

Association of Midwest Museums

Intro Session: Get Inspired!

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>>> Welcome to virtual exhibitions, get inspired, brought to you by the digital empowerment project and organized by the six museum associations and dedicated to providing free resources for small museums.

Our inaugural series of online training focuses on digital media and technology topics and is made possible by the funding for the institute of museum services.

I'm Justin Jakovac and I'm your host for today's program.

My pronouns are he and him.

I'm a white middle aged male, my hair is brown and styled in a side part combover.

I have a mustache and goatee.

In the background there's a gray wall with a teal poster from the 1982 smithsonian exhibition opening and then abstract painting that I picked up in Gambia.

When digital spaces may substitute for our physical sense of place, it is important to reflect on the land that we occupy and honor the indigenous people who have called it home.

I'm speaking to you from my home office in Colorado Springs, Colorado, on the historic lands of the Indian.

We recognize that our organizations and those of our members were founded within a colonizing society which perpetuated the exclusions and erasures of many native people throughout the United States and beyond.

We ask you to reflect on the place where you reside and cultures and to respect the diversity of experiences that form the richness of our world and profession.

Thank you.

Now for a few housekeeping notes.

I'd like to acknowledge today's ASL interpreter and let you know that the captioning is embedded in a box below the Youtube player on our website with controls to adjust your experience.

The best way to refine our craft is to listen to our attendees.

So we ask that you share your candid feedback with us.

Following today's program, you will be sent a link to a satisfaction survey.

Sharing your experiences through the survey will only take a few moments and will greatly improve your work -- our work, that is.

During the program we will address as many of your questions as time allows.

However, sometimes we are unable to answer all of your questions after reflecting on the program.

So I have set up an online community forum for raising the questions and posting answers and connecting with your fellow museum practitioners on the website.

If you're looking for help in between programs, please visit the forum on our website, create a log-in and post your questions.

A member of the community or one of the student technology fellows will get back to you.

Lastly, please follow us on social media to be aware of future programs and links will be posted in the chat.

Now it is my pleasure to introduce today's presenters.

Matt Farrah is the associate curator and exhibitions coordinator at the historic New Orleans collection.

Matt, he began his career at the THNOC in 2010 as a docent and worked as a cataloger, reference assistant and a curator of traveling exhibitions.

A graduate of Tulane University, he focused on the political history of the south.

His past exhibitions include from Winfield to Washington the life and career of Huey p Long and Mary as the day is long, Shakespeare's hand in New Orleans.

Our presenter to follow Matt is Meg Salocks.

Director of Marketing and Engagement at the Lake Champlain Museum and she specializes in digital marketing and sustainable methods of audience engagement to help organizations grow.

Before joining the team at the Maritime Museum 2019, she helped the nonprofits, arts organizations, and museums in Boston, Rhode Island and Detroit with digital campaigns and audience growth.

She was a digital marketer and list manager at Smithsonian national museum of American history where she built up an avid local audience of returning subscribers to their evening food history events signature annual festivals and smithsonian jazz concert series

Please welcome our presenters today.

Matt, take it away.

>> I'm a white male, bald with a black beard.

I'm wearing a gray sport coat with a white shirt and a red tie.

I would also like to make a land acknowledgment before we get started.

Land acknowledgment recognizes indigenous people as the original inhabitants as the caretakers of the land and the relationship between indigenous communities and the traditional lands is one that endures time and change.

Most importantly, by making land acknowledgements, we want to help undue the intentional eraser of the indigenous people and I want to acknowledge the Choctaw on which the historical land -- excuse me, expands its learning, working and living space today.

We also acknowledge other indigenous communities whose traditional lands across Louisiana's border, the Cherokee and appaloosa tribes.

By making this acknowledgement, we hope to express our gratitude to those whose homelands we live on today and we pledge to work to understand the history that's brought us to the lands in our roles within that history.

We will work to amplify indigenous voices and histories throughout our work as educators and historians.

Now that we've got that taken care of, I'd like to thank all of you for coming here today and we're going to talk about virtual exhibitions at the historical New Orleans collection.

Just as a quick little bit of context for everybody, the historical New Orleans collection is larger than most, and we have a hundred different employees and obviously, during the pandemic, we had to change from our physical spaces to a more virtual space.

We had a very small scale virtual exhibition program prior to the pandemic.

We only had about six exhibitions done in their entirety, and since then we have expanded greatly.

We have two major platforms that we use.

Now we use Drupal and Google Arts & Culture.

At one point we had a 360 degree digital exhibition.

We'll get to that in a minute.

But we're probably not going to be doing that any more.

It's time intensive.

Our team varies depending on exhibition to exhibition.

Different exhibitions require different inputs and a more salon style art exhibition is easy to transfer from an in gallery experience to the virtual experience.

