Kate Livingston and myself in Denver, Colorado and Ed Rodley in Boston in 2011. In the years since, Drinking About Museums groups have formed and evolved, ebbed and flowed in cities around the world. All that has ever been required is for one person to set the meeting time and place, and then get the word out.

From the beginning, Drinking About Museums meetups invited people to come together and talk about their work, irrespective of discipline--art museum directors would co-mingle with emerging museum professionals who were fresh out of school; preparators would talk with scientists, development officers would toast with educators. Some of the gatherings were structured, some were aggressively ramshackle. Some were gossipy, others were anything but gossipy. Drinking About Museums has always been just a vehicle, with each event shaped by those who show up, with the conversations adapting - by definition - to the needs of the local community around it.

It makes sense, then, that museum professionals would figure out a way to adapt Drinking About Museums to our rapidly evolving sense of what "community" is now and is becoming. The first people to do this were Adrienne Lalli Hills (Oklahoma Contemporary), Andrea Montiel de Shuman (Detroit Institute of Arts), and Andrea Ledesma (The Field Museum), who held the first fully-virtual Drinking About Museums meetup on March 14, 2020. The success of this first event – only a day or two after museums across the U.S. started closing – that even a Zoom-ified Drinking About Museums could still bring museum people together to talk about the state of their work and their lives.

The success of that meetup proved that it could be done, so it was a short leap to revive an idea I'd had years ago - to create an all-day, worldwide virtual Drinking About Museums that would start in New Zealand and gradually move West across time zones, finally wrapping up on the West Coast of North America. Ed Rodley, David Nunez, Ryan Dodge, all volunteered to see if we could figure out how to make this happen. We put out a call for hosts worldwide, hacked together a website in about 48 hours, and readied our Zoom rooms and our hashtags.

On March 30, 2020, hundreds of museum professionals from around the world joined a rolling series of happy hours around the globe with their colleagues (see <https://www.drinkingaboutmuseums.com/event/>). Drinking About Museums virtual meetups started in Eastern Australia and continued throughout the day, with happy hours beginning at 5pm local time in Singapore, Dubai, Moscow, Brussels, Brussels, London, Rio de Janeiro, Washington, DC, and many, many more. As the event moved West, they began to overlap, meaning that one could move from a happy hour in one continent to a happy hour in another continent only moments later.

And in every meetup I attended that day (I started in Moscow at 9am Austin Standard Time and ended my evening in San Francisco), I heard museum people making new connections, museum people worried about losing their jobs, museum people wondering about the future of their sector. In short, I heard what I always hear at Drinking About Museums meetups: museum people creating a shared sense of community and mutual support. The difference now is not that the community is virtual, but that it is global.

We have plans for more global Drinking About Museums events, and everyone is invited. In the meantime, at least one local group is active. Adrienne Lali Hills, Andrea Ledesma, and Andrea Montiel de Shuman are hosting a weekly Drinking About Museums meetup at 7:30pm Central Time. See <https://drinkingaboutmuseums.com> for updates and further information, or to get involved.

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# CORONAVIRUS AND CONNECTION TO EACH OTHER

By George Sparks

The novel coronavirus is proving to be a catalyst for rapid behavior change in many respects. I want to acknowledge the extreme challenges this global pandemic is placing on people personally, as well as on cultural organizations and businesses. For this moment though, I'd like to focus on the positives we're seeing at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science among colleagues and within the communities we serve. While the long term impact is only beginning to come into view, I've been humbled to witness incredible examples of empathy, ingenuity, generosity, creativity, and sheer grit in these first weeks.

For several years, the Denver Museum of Nature & Science has been working toward our strategic objective to connect with new and diverse people around nature and science in ways that are meaningful to them. We've broadened our perspective to emphasize the value of Museum experiences that occur away from our physical building, where people already live, work, play, and learn. This broader scope set a strong foundation for us to continue serving our communities as we navigate this new world of social distancing and staying at home.

The novel coronavirus pandemic has given rise to new opportunities. A single theme keeps rising to the top for us: connection to each other.

Seeing the need to continue to connect but in different ways, we quickly established an interdisciplinary, cross-museum virtual programming team that creates and shares content with our many audiences, continuing strong connections even when the circumstances prevent us from sharing physical space. For instance, we converted field trips into virtual experiences such as interactive sessions with scientists, teacher webinars, and easy to follow videos for experiments at home. The response from teacher, students and parents has been strong with thousands of

participants in the first month since our building closed.

In addition to providing content, we're using our platforms to allow people a moment to just connect on a human level. It's OK and often welcome that we're not always all about business. People are hungry for this connection.

A young scientist created his own butterfly exhibit since he couldn't visit ours in person and shared it on Facebook, creating a connection point to us and back to a place he loves while also creating connections among the many who saw and reacted to his post. And our Museum team banded together to collect the Museum's personal protection equipment to donate to a local health care provider, which also created meaningful connections through the process of coordinating the donation and again when word spread of the project.

Two of our four values are: We love science, and We are curious, creative, and playful. We're leaning into these during this time to stay in touch with our community and are finding the joy of connection in new ways. I'll leave you with [another example](#) of our talented educator performers creating connections, frame by frame.

## Resources

"COVID-19 Updates." Know Your Own Bone. <https://www.colleendilen.com/category/covid-19-updates/>.

Trendwatching. <https://trendwatching.com/>.

American Enterprise Institute. <https://www.aei.org/>.

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# CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS: MUSEUM DIGITAL COVID-19 RESEARCH STUDY

*By Marty Spellerberg*

We are living through history. Around the world, the COVID-19 pandemic is reshaping society. When Americans began practicing “social distancing” and following orders to shelter-in-place, museums and cultural organizations moved quickly to cease public visitation. But even as our institutions closed their physical doors, we have opened digital windows. We have adopted online tools to continue delivering on our missions, serving our communities, and engaging our audiences.

To document the beginning of this new chapter, professionals from across the sector are collaborating on a cross-institutional study. The working title of this research is “Effects of COVID-19 on the social and digital media of American Museums.” The objectives are to create a record of this moment to inform planning for future emergencies, and document emerging practices.

We are building our dataset using both quantitative and qualitative methods. In our analysis, we will look for overall trends and then dive deeper into subsets of the cohort.

This project follows a previous cross-institutional study on the motivations of museum website visitors. See: <http://spellerberg.org/vms-study/>

We seek cultural institutions of all sizes, with collaborators of varied job titles across digital, social, education, curatorial, and marketing. While our focus is primarily on US-based organizations, international organizations are welcome to contribute.

Please join us. Express your interest in this research via the sign-up form: <https://bit.ly/museums-covid>

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## BUT WHAT ARE THEY LEARNING: CONFESSIONS OF TWO FORMER STEM DIRECTORS

*By Charlie Trautmann, PhD, and Nancy Trautmann, PhD*

“I like your goldfinch earrings!” commented our 4-yr-old granddaughter on arriving at our house one morning. Throughout the day she changed the species to cardinal, robin, and then loon; each time giggling because she knew full well that the birds on the earrings were great blue herons. She and her 7-yr-old sister love to tease us with obvious misidentification of birds they see at our feeders or when we’re out on walks, creating a game out of their bird ID expertise. Why is this important? It shows their joy in having learned something that they know is of interest to us.

