

ASSOCIATION OF MIDWEST MUSEUMS

INTRO SESSION: GET INSPIRED!

September 9, 2021

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>> : Hello, and welcome to the intro session for Module 6, focusing on podcasts. This webinar is brought to you by the Digital Empowerment Project, a nationwide initiative organized by the six US region museum associations and dedicated to providing free self-paced training resources for small museums. This inaugural series of online training focuses on digital media and technology topics and is made possible by funding from the Institute of Museum and Library services.

My name is Dan Yaeger, Executive Director of the New England Museum Association. My pronouns are in the he/him series, and I am your host for today's program. In this era of virtual meetings when digital spaces may substitute for our physical sense of place, it is important to reflect on the land we each occupy and honor the indigenous people who have called it home. I am speaking to you from Swamp Scott, Massachusetts, north of Boston, the historical homeland of the Massachusetts peoples. Wherever we are each located, let us acknowledge the indigenous nations as living communities, their elders both past and present, as well as future generations. We the Digital Empowerment Project 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 work and to respect the diversity of cultures and experiences that form the richness of our world and our profession. Thank you. And now for a few housekeeping notes before we introduce today's presenters and dig into the content. I would like to acknowledge today's ASL interpreters and let you know that captioning for today's program is embedded in a box just below the YouTube player on our website with controls to adjust your experience.

The best way to continuously refine our craft is to listen to our attendees so we ask that you share your candid feedback with us. Following today's program we will be sending a link to a satisfaction survey.

Sharing your experience with the survey will only take a few minutes and will greatly

improve our work. During today's program we will address as many of your questions as time allows. However, sometimes we are unable to answer all of them, and frequently, asked questions that can arise after reflecting on a program. So we have set up an online community forum for raising questions, posting answers, and connecting with your fellow museum practitioners on our website. If you are looking for help in between programs, please visit the form on our website, create a log in, and post your questions.

A member of the community or one of our student technology fellows will get back to you. Lastly, please follow us on social media to be aware of future programs. Links will be posted in the chat. It is now my pleasure to introduce today's speakers. First, Joe Williams, the Director of Native American Programs at the Plains Art Museum in Fargo, North Dakota. And next up will be Amanda Kay Gustin, the Public Programs Manager and fellow New Englander for the Vermont Historical Society. Located in Barre, Vermont. Thanks so much to you both for your time and expertise. Joe, over to you.

>> JOE WILLIAMS: Thank you, Dan. My name is Joe Williams, I am tje Director of Native American Programs here at the Plains Art Museum here in Fargo, North Dakota. I am Dakota from the [indiscernible], which is on the Lake Traverse City Reservation in South Dakota. Before I get into the presentation on the podcast, I would like to give the Plains Art Museum land acknowledgments. If we can go to the next slide.

The Plains Art Museum is located within the sovereign lands of the [indiscernible]. It is especially important to note that the Plains Art Museum also sits on the shores of the [indiscernible] which is known as the Red River. It is a key trade and transportation route for countless nations going back several millennia. We honor the [indiscernible] and will continue to seek and understand our place within this long tradition of custodial care upon this land and river. One note I wanted to make about our land acknowledgments is that in creating this we approached both the Dakota elders and [indiscernible] educators and we wanted to make sure that we created a land acknowledgment that had their guidance and a lot of their language.

So it was crafted around their input. What makes our land acknowledgment -- what I feel personally is special, is that it's also in Dakota and [indiscernible] for, by original speakers for original speakers and I think it was important to reflect a land acknowledgment that reflected the people that are from this land.

The purpose of the five plain questions podcast. First off, it's a podcast that focuses on indigenous and Native American artists that are from initially the region but now around the country. The purpose is to be able to inspire indigenous youth by sharing their success stories but also to redefine what a successful American native is. Growing up I really was only exposed to the top-tier success stories and kind of felt that that was what success was for Native Americans.

So what we want to do is redefine successful as people who are actively working in community, helping those in the community and to show and to highlight people who are doing great things. The story also of indigenous artists needs to be told by indigenous artists in their own voice from their own words. Not filtered by curators such as myself or administrators, but actually comes from those who are living their story.