You're more object-based, text based exhibits are more work intensive.

So we have anywhere from two to ten people, depending on the exhibit.

The platform that we use is a huge, huge determining factor in whether or not you have two people working on it or ten and how much time people need to use and actually do it.

The budget considerations that we'll talk about generally come down to two things.

It's your platform and your equipment cost and your staff time.

The staff time is usually the lion's share of what the budget considerations are.

So our first platform that we'll talk about is Drupal.

Drupal is a free open source content management system, and it comes with the standardized page designs that are customizable.

You can host all different kinds of media and what you will see on the screen here is the back end design and then what it actually looks like when you view it on the web.

So there's all different manners of text generation that you can do, along with adding media.

Now, this platform requires technical expertise, coding, a lot of back end technical design and that is something that requires coders.

So if you don't have somebody who is capable of doing that on staff, or is going to learn how to do it, then Drupal can be a platform that can be a little bit clunky.

It works really, really well for text-heavy exhibitions and exhibitions that require a lot of contextualization for the objects in it.

Now our 360 degree gallery exhibition that we did was based on the music of New Orleans.

These are individual pictures taken by a digital camera and spliced together to form an entire virtual surrogate for the gallery itself.

As you can see here on the slide, the software investment is about \$200 which isn't a lot for, you know, software as it goes, but the technology, the actual hardware for it is pretty expensive.

But this is what you actually end up getting.

So this is what you will see on our website if you look at New Orleans medley.

So you can see the small little information tags on the cases, on the image there on the left.

And that will pull up label texts, so the actual label text you'd read as a surrogate online.

Search for it with your mouse and spin around and go through the galleries at your own leisure.

On the right, you will see two tablets sitting on top of that marble table.

You will see something that looks like a glow.

Those two tablets are jukeboxes that actually have clips of music from different eras in New Orleans.

It goes all the way from classical music to modern hip-hop and rap.

If you click on those globes you can see the jukebox itself on your web browser.

Google Arts & Culture is the most recent addition to our virtual exhibitions platform suite.

I like Google Arts & Culture for more visually captivating shows so if you have a lot of cool posters, art, large-scale objects that can be digitized very easily, this is a really good platform for you.

Obviously, you get all of the advantages that Google has.

Built-in analytics, the largest search engine on the Internet.

You will also get a built-in audience that's literally all over the globe.

One of the things that is also really nice about Google Arts & Culture, it integrates seamlessly into all of Google's attendant apps so if you want to connect something to the map, to Youtube from music, anything like that, it works seamlessly.

Now, you can see here on the top that's the actual Google Arts & Culture Page and this was one that we did about films in Louisiana and this is one of the most famous, Elvis movie called King Creole and on the bottom is our website.

The functionality is the same and it works really well if you want to promote programming that's attendant to anything you have on there.

We started to do a watch party movie series that people could log in on Twitter and follow along with movies that we were showing.

We had the local experts talk about fun facts about filming while we watched the movie together.

It was one of the most successful pandemic programs.

The next thing that is really important to virtual exhibits is that mobility is extremely important.

Being able to look at whatever the virtual exhibit that you have on a mobile device can be a great addition to any exhibition that you have for two reasons.

One, obviously, you can look at it anywhere you want to, but it can also be used if you allow people back into the galleries.

Once we get, you know, hopefully back to the point that we can have everybody in the galleries again, you can actually use this as almost a surrogate for gallery guides.

Obviously it's a little bit different, but you can put more information on a virtual site than sometimes you can fit on a wall.

So the one we're looking at right now is called Storyville about the red light district in New Orleans and is based on the Drupal platform.

I took screen shots off my phone and this is what we're dealing with.

Google Arts & Culture has its own dedicated app and that's what you're looking at here.

This is about women's suffrage and it was born virtual and it was extremely popular and our analytics have shown this is one of the most popular virtual exhibits that we have ever done.

So the final tips and takeaways to remember, you need to tailor the platform to your content.

That's the most important.

There are a number of different platforms that you can use.

I would recommend either Drupal or Google Arts & Culture.

They're both free and they have their advantages for different kinds of things so make sure that the platform fits the exhibit.

Highlight your exhibition strengths.

Make sure that you make -- make sure that you make sure to highlight the things that are most captivating about any exhibition.

It's similar to any sort of promotional marketing material that you do for an exhibit.

The difference is that because it's all online, you need to catch people early and hold their attention.

Then finally, make it mobile.

Make sure people can see it everywhere.

We live in a technology saturated world and we can allow people to have some quality content rather than what they watch.

This is my contact information if you need to get ahold of me and thank you for your time.

>> I cannot hear the presenter.

>> Thank you for that.

Thank you for speaking up.