A month ago, neither of us expected to become responsible for the daytime care of our two young granddaughters

while schools were closed and their parents were working from home during the 2020 COVID-19 crisis. As previous directors of STEM-related education teams, we naturally weave science topics into our interactions with the kids. More extensive time with them during the coronavirus period has shown us the power of free-choice learning, especially when based on their intrinsic curiosity, imagination, and desire to explore.

On a typical day, the girls arrive at our house with a self-crafted agenda, such as playing “hospital” or organizing birthday parties for stuffed animals and dolls. Even if we had more focused learning activities in mind, we give them freedom and space to carry out their own activities,

because, as Einstein often said, “Imagination is more important than knowledge.”

Through undirected play, children build the capacity and, equally important—the confidence—to imagine.

Interspersed with imaginative play, we offer a variety of opportunities to learn, without knowing which will stick. Once, we dug out a placemat showing the periodic table. On a whim, we played and sang Tom Lehrer’s song “The Elements,” in which the entire periodic table is set to the music of a famous, catchy Gilbert and Sullivan show tune. Both girls got hooked and decided to learn the elements, so that they could sing along. Soon they began teasing us about the element named “geranium,” delighting in the knowledge that we would object to including a flower, rather than the element germanium.

As we engage in activities together, often we don’t know the answers to questions they pose. So we seek answers together, demonstrating that it’s OK not to know everything, and that it’s fun to learn something new.

How does all this relate to informal STEM organizations?

The parents and grandparents of the children we serve form a vast, mostly untapped audience with whom we could much more effectively connect. With encouragement and support, these family members could become valuable partners in engaging children in STEM. This would

require that we shift from seeing parents as revenue sources and instead regard them as partners in promoting learning. A key challenge is to help adults get excited about not knowing the answers to children’s questions, because not knowing provides opportunities to explore and learn together, modeling for children the process and excitement of discovery. Our goal should be to empower adults as discovery coaches, helping them gain the confidence to facilitate children’s exploration of interesting topics.

As we emerge from the current COVID-19 crisis, we, in the informal learning community, have the opportunity to reboot our educational priorities and methods. What needs to be done?

We hope that informal STEM organizations will consider inviting parents and other caregivers into their sphere in a new and empowering way; for example, by providing learn-at-home resources for caregivers (e.g., <http://www.sciencenter.org/resources-for-home>). Exhibits and programs can include talking points that encourage exploration and discovery on an everyday basis. Imagine the rewards, for children and caregivers alike!

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## LEADING WITH EMPATHY

*By Barry A. Van Deman*

Sometimes it takes a pandemic to grab you and shake you into realizing what it means to be human. As a leader, you must do what you must do for the success of the organization you lead. In a crisis like the coronavirus, you are faced with decisions that test your judgment, call upon your past and all that it taught you, and hold you up as either a strong or weak leader in the eyes of others.

With cash and liquidity rising to the top of our COVID-19 concerns in organizations, we take actions that cause emotional and financial stress upon the people under our charge. We are not heartless. We do not arrive at our decisions lightly. Nevertheless, we carry guilt or even regret. We weren’t the ones to go—the ones out of work and left to figure out what to do next.

In the early weeks of the pandemic, leaders have made painful decisions to lay off staff, reduce work schedules and thus, their pay, and take other actions that impact people’s lives in harsh ways. While necessary, our decisions hurt. They hurt the people who have served our organizations so well, whose dedication to mission has served the community so well.

These decisions are more difficult for some of us than others. Not everyone has the ability to put oneself in someone else’s shoes or show true compassion. “Compassion is the finest and noblest result of empathy,” writes Piero Ferrucci in *The Power of Kindness*. “Empathy,” he explains, “is an ingredient of the emotional intelligence necessary for acting competently and efficiently in today’s world.”

In times of crisis, especially during times of crisis, we need empathy. According to Piero, "It is exactly when things are going badly that empathy is beneficial...The best way to face pain is directly...To enter into it, as into a tunnel, then to come out the other side."

The pandemic is our tunnel. We don't know how long it is or when we will emerge on the other side. We are suffering now, and in our distress, we too want someone to understand us, to empathize with us. We will come through this, likely making mistakes along the way, but hopefully as stronger leaders with a greater capacity for empathy.

#### RECOMMENDED READING

Ferrucci, Piero. *The Power of Kindness*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin. 2006.

Mayeroff, Milton. *On Caring*. New York: HarperPerennial. 1990.

#### LINKS

You Might Have to Lay Off Employees But You Don't Have to Do It Like a Jerk

<https://www.inc.com/jessica-stillman/how-to-lay-off-employees-with-empathy-decency-during-a-pandemic.html>

7 Inspiring Traits of Compassionate Leadership

<https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/310391>

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## THE PASSWORD IS CASH

By Barry A. Van Deman

I rebooted this morning. My laptop, that is. "Shut down" to "Restart" was easy, but when challenged with "Username and Password," my memory failed in the moment. The stress was getting to me.

Museums are now *shut down* and waiting to *restart*. They all have their own purpose, personality, and business model. But in the midst of the pandemic, they all share one password: CASH.

Museums are bleeding cash. Revenues have all but dried up. We as leaders are using the tools at hand and lifelines to stretch cash during the crisis, hoping to re-open sooner than later. Our greatest fear is running out of cash before it is safe to open our doors again.

For sure, we need cash to bridge the gap to opening. More importantly, we need cash for the foreseeable future. Getting from now to re-opening is one thing. Sustaining through the next two to three years is quite another. Our thinking and our planning must include both short-term solutions and long-term strategies.

Like many people, I have adopted the "new normal" into my vocabulary, but when we open the museum doors again, life will be far from normal. Our normal, as it existed pre-pandemic, just a few months ago, will not be our nor-

mal post-pandemic. The likely steep recession to follow the pandemic will shape our new normal. The virus and our stay at home orders have likely changed behaviors in ways that will impact how people experience museums. And while no one knows for sure, COVID-19 could hang around for a long time or raise its head again, influencing visitor behaviors or closing museums repeatedly.

Now, right now, we need to adopt a new strategy for shaping our organization's future: one that is smart, hopeful, tough, and without regrets. Clarifying strategy, strengthening the core, protecting and growing customer loyalty, streamlining expenses, tightly managing cashflows and liquidity, and being prepared to make bold moves are the actions we need to take today to ensure survival tomorrow. No cash, No mission.

Time to reboot.

#### RECOMMENDED READING

Covey, Stephen R. and Whitman, Bob. *Predictable Results in Unpredictable Times*. Salt Lake City: FranklinCovey Publishing. 2009.