The audience of the five plain questions podcast. There are three tiers to this. Here in North Dakota we had an incident about five or four years ago now called standing rock. And what had happened is that an oil company had developed a pipeline from the Northwest and was delivering oil down to the South. And initially the pipeline had run through Bismarck, North Dakota, and the community there got together and said no, we do not want this pipeline. So the Army Corps of Engineers redesigned the routes and sent it through the Standing Rock Reservation in southern North Dakota.

Without good faith talks with the Standing Rock tribe. Of course, from that there was a protest that developed, and those protesters were called water protectors by indigenous people. Now, the local media, which was funded by the oil companies, really twisted the story of what was going on and really focused on the negative of the protest without

actually giving a voice to the indigenous people who were protesting. So even though the message by indigenous protesters was very clear to the rest of us who are indigenous and their supporters, it was not translated into, through the media.

So there is a lot of confusion in the area. They weren't given a platform to be able to share their story. So the podcast has developed, it's an audio podcast, it's not digital, for the purpose of being able to connect the voice of the speaker to the ears of the listener. To strip away any sort of preconceived notions of who they are listening to so that they will be able to relate to the hopes and fears and to the ambitions of the person that they are listening to, often, which are shared by the listener as well, to make that personal connection. The second part of the audience is indigenous people. I want to be able to share these stories with people on the reservation or in the urban area who are from -- or have a Native American heritage to see that there are people like them, either relatives or friends, who have the same ambitions and the same goals and see that other people are doing it and they can, too.

And the third part of the audience, which I feel is the most important, is indigenous youth. I think it's incredibly important that young people have people to look up to, to have inspiration, to show them that there is a way forward. Like I had stated before, when I was a kid the only, really, pop-culture hero that I had to look up to was Billy Mills. He was a 1964 10,000-meter gold medal runner and they made a movie about his life. I have since become friends with Billy Mills and it, while it was great that that story was out there and it really inspired me but I wasn't a runner that wasn't my goal. There weren't a lot of stories out there.

When I was in high school, I wanted to join, or I wanted to go to this art camp, and I was kind of on the fence. And one night a PBS local station did a feature on an artist named Robert Penn and he was a Lakota artist and they showcased him, and it was a great story. And at the end of the episode my dad had asked me if I had filled out that application yet because we just saw this really successful artist. I hadn't and he instructed me to do so. And that program and that night sort of has led me on the path

that brings us here today.

What I want to do is create a podcast that shares stories of artists and movers and shakers and culture bearers and musicians and writers so that other youth have more of a selection of people to inspire them. So that is really the driving force behind the podcast.

In creating the podcast I have been here at the Plains Museum for three years now and a lot of the programming that we do here, one is exhibitions. We bring in artists, we set up a space for them to show their artwork. We create artist talks; we have different kinds of programs that engage the community. We have workshops so that community members can come in and maybe work with the artist or the museum staff by creating artwork inspired by the exhibition.

The problem with that, though, is that for someone to, for us to engage with somebody they have to come into our building, and they have to engage with us in the small space here. And I understand that a lot of individuals from our community don't come to this building. While it is free for all, the museum in general has -- those who normally don't come to a museum may caution on not coming in when there are events and that is an issue that many of us deal with.

So I have been trying to think about how to create programming that is community engaging out of community and how do we connect to people that normally wouldn't come to this museum. So I developed a few different programs and one thing that was in the back of my head was maybe creating a podcast. In my background I do have a radio background. I've been on a couple different radio shows in my past and I thought well it would be kind of neat to do a podcast on this.

But it was always shelved for various different reasons. When the pandemic hit we had to shut the museum down for several months so we had to cancel a lot of our programming. And I thought to myself well, now is a perfect time to try this podcast. One to keep things going with my program but two, why not? There are a lot of artists

not doing a lot of stuff right now and who are looking for opportunities to get word out about their work.

So with the museum support we started the podcast. Now, Eleven Warrior Arts LLC is an LLC I have on the side of the museum. Up to this point we were creating YouTube videos, doing some media stuff, real small-scale stuff. It was a side project. The museum did not have the broadcast or the technology to be able to put a podcast together.

And I know for those of you who do podcasts, I realize it's not that complicated of a thing, but you know at the museum we don't have the largest budget. The LLC that I have has some of that equipment that we could use. So we teamed the two together and we started creating work. Ironically, the first several episodes of this podcast, which are some of our really great episodes, were created on an iPad. Using free software that comes with your Macintosh computer.