I'll start right back over because reading my lips is probably very hard to do.

Hello.

I am Meg Salocks, I'm the Director of Marketing and Engagement at Lake Champlain Maritime Museum.

I'm a white woman with shoulder length curly brown hair and blue eyes.

And I'm wearing a sleeveless green top and some dangly white fish-shaped earrings.

And I'm sitting in my home office with some tan walls and there's a set of French doors behind me.



I'm here to talk today about virtual exhibitions at Lake Champlain Maritime Museum. We share the history, archaeology and ecology of Lake Champlain and the region to empower the audiences to become stewards of the lake and build a healthy future for our lake and communities.

We are located on the shores of Lake Champlain outside of Vergennes, Vermont, and located in the homeland of the Abenaki people and who continue to be a thriving indigenous culture in this region.

I would like to acknowledge with gratitude their generations of stewardship from our past, present and future.

Lake Champlain Maritime Museum is a mid-sized Vermont museum with the staff of about 15-year round employees.

And then we expand to 20 to 25 employees during the open season.

The museum is actually a three acre campus with 18 different buildings and exhibit spaces indoors and outdoors and two replica boats.

We are in a rural part of Vermont, in a spot where our visitors truly need some form of private transportation to visit us, whether it's car, boat or plane as there's a small private airfield across the street.

Because of that, and because no one wants to be on the shores of Lake Champlain in the winter our exhibits and grounds are only open seasonally from May to October.

But we're a year round museum which means we run educational programs on site and at local schools at pure organizations and thanks to the internet we have been doing virtual and digital programs for years which is what we'll talk a little bit more about today.

So over the past five years Lake Champlain Maritime Museum has run the digital and virtual programs year round.

I have been on the museum's team for about three years now.

We love exploring and presenting new virtual options because it's way for us to reach more audiences, present our research and collections in new ways and really let anyone and everyone enjoy the museum without worrying about the barrier of travel.

In addition to virtual exhibits we have created virtual shipwreck tours, we run virtual camps and webinars and more.

While the pandemic allowed us to increase our virtual programming, and we have really seen a growing and eager online audience in the past year which is excellent, it's really

affirmed something that we know that we love and that we based on our location we need to do to grow our audiences.

But we are here today to talk about a digital exhibition specifically.

So I wanted to give you some sort of big-picture first about how and why we do these before which dive into the specific example.

So because of the nature of our space, we have a lot of permanent collections and exhibits on display.

We usually do one to two temporary exhibits per year, relating to the significant anniversary or an important theme.

These could be about women's history, they have been about the history of salmon, ship building and shipwrecks and everything in between.

Since I have been on board for the past three years we have always included a virtual exhibit component or a separate virtual exhibit as part of that special annual theme.

Why?

Well, obviously we love it if that's not becoming clear but we have had great audience success with these as we expand our exhibits more in the online space.

As Matt was also kind of suggesting as you heard, we found that virtual exhibits are an opportunity to create an interactive learning space and a content-focused deep dive in a way we can't do because of the physical space or we couldn't afford when we were designing the physical exhibit.

Just in general you have more space and flexibility online which we love.

We can share those fun, weird stories, share more of the research, we can share our full bibliography which a lot of our historian audiences love, and you know, I think as Matt brought up, we found that always pairing a virtual exhibit with an on-site experience it's a great way to encourage further experience with the link or the QR code next to the story or the object or the image that really spoke to them.

We can keep them engaged for a moment longer, keep them in the environment and that for audience members statistically that means they'll be more likely to remember us and tell a friend about us and come back to us either in person or online which is great.

So we're a small museum.

We're in rural Vermont and we love to do things online.

Which leads to the question: how do you do virtual exhibits and to explain the process I'm going to use the exhibit that brought me here today which is our exhibit, Women at the Helm, which is a virtual exhibit we presented on StoryMaps.

Now, there are a couple of different StoryMaps out in the world today so I'll specify StoryMaps that I'm talking about is the storytelling application on the arc GIS platform that allows authors to share maps with you to share narrative text and multimedia to basically tell a compelling story.

It is run by ESRI, which is a global GIS technology and mapping technology and at quick glance it's a beautiful and affordable storytelling solution.

You can create stories even at the free account level which is where we started and we have grown from there.

The museum itself has used StoryMaps five years for digital maps, to share the canal schooner when it traveled through the canal system.

Women at the Helm is an exhibit that we started to work on in 2019 to open in 2020 to celebrate women leaders from the Champlain Valley to mark the centennial women's suffrage.

The most important detail to note about the exhibit and why it's so interesting is that the platform was selected before we had our exhibit planned -- before we started to develop the exhibit itself, before we had our narrative or the goals and that's an interesting example and based on what we heard from Matt, you're probably thinking oh, gosh, that's not the right call, but this exhibit is a favorite for a lot of our audiences and our staff for the sheer breadth of information that it come contains.