Rigby, Darrell. *Winning in Turbulence*. Boston: Harvard Business Press. 2009.

Yamashita, Keith and Spataro, Sandra. *Unstuck*. New York: Penguin Group. 2004.

## LINKS

Koehn, Nancy. Real Leaders Are Forged in Crisis. Harvard Business Review April 30, 2020

<https://hbr.org/2020/04/real-leaders-are-forged-in-crisis?ab=hero-subleft-2>

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# REFLECT, RECONNECT, RECHARGE

*By Jeanne Vergeront*

It's no overstatement to describe these as extraordinary times. Ways in which this global novel virus is changing our world are noted elsewhere here.

What we do *now* in this critical moment counts in more ways than we can possibly know. While we are all in very different situations at work, at home, in our towns and cities, we are all likely thinking about the world we live in, now and the future. Mixed in with our sense of upheaval and loss, we're each dealing with our own jumble of questions about how to navigate this territory and prepare for a brighter future. In trying to find order and comfort, I return to three time-tested processes useful across settings and situations for solving problems or finding new possibilities.

## REFLECT

For many of us, pockets of time have opened up, providing opportunities to sit back, reflect, and make sense of what's happening and what matters. A deliberate, active process, reflection assesses and interprets experiences and events through thinking, writing, drawing, reading, or a combination. Reflection can bring awareness of something critical we need to know, where we can contribute, or a path forward.

From personal to professional, topics for reflection are not lacking: dialogues on ASTC CoP (making and tinkering post COVID-19), "wellbeing" for us and our museums in the context of COVID-19; or where we can make a difference when our museum reopens.

## RECONNECT

Under normal circumstances, being in touch with family, friends, and colleagues nourishes by learning from them, feeling appreciated, being inspired. Now this is even more important. Safe options for connecting are fortunately

plentiful: text, phone, email, Zoom, even postcards. Check in on colleagues you enjoy and care about. How are they doing? What is inspiring them? This is a time to spread and receive humor and hope.

Reconnecting with what you love about museums can also be powerful. Return to museum books or articles resting on the shelf. (See Hawkins below.) Take a walk in your neighborhood looking for signs of learning in place. Some of my young neighbors have paced out and illustrated the solar system in chalk on the sidewalk stretching across three blocks.

## RECHARGE

Our communities will need us to return recharged and ready-to-go when our museums re-launch. While we don't know when this will be or under what conditions, we can assume that expanded, refreshed, and nimble perspectives will be indispensable. In preparation, let's listen to informed perspectives, bold thinkers, and wise voices. Let's challenge ourselves to try something new that can help when our museums take risks, make tough choices, reimagine their work, and, in some cases reinvent themselves. Listen to webinars on new topics; work on new skills; look deeply at your museum's strengths and capacities; read TrendsWatch 2020. Take care of yourself, nurture a playful disposition, and take time to play.



## RESOURCES

- The Informed Vision: Essays on Learning and Human Nature by David Hawkins
- Know Your Own Bone: <https://www.colleendilen.com/2020/04/06/data-by-region-how-covid-19-is-impacting-intentions-to-visit-cultural-entities-april-6-2020/>
- Paul Orselli's Museum FAQ: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-H217IFtmg>

[watch?v=-H217IFtmg](https://www.aam-us.org/programs/)

- TrendsWatch 2020: <https://www.aam-us.org/programs/>

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# COVID-19 SLAPS THE MUSEUM FIELD IN THE FACE — TIME TO WAKE UP

*By Charlie Walter and Rebecca Nall*

As of April 7, 2020, most museums in the U.S. are in their third or fourth week of closure due to the Covid-19 outbreak. In talking with museum leaders across the field, I have heard a variety of reactions to these closures. Some directors felt the immediate need to lay off staff. Some dug into endowments to keep their teams together. At least one museum closed its doors for good. Some have already processed their PPP loans and have another two and a half months of revenue to support their staff. The best situations I have heard of are those museums that have a rainy-day fund to dip into or those that are part of a state, city or university system with the ability to continue paying their staff during this crisis.

Our reality is that we are living in a more volatile world than the one I was living in when I started in the field over 30 years ago. Whether it be another pandemic, recession, or a terrorist related incident, another crushing time will be upon us sometime in the future. We need to make the choice now to be better prepared for next time. Every museum director in the country should now be strategizing how to bank 3-6 months of payroll, benefits and critical expense items needed to keep their collections and institutions safeguarded.

Some of us may be fortunate enough to have a foundation or an active board step up and support this effort. Given the trauma Covid-19 has reeked upon our communities, now may be the best time to make these requests. For others of us, it may come down to cancelling a program or service to assure a net surplus of revenue at the end of the year to place in such a fund. It could take five years of operating, juggling mission critical programs and services with the long-term need to create a crisis fund, to reach

whatever financial goal you set for your institution.

Covid-19 has been about as subtle as a slap in the face. Sometimes it takes just that to awaken us from our plodding ways to consider new, long-term strategies. The challenge will be staying mission focused as the priority. Financial health achieved at the cost of mission is not a victory. For most of us this will be a long game. Perhaps we'll set a goal of banking 5% of yearly revenues towards a crisis fund. The hardest part about this may be deciding what overhead items can be trimmed or what programs or services need to be scaled back or diminished. Perhaps AAM will make having such a fund a critical part of Accreditation in the future?

In addition to creating this crisis reserve fund, we also need to pay very close attention to how our communities come out of Covid-19. Will audiences trickle back in, or will they flood back in as stay at home regulations are lifted? Will the new-found reliance on technology to entertain and support learning eat away at our onsite audiences? We must learn from this experience for the next time. We have short memories.

There is much to be said about protecting a museum's long-term stability, but we also need to understand the human issue during a global crisis. I know of two highly respected museum professionals, each with more than twenty years of experience in the field, that lost their jobs this week due to the pandemic. This is akin to an art museum selling its masterworks to pay for operations. We learned decades ago that our work needs to focus on the visitor as much as our collections. Over the years, museums have labored to enlighten the public and lead change

on a myriad of people-driven initiatives including leveling informal education opportunities across socioeconomic strata, food deserts, and mental and physical health, to name a few. I think it's time we realize that we also need to focus on our staff, who have worked tirelessly to improve our communities, especially in times of crisis. We'll need financial resources to make this happen. As leaders we must find a way.

Probably within a year of Covid-19 releasing its grip on us, our galleries will be full of visitors once again. It may take longer than that for our institutions to feel whole again. Our work as museum leaders is important. We need to fight the good fight and do everything within our power to assure our museums are more than viable. They need to be sustainable. And sometimes it takes a slap in the face to wake us up.

Resources we've been looking to during the Covid-19 Pandemic:

Association of Science-Technology Centers, Chief Executives Online Forum.

Association of Children's Museums E-Forum, A Digest of Need-To-Know Info for ACM Members.

Colleen Dilenschneider, Know Your Own Bone website.

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## SOME OBSERVATIONS ON COVID-19 AND THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF NUCLEAR SCIENCE & HISTORY

*By Jim Walther*

Would it affect us?

Those of us that are news junkies were watching the developments in Wuhan, China way back. It looked bad, mostly because there did not seem to be a way to arrest the spread of CoVid-19, as we soon learned it was called. Humans had no immunity to it what so ever so it was going to run its course. No one realized quite how deadly it was. But, it had a Russian roulette sort of feel to it as well; in that some folks got really, really sick, many died, some hardly knew that they had it. And, that it could incubate for so long was problematic as humans are not patient animals. Here in the U.S. our government had plans for this sort of situation but for some strange political reason, those steps to prepare us were not followed; even the office that readied us was disbanded. What a tragedy for our nation.

Getting ready for disaster, why building a reserve fund is crucial:

Our Museum just turned 50 years old! We celebrated mightily in 2019 as we reached this milestone. But, in truth, our institution in its present operating mode is really only 10. We just celebrated 10 years in our newly built museum building as well in 2019 and we observed 15 years as a converted non-profit. Back in the 1960's up to

right after 9/11, our museum had been started and operated by the federal government. But a goal for the institution was to break the cycle of under-funding and neglect and to launch out to truly serve the nation by operating independently. This we began formally in 2005. Our Board had just implemented a capital campaign strategy to build our new home. We would be privately operated not reliant on federal support. It was scary but I could see that we were on the path to success. Indeed, we had several very well performing business units operated by the "foundation" even before we transitioned. So, we did it; pulled the trigger, did the campaign and raised almost the full goal. Then the recession hit in 2008, we were nearly done with construction with an opening planned for spring of 2009. The economy went into the toilet, as it were. And fundraising went away, pretty much overnight. Luckily we were near goal. Only a few gifts did not materialize and we got the door open on schedule. But, we were in debt a bit, yet, with careful financial management and good community support, we slowly emerged. As we did, I began to set aside a small earning plan from excess revenues each year. This fund was reserved and at Board discretion of use so not in the annual operating budget. A rainy day fund as it was. Boy am I glad we did that.

### Canceling the big fundraiser:

Each year for 23 years we have held The Einstein Gala to raise money for museum STEM programming. We were all set to hold it at a big casino on March 21....but we had to cancel a week out. Luckily, we had the ticket sales at goal. The silent auction, always a big hit had moved to a mobile bidding platform for the first time. A blessing we were to learn of soon.

This hit us right as we were about to launch a series of exhibits and events that commemorate the 75th anniversary of the end of WWII. We had completed an exhibit "The Dark Cube; Heisenberg's Race for the Bomb" on March 13 and planned a debut opening. The exhibit features a piece of Hitler's reactor uranium – a real piece. The professor that was to speak about it was to come out from Maryland. His university canceled his travel, so we had him by Skype and it was a successful opening.

Radiation kills coronavirus – visit the nuclear museum!: Some who know me realize that I joke a bit....this was no laughing matter – but, I did craft a short saying that could have been on a t-shirt. Well, the marketing department vetoed my idea saying it was in bad taste. Oh well.

### Digital preparations:

Luckily as well I suspect. But, because we do have a large on-line presence we could have used it. Our museum began a very exciting partner arrangement with "The Atomic Heritage Foundation". This group was closing its physical shop and so we took over website operations. What a boon to have such well made digital offerings since kids would end up studying from home soon.

### Governor closes non-essentials:

On March 16, our Governor took unprecedented action to protect us all and closed most businesses state-wide. So we shut down to the public that day. But staff continued to come to work and we spent a full week cleaning every nook and cranny. But, the following week, her order increased in safe practice as she told all non-essential workers that they must stay home. So we are all teleconferencing, working from our kitchens. It is working out ok. One of my concerns is protecting the museum facility. No one is there and so, it, and its sophisticated HVAC systems are quietly running. So, I go survey it every other day to make sure it is all is nominal, no trespassing, vandalism. We are deeply blessed with a generous community and Board of Trustees. Many have given or become members to see us through this. If it only lasts until May, we can weather it financially with out layoffs and we are all working to achieve that goal.

My observations on this sort of concern stem from now 42 years in the museum field. Here it is: Have a good plan; implement it even when it is not popular. Keep a positive attitude and shine your good light out as an example for your team. If you keep the faith, they will too.

Stay safe all,  
Jim

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## ZOONOTIC DISEASE OUTBREAKS WHERE DO THEY COME FROM?

*By Martin Weiss*

The coronavirus of the current pandemic causes what is known as a zoonotic disease, which means it is caused by microbes that we share with other animals. At the New York Hall of Science, we created an interactive, web based, engaging comic book, *Transmissions Gone Viral*, about West Nile Virus which caused an outbreak in New York City in 1999, and is now endemic to the United States, as an introduction to zoonotic diseases for middle school aged children. In addition, to answer museum visitor questions

we created a pop-up exhibition, *The Science Behind the News: Viruses* which many science museums are using with their audiences.

While these microbes originate in other species, human behavior is usually the cause of their transmission. We are everywhere on Earth, and many of our activities affect the natural environment: For example, we cut down forests, eliminate predators, build work camps in forests, collect





© 2019 New York Hall of Science: *Transmissions: Gone Viral*; Artwork, Charlie LaGreca; Writer, Karen de Seve.

wild animals in markets, butcher, sell, and prepare to eat wild life. These activities have repeatedly brought us into contact with sources of novel viruses. Outbreaks and epidemics have at times been the outcome.

The source of the novel coronavirus behind the current pandemic appears to be one of many “wet markets”, like the one illustrated in Hong Kong, found in China, where a great variety of wild animals are available for purchase. Cages containing bats are stacked upon cages containing porcupines, which are stacked upon cages containing palm civets, which are, in turn, stacked upon cages containing chickens, or ducks, or pigs. In such a context, there is no control of hygiene, and animals breathe, salivate, defecate and pee on one another. These markets serve as a petri dish for the growth and transmission of viruses. This presents a very, very dangerous situation, one that is practically designed for viral spread. Coronaviruses replicate and mutate very rapidly, frequently/occasionally morphing into forms that can jump species and infect new hosts.

Once a novel virus has developed the ability to infect people, workers at these markets can pick them up via exhaled aerosols and other body fluids as these animals are butchered, which produces a copious flow of blood. These viruses can easily spread among the animals, as well as to workers and consumers, who then take them out of the market and transmit them to other people who live in the area. Bats, in particular, are frequently implicated in transmitting viruses to people. They are especially able to harbor coronaviruses because they tolerate them better than other mammals as a result of their uniquely adapted immune systems.

The process that produced the novel coronavirus, that has led the current pandemic is the same that Charles Darwin proposed in his theory of evolution by natural selection, which has resulted in every living thing that has ever lived on Earth or lives on Earth today, including us. Other microbes that jumped to us by the same process to cause disease are West Nile disease, Lyme disease, HIV, Ebola and recently SARS.