So we are going to dig into that.

As a way to sort of explain the process and lessons learned I'll talk about the four main parts of the process.

First starting with funding.

As I said, most of our virtual exhibits are connected to a larger, special annual exhibit which is always grant funded and we always include a section as I have said for a virtual exhibit component in our grant application.

We scope them completely together, the physical and the virtual projects because a lot of the work for those, the research, the writing, can be done together or it's the same people that are working on it.

And a lot of that grant application is for funding for staff time.

The vast majority of it.

There's a small fraction that goes to the material cost but we don't need to budget as much for that.

It's more about the staff time.

We will not do a digital exhibit if we have not secured the funding for it which affects our time line, but something I'm grateful for and proud of is we have really grown our respect for how much time building a virtual exhibit as well as a virtual exhibit takes and the staff expertise that you need for that.

As an example for those of you who are thinking about your budget line, what do I need to accomplish this, about three years ago we were asking for about \$3,600 for a small on-site and virtual exhibit.

And last year we scoped about \$7500 for a joint physical and virtual experience.

Next part is the platform where Matt did a great job of talking about how to think about it and I'll continue to beat on this drum. Three years ago, it was a part of the grant application process for our exhibit that we were selecting the platform in the grant application.

Which is how for the Women at the Helm exhibit I ended up building it on StoryMaps and that was something that the funders were excited to see.

We were kind of stuck with it.

However, StoryMaps wasn't the right application for this experience and this project, so we have learned that lesson big-time and we have changed it up such that when we are writing that grant application we literally just say that thereby a virtual exhibit or a virtual exhibit experience and we don't specify anything beyond that because we have built into the exhibit process now that there's time and funding for platform research, scoping and then decision making.

Which I think will connect -- these kind of connect together and staffing, the third part.

Our exhibit teams I guess similar to what Matt was saying it really depends on the size and scope of the project and the exhibit itself.

We have had exhibit teams of three to six people who work together on the full course of the exhibit to agree on the goals, the outcomes, the target audience, as well as the overarching narrative.

Our exhibit teams break down between a person doing the research or one to two people researching.

One to two people writing, both the script for the physical exhibit as well as the virtual exhibit.

One person either from our education or myself from my communications team to make sure that we are speaking the right language for our target audience and that we are speaking in words that they understand.

And then one designer, which has also historically been me as many of your small museum folks are nodding and recognizing this lifestyle and then we have one person for the on-site design.

Women at the Helm, at its peak we had three people working on this, the on-site and virtual experience.

Two people were really sharing the work and the research and the writing and I was doing the design for both.

You know, I think we all continue to learn this lesson in this industry, but it is always the chance to think about how are we scheduling ourselves, making sure that I was dividing up my time between not doing design for the physical space as well as the virtual space at the same time because those are apples and oranges.

Those are completely different types of design work and that led us to both think differently about our staffing teams when we were building the project team itself.

But also to think about timing which is the fourth key part of our virtual exhibit and on-site exhibit process.

We learned from the Women at the Helm and thanks to the pandemic that we could research forever.

We could research and write forever and that we needed to start earlier.

Overall, you know, Women at the Helm we completed over the course of four months.

It was -- we cranked it out, it was a great timeline, I think the end result is beautiful but we feel like we could have put in more.

So we're giving ourselves as much time as possible, but recognizing these are annual projects that are approved and we have to complete them in less than a year.

So I have been suggesting this, but I wanted to pick it apart because I think this is an interesting example and will help you decide on a platform or who might be in my shoes, just how we decided, you know, what -- why didn't this work and why wasn't this the right platform?

Women at the Helm, it documents the lives and legacies of 14 different leaders from the 18th century to today and from the Champlain Valley.

It's both a great example of a history nerd's dream exhibit, as the virtual experience itself is just packed with information and stories and details and mixed media and archival information.

But it's also a great example of some serious lessons that were learned and the wrong platform choice.

When I break it down between the pros and the cons, this is how I shake it out.

Number one, we made that decision too early.

We shouldn't have picked the platform before we knew, you know, as Matt was saying what was the content, what was the story that we were sharing and who was the audience?

StoryMaps itself, if you're not picking up on the name it's just the wrong kind of storytelling.

You know, when your exhibit is really about women from the 18th to 19th, 20th century, especially in the 18th to 19th, women weren't moving around, there wasn't a lot of map-based movement for us to share, but we did have a lot of information, materials, photographs, archival documents documenting their lives.

There was a lot of 2 D and text information to communicate their lives like a season impact, which brings me to the different priority of visuals.

StoryMaps is a map-based platform.