Random gene mutations, which produce new traits that become fodder for natural selection, also produce

new microbes that are able to survive in new environments—or, put another way, to infect new species. In this case, a virus was transmitted from bats to other species at a wet market and then on to people around the world. Wet markets bring together animal species that don’t interact in nature, facilitating novel exchanges of viruses from bats to other species, and ultimately to us. New strains of coronaviruses, are able to adapt quickly to new environments. We are a new environment for one of these coronavirus strains.

But as the weeks on lockdown go by, and deaths mount from the coronavirus pandemic, we must ask ourselves: wet markets at what cost? It’s widely believed that the novel coronavirus that is fueling this pandemic originated in a live-animal, wet market in Wuhan, China by natural processes that connect us to the natural world. The exact origins of these diseases are difficult to pinpoint, but wildlife and live-animal markets, with their mix of species in the midst of densely populated areas, are a clear risk. (Politico, 2020; The Conversation, 2020). “It boggles my mind when we have so many diseases that emanate out of that unusual human-animal interface that we don’t just shut it down,” Anthony Fauci, head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, has said “I don’t know what else has to happen to get us to appreciate that” (The Atlantic, 2020).

#### SOME REFERENCES

*Transmissions Gone Viral* free to access at <https://nysci.org/school/resources/transmissions-gone-viral/>

The Science Behind the News-Covid-19 <https://nysci.org/>

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April 10, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2020/04/ban-wet-markets/609781/>.

Shut down those things right away’: Calls to close ‘wet  
markets’ ramp up pressure on China Politico Health  
4/03/2020 <https://tinyurl.com/t7aoq9l>

*Why shutting down Chinese ‘wet markets’ could be a terrible mistake*

January 31, 2020 5:13am EST Updated March 2, 2020  
7:02am EST <https://tinyurl.com/skhsvbn>

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## THE METAPHOR OF EVOLUTION APPLIED TO COVID-19

*By Robert Mac West*

The paleontological world has, for a long time, looked at the extinction of the dinosaurs about 66 million years ago as a very significant event in the history of life on this planet. Much discussion has taken place about what caused the extinction, with the huge impact of a massive comet or asteroid into the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico generally seen as the cause of that extinction event.

The disappearance of the nonavian dinosaurs and the changes in many terrestrial environments changed the nature of the evolutionary process. Organisms, primarily small mammals, suddenly had huge opportunities to expand and occupy new environments without being overwhelmed by dinosaurs. And the mammals, generally tiny and obscure in the presence of the dinosaurs, rapidly diversified and grew physically into organisms much more similar to what we know today.

A recent discovery and research by the Denver Museum of Nature & Science documents the major change in life forms following the dinosaur extinction. Fossil mammals at Corral Bluffs in central Colorado clearly show the diversification and size expansion of mammals when new environments and habitats became available upon the disappearance of the large reptiles. There also was a diversification of plant life, also permitting new forms of mammals to evolve. In short, without the elimination of the dinosaurs those environments would not have been accessible to the rapidly-evolving mammals.

Now, can we look at the museum and science center world through broadly similar spectacles? We all know that museums are, so to speak, organisms that live in a “natural” world – that of their communities, economics, collections,

audiences, competition, etc. And we spend a lot of effort trying to understand that complex environment and how to work in it effectively and sustainably. Also, part of our planning process is devoted to attempting to understand how it is changing via things such as the impact of social media, increasing social diversity, regional politics, etc.

So now, can we look at the impact of the covid-19 pandemic and all the ways it is changing and influencing behavior etc., as something (in this metaphor) as equivalent to the disappearance of the dinosaurs? Who will flourish in the aftermath? What new resources and opportunities will there be? What challenges and barriers will have been created? Will there be extinctions?

### RESOURCES

<https://www.5280.com/2019/10/groundbreaking-dmns-discovery-reveals-what-happened-to-mammals-after-dinosaurs-went-extinct/>

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/2019/10/new-fossils-show-mammals-growth-spurt-after-dinosaurs-died-corral-bluffs/>

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# CAN GOING DIGITAL SAVE US? AN INTERVIEW WITH NIK HONEYSETT

By Karen Wise

When we decided to create this special online issue of the ILR, I knew that Nik Honeysett was one voice we needed to hear from. Nik has been for years a clear and consistent voice, advocating, educating and leading digital transformation in museums. He is the Executive Director of the Balboa Park Online Collaborative (BPOC) <https://bpoc.org/>. He was an AAM board member during the organizations rethinking of their business and service model, and he was collaborator on the New Media Consortium (NHM) Horizon Report, Museum Edition <https://library.educause.edu/resources/2016/1/horizon-report-museum-edition-2010-2016>

Our conversation, like every one I have had since about March 12, began with the how are you and yours, check in on family. We discussed the new reality that work and family are one, that there is no separation, that even if computer time doesn't have to be rationed, space use has to be negotiated, as does the entire family situation in order to accommodate work. Nik, of course, is busier than ever. As a leader in the digital transformation of museums, his work for the Balboa Park cultural organizations themselves, plus the consulting work the Collaborative does to move client organizations forward, gives him a unique perspective from the front lines – both from the inside and as a consultant.

Karen: What's front of mind for you?

Nik: We're in a time of profound crisis. This industry is taking an immense gut punch and we'll be struggling to breathe for the foreseeable future. We are likely to see some organizations collapse, and perhaps some consolidation.

We'd better be ready for when we do finally reopen and it can't be business as usual. To be sustainable we must develop business plans with real resilience built into them. We are going to need multiple, very different revenue streams – some of which we haven't imagined yet. We don't know what the future of philanthropy will be, but short term how much will we be able to rely on it? And admissions? If this pandemic ends quickly and definitively, that's one thing, but if it has a long tail, or comes and goes in waves, then revenue streams that depend on physical attendance aren't going to recover for a long time. Either

way we will need to plan for the next big disruption. And what about investment? Right now what we're mostly seeing is cutting. But the loyalty pipeline requires that we be present in a thoughtful way, for our audiences. The only way museums are reaching their audiences now is through technology. This crisis is an opportunity, but we must focus on quality, not just quantity of what we are producing.

Museums still haven't understood that technology is an investment – in efficiency, productivity, capacity and reach. Digital transformation requires focus, thought and development. That investment must be purposeful if it's really going to make a difference.

K: So what do you think museums need to do?

N: First, understand that technology is a true investment. We must dedicate the resources – the time, energy, thought and funds – needed to decide what to do and to do it. Museums must rethink how we reach people. Mobile phone penetration is almost universal, but we are still behind in recognizing and taking advantage of that, in creating compelling mobile-first user experiences that are worth people's time. That's going to be our mechanism for content marketing and delivery.

This crisis shows how important mobile first is. When people do come back to museums, they are going to be preoccupied with hygiene. We need to make it not just possible, but fun and compelling for them to interact with us without touching anything that they don't control. They will want their transactions, their content delivery, and experiences, to go through their own devices. That's a huge opportunity for museums, because if audiences are experiencing us through their own devices, and we make it worth their while, we can stay with them wherever they are, and stay top of mind, creating and constantly reinforcing that loyalty pipeline.

K: So how are things in Balboa Park?

N: Well the good news is that we had already moved all the organizations in the park to the cloud version of Microsoft 365. That had cut the amount of desktop support needed across the park by 50%, and allowed us to reallocate those resources to do more elsewhere. It

also meant that everyone already had the conferencing platform Teams, whether they were previously using it or not. When the museums' buildings closed, we were able to get everyone up and running from home quickly, and to provide them with support pretty seamlessly.

K: Wow – even the small organizations?

N: Yes, the Collaborative is just that. Every organization pays according to their size and budget, and all receive the same service from us. Also, we are a separate organization. Part of what we do is consulting, and the revenue from that not only funds us, but also allows us to invest in digital initiatives across the park.

K: It's an extraordinary model. Many have talked about how museums could share infrastructure and services, but few do. How did it come about?

N: It was a local funder, the Legler-Benbough foundation, that was pushing for greater collaboration among San Diego organizations. Different groups were coming to them, asking for funding for their own digital projects. So instead of funding them individually, the foundation provided three years of funding to establish the collaborative to create infrastructure that would support all the museums at the same level. So now we provide those services, and organizations pay in, but we also consult to support the field. By bringing in revenue helping institutions with their own digital transformations, we can better serve the Balboa Park organizations. It's a model that makes sense, but it required vision and a big investment to get it off the ground.

We keep making improvements and using our scale to create more efficiencies and to broaden the services available to all organizations. For example, right now we're looking at how best to support distance and remote learning.

We found that there are already 6 separate licenses for Blackboard in the park (see <https://www.blackboard.com/teaching-learning/collaboration-web-conferencing/blackboard-collaborate>). We're now in conversations with Blackboard to see if we can negotiate a single shared license. If that works we'll be able to hire our own Blackboard expert, so we can provide much wider access to this technology across San Diego organizations.

K: So what else are you seeing and thinking about?

N: I'm lucky enough to get paid to think about some big, timely questions. Working with our clients, we are grappling with big sets of questions. And perhaps now, in this crisis, all museums will start thinking about them. Some examples:

How do you get your community back into your institution? And then coming back? What is your digital experience and how does it stand out?

What does it mean to be a true digital first museum? What does that actually look like? What's the revenue model? What does that mean for what an exhibition is? How and what is created? What kind of duration? Reach? And how could you create educational resources that change and morph over time?

What would it mean for a museum with a social cause to be completely embedded into the community? How, without a building, would you infiltrate the community, the city, digitally, perhaps other ways – and how to do both traditional fundraising and digital fundraising to support that?

K: Do you have any final thoughts to share?

N: We've been given a gift – as fatal and catastrophic as it is, we must come out of this different – because there is no returning to normal. We can use the pause that has been imposed on us to retool. You cannot do a major overhaul of an airplane while it flies, you must do it when it's on the ground so that it can return to flight and not crash – this is our moment.

The health crisis itself will end – the tail for museums will be so much longer. The question is, what will we do next? Will we be like newspapers? Will there need to be a paywall – how can you give the community something that it would pay for? Or will we morph as libraries have and are, into stronger community anchors? Or are we more like Netflix? There are existing revenue models around content – can and should we tap into those, or will we need to develop new ones? And what is the value proposition? And the partnerships? What investments must we make today?

The variety of institutions that we work with requires us to create consistency in our consulting practices, so we're already thinking about what our message and advice is for the "new normal". We've begun to refine that messaging which is summarized in a slidedeck (<https://bit.ly/NS-GLAM-strategy>) put together by my colleague Neal Stimler who is BPOC's Senior Advisor and Business Development Specialist. Our message is simple to convey, but harder to enact, museums should focus on: Economy (diversify and strength earned revenue), Engagement (evolve to digital- and mobile-first), and Environment (be accountable to what's happening to our world).

We have to diversify our revenue streams, and not just in the ways we have been seeing, with earned revenue depending only on physical visitation. No single revenue

stream or activity should be able to shut you down.

We are going to need new kinds of public-private partnerships, collaborations with communities and other organizations, and new thinking.

My concern now is that we can't be afraid to take risks. Our model – from hiring on down, has been generally risk averse. Can we push ourselves to transform, organization

by organization, and as an industry?

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## MUSEUMS IN THE TIME OF COVID-19: SOME OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS FROM THE FIRST WEEKS OF THE CRISIS

By Karen Wise

*“Don't it always seem to go, that you don't know what you got 'til it's gone...”*  
-Joni Mitchell

Susie Wilkening in her Data Museum <http://www.wilkeningconsulting.com/datamuseum> has for some time been posting individual responses to a prompt she gave museum goers in her 2018 annual survey, to imagine a world without museums. On April 10, 2020 she posted the response “sad” on Twitter, with the statement “Yep. This pretty much sums it up. –Susie.”



Museums – and the entire cultural arena – are one of the sectors being decimated by the Covid-19 crisis. Museums around the world are closed. Our field is devastated –

thousands are out of work, and even the strongest and best prepared organizations are looking at a very different future than what most envisioned a few months ago. At the same time, as informal education, entertainment and cultural enrichment providers, we have the potential to provide important support to the education sector resources for parents, as well as relief and even a bit of solace and fun. What and how are we doing?

*Taking Stock of what is going on – Turmoil, controlled chaos, and finding a way forward*

Most museums in the U.S. closed on or about Friday the 13th of March. The past few weeks, for museum leaders, have been about survival mode. Joe Hastings, Executive Director of Explora, in Albuquerque, New Mexico put it this way “This is a game of survival for the organization and if the organization doesn't survive there is no mission.” The priorities have been immediate – security of physical plant and assets, care of live animals and plants (living collections), moving all functions online, finances, HR, and Board, donor and stakeholder relations.

While publically available numbers are just emerging, preliminary results from a survey being conducted by the Network of European Museum Organisations (NEMO) [https://www.ne-mo.org/fileadmin/Dateien/public/NEMO\\_documents/NEMO\\_Corona\\_Survey\\_Results\\_6\\_4\\_20.pdf](https://www.ne-mo.org/fileadmin/Dateien/public/NEMO_documents/NEMO_Corona_Survey_Results_6_4_20.pdf) offers a scale magnitude idea of revenue loss in Europe and beyond. “From the museums providing data, 30% are losing up to 1000 Euro/week. 25% of the museums lose up to 5000 Euro a week, 13%lose up to 30000 Euro/week, and 5% lose over 50000/week.”