Not something made for beautiful visuals and text as Google Arts & Culture is, it's not an Instagram.

It's Google maps, not maps but if you ever used the GIS mapping or ESRI information to share information, the more layers that you have, the longer it will take to load.

You need more power to communicate that information, which leads to the fourth main problem with StoryMaps in this exhibit: it is really slow to load.

The more information that we packed in.

You know, I think our curators and writers did the best to come to the right balance of using maps but working in the 2D elements and that was a design challenge for me we had a lot of material at the end of the exhibit and knowing that our audiences are located in rural Vermont, we were getting a lot of reports of our exhibit appearing broken online, but it was truly that their Internet providers couldn't handle the StoryMap application on their browsers.

Then finally, I think something that is valuable to bring up and Matt kind of mentioned this, because StoryMaps is a third-party platform we didn't have a lot of audience tracking information.

I couldn't track audience behavior either.

The most they'll give you is a full lifetime visitor account that you cannot divide out by month or by day.

We can't see any demographics about the viewers. we can't see their interaction stats.

Where are they starting, where are they leaving, what are they clicking on the most?

I will share two sorts of fixes that I came up with for the last problem.

I created a custom link for our exhibit connected to our own site and thus connected to our analytics and that let me track a little bit of the audience behavior.

But at the very least, where are they located, are they all new users, repeat people coming back again.

All that was tracking was people entering the exhibit so I couldn't see anything else beyond that.

I didn't know what they were doing after that and how long they were staying.

One solution to the audience behavior problem I had noticed was that when we launched this exhibit, we sent it to a batch of our target audience which is educators and historians and we were hoping that the teachers would use this in the classroom and for the students to learn and research about the local history and the local historians were looking for more history on the women in the Champlain Valley.

We asked them to beta test the exhibit and they were excited about this opportunity, and this allowed us to discover loading issues.

It created a positive encouraging atmosphere where this target audience felt really welcome to come back and share their thoughts and their questions and they have caught problems.

I got an email from a teacher who was like, hey, I think your StoryMaps is down and we caught an outage before the team knew about it and we were able to elevate it right away and we were able to get that StoryMaps, the exhibit back up for the teacher within about ten minutes.

That was awesome that we were able to open the line of communication we had never had before.

It was known I couldn't track it on StoryMaps so it was like saying, hey, track this for me.

So that was a nice little silver lining.

I will say sort of, you know, to say some cons on the pro side, because I'm not here to say that the StoryMaps is the worst, it's a beautiful application and very affordable.

We don't want to trash it completely, so the things I liked a lot for the Women at the Helm exhibit, they have some great and beautiful layout and formatting options.

There's a lot of -- it's -- there's a variety of choices but not too many so you can make it work for the content that you have.

It is automatically mobile friendly and this is a newer thing that StoryMaps has been working on.

If you're familiar with the platform, but were using it like three years ago it was not mobile friendly but now their default StoryMaps storytelling application is automatically -- they will do a mobile and a desktop version of your story.

If you have a map or a GIS or a location based story, it is perfect for that.

It tells beautiful regional map-based stories over the course of history or modern day stories and it is affordable.

I checked, you could build our exhibit using the free account level.

You just wouldn't have access to some of the customization features that we had to align with the brand.

That's where I would shake out, between the pros and the cons for us, I would summarize to say that the StoryMaps isn't the best application for this exhibit.

If I could go back in time, I would sooner design this specific Women at the Helm project on our own -- we have a word press site at the museum and we have a lot of built-in storytelling and visual modules that we have added -- again, they're free.

Word press, you have to do your research and know what's the right one for you.



But this exhibit was really rich in text, delightful imaginary and archival material and I would have wanted to give it a simpler space with less add-ons to really let the content itself shine.

Then I would have had it attached to our Google analytics and I would have known way more.

But for those of you who are really curious about StoryMaps or let's say that you have a mapping or a location-based story or exhibit that you'd like to share, I did want to share some specific specs about this platform.

Or if you have looked at the Women at the Helm exhibit and think it's beautiful and you want to know how we did it, I will share my interactive and design challenges for this one.

We're based on knowing our audiences.

We have two sort of main exhibit audiences.

We have the browser as I call them.

And then the super fans.

So I wanted to maintain a beautiful scrolling experience for our browsers so that they still got the main storyline as they sort of scrolled through on their phone or computer.

But I also wanted to provide super intense deep dives for the super fans who, you know, are just as much into the research and data as our own researchers are.

Seeing how excited my researchers got when they were writing this, I wanted to recreate that moment for our super fans knowing that I'd love, you know, diving into the one person story and learning what it was like to live in the lighthouse.

Knowing myself and the museum I wanted to skip over that part, so I wanted to create both experiences.

Then we had to decide if we wanted to tell the stories chronologically or in a different categorization.