Depending on the size of their budgets, and the percent-

age of revenue tied to onsite attendance, cutting expenses – often drastically – has been the order of the day. For U.S. museums, according to the 2020 edition of The American Alliance of Museum’s Trendswatch <https://www.aam-us.org/programs/center-for-the-future-of-museums/trendswatch/>, earned revenue accounts for between an average of 26% for art museums to well over 50% for children’s museums, science museums, zoos and aquariums. Virtually all earned revenue for all but the rarest of organizations depends directly upon physical attendance. With most other sources of revenue also at risk, every organization is grappling with their budgets – today, tomorrow, next week, next month, for the rest of the fiscal year, and beyond. Capital projects, exhibits and programs have been put on hold or slashed, but for too many, that’s not enough.

For those organizations that have already been forced to consider or begin pay cuts, furloughs and layoffs, the Human Resources (HR) work has been intense. What must we do, what will it cost, how much will it save, how should it be done and what happens afterwards – to those still working, those no longer working, and to organizational capacity? The emotional toll compounds the financial impact on all sides. Internal communications – when face to face meetings are impossible have been challenging, and variable in how personal they have been. While many leaders have found ways to communicate more personally, furloughs and layoffs have been announced via email at more than one organization.

How many museum staffers have lost their jobs? Time will tell. A crowdsourced google sheet “Museum Staff Impact During Covid19”

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1acEaRssO-NaAlFjThEFybfbhBB1b3OIuOne-NHsghOMxg/edit#gid=0> already listed over 10,000 layoffs and furloughs as of April 13, with about 125 organizations listed so far. The California Association of Museums (CAM) published summary results of a survey they conducted between March 30 and April 3 <https://www.calmuseums.org/Public/Public/LEARN/Resources/COVID-19%20Resources%20for%20Museums.aspx> with the alarming statistic that as of April 3 (out of a sample of 125 of the states’ roughly 1500 museums) 40% of California museums had already made staff cuts so deep that the equivalent of 10% of the museum workforce in the state had been laid off or furloughed.

At the same time, each museum has had to grapple with local, state and federal rules, regulations and orders – moving targets that were changing daily for some time. In many places, stay at home advisories were followed by stay at home orders with changing guidelines on what kinds of jobs are considered critical. The staff and super-

visors of staff that are critical, security, maintenance and operations, living collections care and others, have had to be trained, retrained and held accountable for adhering to social distancing requirements.

Donor and stakeholder relations are needed more than ever. The need to keep full focus on both internal and external constituencies and forces has meant little sleep and no real rest for museum leaders. Several organizations have had good success working with donors and granting agencies to pivot existing projects quickly. Museum chief executives, fund raisers and grant holders have been making personal phone calls morning noon and night since the crisis began. But how much money is coming in? If the CAM survey is any indication, fund development is terrible so far.

Boards, board leaders, and other overseeing entities are critical partners. In the midst of the fast-moving crisis, chief executives have had to provide clear, effective and continual communications, as well as food for board deliberations and oversight. Some leaders describe solid board support with new, renewed or deepened board engagement. Others are seeing longstanding issues with their boards take on new urgency in this moment of need.

Digital infrastructure is playing out as well. Museums that have prioritized ongoing investment in digital infrastructure had the capability to move communications and to keep core business functions operating relatively smoothly, quickly and seamlessly ([see the interview with Nik Honeysett in this issue](#)). Those still lacking in digital infrastructure have suffered. Some of these were able quickly to install at least some infrastructure or work arounds, while others are still not able to do what they need well, even a month into the crisis.

*What value are we offering in the midst of this crisis?*

With every aspect of life disrupted around the world, what are museums doing for our communities? Yes, many are scrambling to provide education, entertainment and solace. Our efforts are valiant, and they are producing a good deal of content. Lists of resources abound –MCN’s list appeared during only the second week of the shutdowns <https://mcn.edu/a-guide-to-virtual-museum-resources/>. Some of the resources were preexisting, others were being constructed on the fly, and the list has expanded tremendously since then. With widely variable levels of experience, infrastructure and resources, the results too

are variable by every measure. MCN's article *The 8 Essential Things Museums are Providing Right Now* is a lovely summary <http://mcn.edu/8-essential-things/>.

But what are we really accomplishing, and for whom? And how will we measure success? Audience impact? [Leticia Perez's piece](#) in this issue raises this question, and [Marty Spellerberg's Call for Participants: Museum Digital COVID-19 Research Study](#) may help us tease out how things are going. [Peter Linett's call for participants](#) is also promising. And hopefully both AAM's collaborative museum survey with Susie Wilkening <https://www.aam-us.org/programs/about-museums/2020-annual-survey-of-museum-goers/>, and the COVES program <http://www.understandingvisitors.org/> will also pivot to start investigating how we are doing with audiences, beyond just eyeballs and numbers of unique visitors. There are important conversations among audience researchers, including weekly chats sponsored by the Visitor Studies Association <https://www.visitorstudies.org/covid-19-update>.

Some museums are looking beyond our usual horizons to see how they can help their communities. It was well-publicized that Micah Parzen, CEO of the Museum of Man in San Diego put out an open letter asking how the museum might be of service to the community <https://www.museumofman.org/covid-19-updates/>. As to the response, he writes:

*"The response was phenomenal. We received scores of comments in enthusiastic support, including many ideas for how we might creatively activate our building. Unfortunately, the City has closed Balboa Park to the public, precluding us from transforming the inside of our space into a community resource. But that did not stop us. We decided to project a message of gratitude to the community on all four faces of the iconic California Tower. The message was a simple "THANK YOU" to each and every San Diegan—no matter who they are—for doing their part to make a difference during this challenging time. We asked the City, which controls the nightly lighting of the California Building & Tower, to turn it blue, consistent with the #lightitblue and #lightitupblue movements in support of frontline workers everywhere. We anticipate periodically changing our Tower message to the community, possibly as often as weekly, in a show of continued support and solidarity with our community. In this way, we hope that the Tower, which is a symbol of San Diego in so many ways, may serve as a North Star of sorts to help us all navigate the path to the other side of this horrible pandemic."*

Other well-publicized activities include personal protective equipment (PPE) collection and donation by museums and groups of professionals (e.g. conservators) and the an-



nouncement by the Old Salem Museum and Gardens that they were reorienting their garden to provide produce to a local food bank, and baking bread for the same purpose. Many organizations are working with local schools and school districts to see how they can support remote teaching. And at least a few are thinking about how they can provide educational resources for children and families that lack internet access, such as providing printed activity sheets to include with the meals being distributed to children who usually receive breakfast and lunch at school.

History and Art Museums are also collecting in this crisis, so that they will be able to tell the story of this pandemic. For example see "Collecting the pandemic" <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/covid-19-re-shapes-world-cultural-institutions-collect-oral-histories-180974613/>. We can hope that healing storytelling will begin soon. In the meantime, there are organizations convening digital storytelling workshops such as StoryCenter <https://www.storycenter.org/public-workshops/storytellinginthetimeofcovid19-webinar>. Will we partner with some of these experts to create new forms of output?

All this begs the question, are we doing enough? Are we doing the right things? What are the direct needs that we may be able to help with? ASTC posted this call for Museums and Science Centers to partner with the Red Cross in hosting blood drives <https://www.astc.org/opportunities/>

[science-centers-museums-can-play-life-saving-role/](#). The *Non-Profit Quarterly* has called upon museums to help support mutual aid networks forming to help feed and support the unemployed <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/as-pandemic-layoffs-top-17-million-mutual-aid-networks-arise/>. And what about information about the pandemic itself? Museums are still relatively trusted organizations – can we provide accurate and timely information and resources in digestible forms? For example could we all direct families to Association of Childrens Museums covid-19 resources <https://childrensmuseums.org/about/covid-19?> What other great sources can we vet and funnel people toward?

What else can we do for our communities when something like 15 million people – including many thousands of our own people – are out of work? When the digital divide means that those who have the least are suffering the most?

### *Opportunities, silver linings and questions*

Even as the Covid-19 crisis is devastating the industry and our people, it is also pushing our creativity, and bringing about conversations that have needed to happen. While it is early to describe outcomes, it is clear that many museums are changing and adapting with lightning speed. There is little need to create a sense of urgency for organizational change. That has come from the outside. For organizations that have been accustomed to long, even annual planning cycles, staff are building new capacity for teamwork, collaboration and rapid response prototyping. We clearly will all have to do more with less. How will that spark creativity and entrepreneurial spirit? And how will we maintain that after we reopen? There are signs that many organizations are just now moving from immediate survival mode to a more strategic mode. We will see where this leads in the next few weeks.

Both Professional networks and professional organizations are activating in new forms. I have attended more than a dozen open conversations sponsored by both professional organizations and ad hoc groups such as Drinking About Museums (see [Koven Smith's piece](#) in this issue)

Web based conversations on zoom and other platforms may be a poor substitute for lunch with a friend or gatherings at the local bar after work, but they are rich in their own right. One quote, at a recent zoom discussion sponsored by the Mid Atlantic Association of Museums (the organization behind the Building Museums Conference), stands out. Leaders of small museums were telling stories about how they are finding ways to keep their collections safe, their animals fed, and their infrastructure functioning. Betsy Loring said “We face emergencies all time, and while

we'd never wish them on others, at least this time we have people to talk with about them.”

Local, state, regional and national professional organizations are activating in new forms and taking on expanded listening and connecting roles (see [Charity Counts in this issue](#)). They are pushing out information and resources at an astounding rate. And those with meetings coming up are having to cancel them or make them virtual. The upcoming AAM meeting, which was to have been in San Francisco next month, will instead be a virtual meeting that will take place May 18 and June 1-4. The just announced theme is #RadicalReimagining <https://annualmeeting.aam-us.org/>.

Will people attend? Pay the \$235 registration fee? Spend the time? VSA, ASTC and others have been experimenting with adding virtual attendance to in-person meetings, but AAM is being forced to make this full leap, just like the organizations and people it represents. How will they make all day virtual meetings work? I hope to be able to find out, but it will all depend on what kinds of competing demands there are, and how necessary – and value added – these meetings look to be.

### *Questions abound, answers are few*

How will museums use this crisis – will we go backwards and into ourselves, or outwards, towards our communities? How will our internal and our audience focused initiatives change? Will we center equity and inclusion (see [Sarah Burroughs piece in this issue](#), as well as <https://www.aam-us.org/2020/04/02/museums-and-equity-in-times-of-crisis/> ; <https://www.museumaction.org/massaction-blog/2020/4/1/how-are-we-centering-equity-in-this-time-of-museum-closures> ). What about decolonization and shared authority? And how will we acknowledge and confront the digital divide? Will we be satisfied developing online programs that reach only those with internet access and devices? And using language and activities that exclude audiences that are not already comfortable or interested? Or will we push to reach the audiences that need us most, evaluate and continually improve what we do and how we do it? Will we find new ways to support formal education, educators and students, or keep on the same pathways? Will we look for new ways to serve, to be not just relevant, but necessary, critical resources? And what of our own house - our own staff – how deep will the cuts go and what will they do to our futures? And what of museum studies? Will we continue to offer graduate degrees that cost thousands, tens of thousands of dollars and lead to limited prospects of low paying jobs?

I work in this industry because I believe in museums, and



I am convinced that we have important things to offer our communities and the world. This can be our defining moment, giving us new purpose and direction, if we can seize it. Let's hope that we can.

## A SELECTION OF RESOURCES FOR MUSEUM AND SCIENCE CENTER LEADERS

*These sources help with current needs, with some resources for thinking about the future:*

### American Alliance of Museums (AAM)

- Trendswatch 2020: The future of financial sustainability Published on March 24, less than two weeks after most museums in the U.S. closed, and prepared prior to the crisis fully hitting, this is a must-read, at least for U.S. organizations.
- Webpage Covid-19 page <https://www.aam-us.org/category/covid-19/> featuring articles and events (webinars). This has both practical items and short pieces touting individual museums' activities

Association of Children's Museum (ACM) list of resources for the public <https://childrensmuseums.org/about/covid-19> - A great selection of resources that museums can refer the parents and families to.

### Association of Science and Technology Centers (ASTC)

- The ASTC website features an outstanding and well organized set of resources for all museums on every thing from business operations to programming examples <https://www.astc.org/coronavirus/> highly recommended for all, not just science museums
- ASTC has been providing a regular set of resources, including state by state calls with chief executives of member organizations aimed at sharing practical information and ideas, connecting colleagues for support and collaboration.

Colleen Dillenschneider's Know Your Bone <https://www.colleendilen.com/>

A must-read source of data and analysis. Recent posts have focused on results of intent to visit surveys and their implications for eventual reopening scenarios.

Harvard Business Review <https://hbr.org/> - with articles like *10 Questions to Guide Boards Through the Pandemic* this is always worth browsing

MCN (formerly Museum Computer Network) has long been a forward thinking organization. Their work is more important than ever, and if nothing else their blog is worth following <http://mcn.edu/>

Non-Profit Quarterly A great source of resources. For example, while most discussions of cutting staff behind closed doors, this article provides at least a framework for the conversation <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/its-different-this-time-handling-your-nonprofits-staffing-under-covid-19/> note: NPQ is offering a webinar series on responding to Covid-19 – the April 23 event is *Human Resources: Urgency & Equity* <https://info.nonprofitquarterly.org/covid19-hr-webinar>

Stanford Social Innovation Review <https://ssir.org/> such as their series Rethinking Social Change in the Face of Coronavirus.

*I thank all the museumers that have spoken with me, sent me information and told me their stories on and off the record in the past few weeks. We are all in this together and your generosity and spirit give me hope and solace in this time of upheaval and isolation.*

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## ON THE COVER:

*Museum of the Man in San Diego projects a message to the community on the iconic Californial Tower.*

*Full story on page 45.*