One of the main questions we got when we surveyed the audience was what is a leader, so it's divided between three different types of leaders and there's an intersection.

So how did this translate into StoryMaps?

I will say this was built on our organizational account level, but as I said before you could literally create the exhibit that I made out of the account level but you can't brand your buttons the right color.

I used the Sidecar StoryMap format they give you when you open StoryMaps.

You are given a choice of three different storytelling slides or cards so I use the Sidecar and I put the Express Maps into the Sidecar slides which created the deep dive experience.

I created further by only adding red points on the map and I trained part -- part of the virtual experience, people will click and Zoom in on the information.

Any maps without a red point you can't click on it.

The other detail, there's four different sort of categories to the exhibit so it's actually -- it's one exhibit but it's actually four separate completely unique StoryMaps that we then used a simple drag and drop button feature to create a navigation at the bottom of each.

Seamlessly for the user's end, it is one linked umbrella exhibit where you go from room to room, if you will.

From section to section, to move from captains, back to scientists, back to info and scientists.

It was actually four completely different StoryMaps.

So that was a lot.

In summary, you know, I think my sort of final tips are the things that I would say if you didn't remember anything else, to reaffirm what Matt said, StoryMaps -- well, it's really about choosing the right platform and I really like StoryMaps.

It is a really interesting and powerful and affordable platform, but it's best suited for map-based media.

If you have an exhibit that's object or image or text based I would not recommend it.

You should choose the right platform based on the exhibit goals, story and content and your audience.

If you do end up in my shoes and find yourself stuck using a platform that might not be right or you weren't really sure and you're sort of noticing that it's not really right, take note.

Start taking notes about why it isn't right, source target audience feedback, invite people to beta test to affirm what is going wrong here, because that's helped for me, myself, and for our organization that's helped us make better decisions since then and our future.

We have changed how we plan the virtual exhibits in the future and I get to share this with our museum community and say, here's what I have learned.

Here's what worked, what didn't, and it's not only about your organization learning but helping us all to learn.

Finally, I built this exhibit with myself and two other people and then we completed the physical exhibit once we could kind of reopen.

So yes, you can do this with a small team.

Just give yourself the team.

Know your scope and know your content, but yes, you can do this.

And that's it.

If you have any questions or if you just want to ask a lot of StoryMaps questions or if in general you want to talk about digital exhibits this is my email and my Twitter handle.

Those are the best places to reach me.

And we also -- if you want to know more about the museum of Vermont, I would invite you to follow the museum on social media.

We do fun things.

Thanks so much.

>> That was great.

Got some questions rolling in and I'm going to read those to you.

As soon as we get ourselves on track here.

So a note for the audience.

During the technical workshop webinars that are going to follow this on the next three Thursdays from now, you'll hear more about virtual exhibition platforms and including word press.

So you can consider a lot of what Matt already said but we'll do a deep dive into a lot of the information over the coming weeks.

So thanks for the solid intro to all of this -- to this topic, guys.

All right.

First question.

What have your observations been about the interest of the public generally in the virtual exhibitions you have created?

Basically, do you feel it's a good use of a museum's resources to invest in that?

I'll just call on Matt first.

>> The short answer to that question is yes.

We have -- we have seen overwhelmingly positive responses to this and it's something that I think we were all quite surprised by.

Because we are in the French quarter and we often associate everything that we do with being, you know, sort of gallery traditional tourist based, and so the idea that people could come to a website, look at exhibitions that, you know, we had adapted to another format would be so popular was very surprising.

But it's been great.

To the point about whether or not it's a good investment of resources, that really comes to what kind of time your staff has because these things can be very, very time-consuming.

And so if you have a really limited, really small staff, if they don't have the most tech savvy nature, then it's the best way to employ somebody who is tech savvy to do that.

There are plenty of platforms that you don't need, but I would highly encourage people to explore the world of virtual exhibits.

It's something that is not going to stop for us.

If anything, it will get more intense.

>> Thanks.

Any add on to that, Meg?

>> I would agree completely, and I would add the further logic step question to Matt's, do you have the staff time and the resources and where are your audiences?

For us, you know, as I said it's the audience, it's a challenge for them to get to us and we can reach them easier online so it was worth the staff's time to give them an easier way to reach us.

Whereas, you know, the French Quarter I haven't been to, but I think they have a lot of the people walking in so you can wait maybe before you start the online exhibits so I would add that to your matrix.

>> Super.

Another question, do either of your museums do only virtual exhibitions or do you have a mix of virtual and in gallery exhibitions in each case?

Any strictly virtual exhibitions that you put on or is there a physical counterpart in each case?

I'll ask Meg first.

>> In terms of exhibit, I have argued strongly that we pair them with the physical exhibit.

That's how it's most important for our staffing and funding, however, we have done virtual only experiences.

I'm thinking about the virtual shipwreck tours.

That was something where I was using old media, and we created voiceover and we brought in diving experts to create an underwater virtual tour.

You can do that in person and there are a lot of people that don't dive so that was best for that audience.

>> Awesome.

Any thoughts on that, Matt?

>> We have only done one exclusively virtual exhibit, and it was specifically because we were planning on doing a full celebration for women's suffrage and during 2020 when that was going to open we couldn't open exhibits.

So we sort of had to -- here you go, here's that buzz word, we had to pivot and move to the all-virtual exhibit.

We generally like to pair them, so we don't -- in the past we have never done one without having a physical in gallery experience.

I don't think that's going to be the case going forward.

I think we are going to -- I mean, I don't think, I know for a fact, we're going to end up doing a lot of virtual content that doesn't have a physical complement to it.

It's not all going to look the same as our virtual exhibits look now.

There's going to be a combination of virtual formats and exhibits and then, you know, either smaller scale or just sort of different kind of programmatic things that will be virtual only.

>> I want to add in, I think if the question is should you do virtual only?

The next question is who's it for and what's the goal?

Maybe yes, maybe it's an exhibit, a tour, an experience that I think there's a lot of questions to ask and the answer might be yes, virtual only.

>> Okay.

So I have got a couple of questions that rolled in -- that are targeted towards one or the other, so let me put you on the hot seat here, Matt.

Don't you need some pretty skilled developers to work with Drupal?

Not cheap if you don't happen to have them on staff.

>> Yes, both of those are true.

I learned -- I got a crash course in sort of the back end design on Drupal very early on and -- in our pandemic exile, and I would not regard myself as being exceptionally tech savvy.

You know, I'm an elder millennial so I have the kind of tech expertise that comes with anybody my age, but it's certainly not exceptional.

And we need -- yes, I mean, Drupal requires people with coding and back end web page design skills.

So I mean, I don't hate Drupal but I don't love it.

It's very much a means to an end.

>> Great.

Great.

Let me -- there's one more that came in straight to Matt.

To be clear, did you do the watch parties in the Google Arts & Culture platform via an embed in your website?

>> No, we don't.

The way the watch parties went, in the exhibit if one of the movies that we were showing was going to be part of what we -- we called it #NOLA movie night, there was a

link that said you had to do it, but it gave you the options for streaming whatever the film was and then the Twitter handle for the Twitter page we had set up for this.

So we just used Google as a way to link directly to our site and we promoted it that way.

>> Got it.

Now I have one for Meg here.

We're planning to add technology funding sources on the museum learning hub at some point.

Where do you seek grant funding for virtual exhibitions and, Matt, feel free to chime in.

>> Yeah.

So for us, a lot of our exhibit funders they're local funding organizations and some of our best friends, I know they recently got re-established are the Champlain Valley national heritage partnership and the Lake Champlain based programs.

We found a lot of success focusing on the organizations who have the same priorities and the mission-based goals as we do.

You know, I would say it's similar to federal funding and they release their NOFOs and we track them and we know the application process.

>> Any experience there, Matt?

>> I mean, ours is a little bit -- we have a slightly different sort of set of needs when it comes to that because both of the platforms we use are free.

So the cost associated with implementing a virtual exhibit for us is really all tied up in the staff time.

And because, you know, our staff is set at the beginning of the fiscal year, you know, we don't have to do a lot of funding for that kind of thing.

If we had, you know, sort of hosting costs associated with the platforms that we use, then there are -- there are a lot of opportunities out there to get funding.

One thing I would encourage anybody to look into, a lot of state agencies will use their accessibility based funding to fund virtual exhibits because they feed directly into accessibility issues.

If you have trouble getting to the museum, getting in, getting around, you know, a museum, anything like that, then this is a way that you can as a museum professional you can get your work out there without having to have people come to you.

We're talking about funding now, I guess, because a couple of the next questions sort of evolve into that.

Aside from the grant revenue, what is the funding case for a virtual exhibit?

How do you charge for it if at all?

I'll shoot it to Meg and tag team it.

>> Sure, so the museum just switched to the free admission model, recognizing there are a lot of barriers for people to visit us.

Therefore, our virtual exhibits should follow the same model but something that works really well, building something you know is for the right audience and then tracking that audience behavior and that's why that statistic was so important to me.

Because then we report that back to our funders and we then use it in future proposals to really show the reach of the audience growth, how many people are coming back.

You know, how are we growing our audience and we use metrics to track, where does someone start and when do they subscribe to the email and inevitably if they love us and we have treated them in the best way possible, they can become a donor or a member.

They'll send their kids to our camps so it's about the lifetime value and not the one time you're checking on the exhibit.

I would say the audience stats are a great way to argue without charging for that exhibit.

>> I think Meg hit it on the head.

Being able to engage with a community with a targeted audience is paramount and that's the name of the game.

We have a free admission model, but for those of you who don't, there are ways to charge for admission to virtual exhibits that are similar to other kinds of online persevering.

If you ever live streamed a concert or something like that, there are hosting services that allow you to do that kind of thing.

I don't know how successful they are because it's a one-time deal and, you know, it's an exhibit.

So it's sort of the same kind of thing but it feels different often for the user because instead of being in a gallery and getting that experience, you're sitting in front of your computer doing it.

That's why it's really important to make sure that whatever you put in your virtual exhibit is really captivating, especially if you're going to charge for it.



>> Great.

Then just on a final note on that, have any -- have either of you worked with sponsors in association with the virtual exhibit, say local placement or acknowledgement type of sponsorship?

I see Meg nodding.

>> Yes and, granted, we think who our sponsors are and there's a value in being listed as a sponsor for the exhibit, or having your logo there that's valuable for your funder or the museum.

So yes, we share, you know, depending on the level of sponsorship, we will share logos, we'll share the websites.

We'll share a shout-out.

So yeah, I definitely have done sponsorships before and I'm seeing an increased interest in that.

I think that's partially as we grow in reputation and online standing, as well as just as the world has sort of switched to understanding virtual programs in a whole new way.

>> Any experience there, Matt?

>> We haven't.

And that's mainly because until -- really until this video on suffrage, all of the exhibits were born out of the physical exhibit.

If we had a sponsor or a partner, we don't usually do sponsorships because of the -- you know, sort of the bureaucratic red tape and some of the pitfalls with that, but we will often partner with people.

Different organizations, things like that.

When we do exhibits, so like, for example, we did an exhibit on sports in New Orleans and we were lucky enough to partner with the Tulane athletic department, the New Orleans Saints and the Sugar Bowl Committee so we did a very paired down experience and our sponsors are listed from that, that's part of the larger exhibition project as a whole.

>> Nice.

All right.

If we have time for just about one more question and then we'll do some wrap-up comments here.

Okay.

Is it possible for a single person with no in house or external help to maintain both physical and virtual exhibits?

How have you prioritized the needs for both?

So we're talking a lot -- talking to a lot of people here that are really a one-person band, if you will or two-person band.

So what's the feasibility here?

I know as I say, stay tuned for the next two weeks because we'll be talking more about that, but I'd love to hear what you all have to say.

>> I would say if you give yourself the time and you have scoped it out, and you're not trying to do multiple, physical and virtual exhibits, yes.

If you know yourself and your abilities, you know, if it were just me in a small museum, I knew my exhibits well and I wanted to build a virtual one as well, I believe I could do that.

But you need to give yourself the time.

I wouldn't try to do that on the same four-month timeline that we cranked out this one.

And then there is upkeep to it.

You know, as you're saying, there's maintenance of the physical space in the same way there's maintenance of your virtual space.

If there's an outage, reporting it and editing it is the same as editing a physical exhibit and it's about scoping out your priorities but I would say it's possible.

>> Yeah.

I would agree with that.

I think that's perfectly said, Meg.

It's really -- that is as much a question of what your time allows than it is anything else.

Time and expertise, you know, being comfortable with what you can and you can't do is really important, but I would -- you know, it's always good, I like to encourage people to reach out to younger people who are interested in getting into the museum field.

Especially when it comes to things that you may not be as comfortable doing.

If you could find, you know, somebody around you that's in graduate school that understands the ins and outs of understanding how to work whatever the platform is.

I will say Google it's very easy and very intuitive. You can set up an internship and work with somebody and develop that sort of educational component to everything that we do as museum people.

You know, the idea is to help educate people.

That's really the point.

So, you know, you have to be able to manage your team and be sure to manage your expectations.

Know what you'll have at the end of the day.

That needs to be goal Oriented.

Don't do it because you think you should do it, but do it because it has a purpose.

>> Super.

Thanks, Matt, and thanks, Meg, for your time today and for being our presenters at the intro to our virtual exhibitions module.

I'll give you a couple of housekeeping notes on the way out here.

Again, after each of the modules are finished, after the next three that we do, we will have all of the videos available on our website, as well as a complete toolkit of resources provided by the presenters.

Please remember to visit the forum on the website and ask questions.

Follow us on social media and stay aware of future programs.

Join us next week, August 12, 2021, at 11:00 a.m. Pacific and 2:00 p.m. eastern for the first technical workshop on the series and with an independent art historian from Pueblo, New Mexico.

One last reminder to complete the post event satisfaction survey and thank you for joining us today.

It's been a pleasure.