So it was a DIY project. We decided to go with a weekly series so there is a lot of phone calls, a lot of emails, a lot of scrambling to make things happen on a consistent basis. And for the most part we are almost done with season two and we have been consistent for a year and a half now. I am pretty proud of that fact. But through this support of the Eleven Warrior Arts and guidance with the Plains Art Museum we are able to keep this going and to date I think we are 63 episodes in. We have mid 50s artists that we have engaged with through this podcast series.

And I am pretty proud of that. Now that we are a little farther and things have expanded a little bit, we are still using the studio space, we have some other microphones that we use. We use an online tool called Zencast, which is a nice quality audio service that is provided where the device tracks up and because of the pandemic we have been doing a lot of our interviews online.

So Zoom has its drawbacks, some of these online platforms the audio is not always the

best and so I am pleased with the software that we have been using through Zencastr. Not perfect, but we make do with what we have. We have been able to do some in-studio interviews, but of course with the Delta variant popping up we have backed off on that again and we have gone back to the Zencastr use.

For editing we have been using Adobe Audition. Which is very similar to a lot of different online tools that you can use. It has been fairly a painless process for the most part. When a lot of people start podcasts -- one thing I did was when I started this podcast, I knew I wanted to interview artists. I didn't want this to be an opinion piece about me, I did not want to have Joe's thought of the day. No one is going to be tuning in for that.

And how I developed it, I guess, was I did a precursory research on successful podcasts and of course the theme is a big part of it and I want to stay consistent to focusing on Native American artists or people in the arts, various different things they are doing. I also decided to focus on five general questions that you can really ask anybody in any field.

The questions aren't always the same because sometimes you can't ask a doctor the same thing you can ask an artist. But in general, you know, inspirations, opportunities, those kinds of things. Then there are follow-up questions. I don't want to miss opportunities to dig deeper into some of the answers that have really good stories. While five plain questions is a simple title and it's a play on the museum's name, I think five general questions [indiscernible] is not as a catchy title name for a podcast.

That is the general process on how the podcast goes. While the interviewing is the fun part and I kind of like editing, there is a lot of front-end research, deciding who the artist is going to be and connecting with them and finding a date to connect. And then the day of the interviews making sure the equipment is working, making sure that everything is lined up and then the editing process. And listening to the interview several times before we get it out there. Then the quality checks at the end.

So while a podcast may be 40 minutes, we are still talking six or eight hours of prep and post-production work to make sure that that quality is there. It is a labor of love. Quite often on Tuesday nights I'm up till midnight working on a podcast to make sure it is ready to go because we post a new episode every Wednesday.

That is where we are at there.

The future of podcasting. While there is a picture of me in this photo the purpose is not to say that I'm the future of indigenous podcasting. The reason is that a lot of podcasts are home productions. They are something that is a labor of love and while we work hard to have a high-quality sound that means having a space that we don't have echoing or don't have a fan blowing covering us up. There's a lot of work to make sure the sound is good, and you can achieve that in a home space that you have designed.

Not in a high-quality studio. So I hope that the indigenous creators who might be seeing this or who want to start a podcast know that they do not have to have a super studio supported by some big broadcast network to make that come true. And while I want to - - the podcast I'm currently working on and the one I am developing to be of the highest quality, and it's always great to be on top of the game, number one, I don't want us to be the only indigenous podcast about artists.

If someone wants to develop something I would be more than happy to encourage them, to support them in any way. Because we need more voices out there telling stories or being creative and inspiring people. So I hope that in a few years I am one of dozens of podcasts out there. There are some really good podcasts out there. But I want to make sure that if someone is doing something like a podcast that they are focusing also on the quality of the presentation.

So that we raise the bar on what we are doing. So I would really love to have -- to see that there is a whole community of podcasts out there in the future or storytellers. That really is the hope for the future. And I hope I am part of that. At least an inspiration to

them as well.

I want to thank you so much for your time in listening to this. If you want to reach out to me, here's my contact information. I would love to connect with you. If you have any questions or ideas that would be great. You are going to see some things that you will see on social media. 11warriorarts is on Twitter, elevenjoe is my personal thing on Instagram. And also, on Facebook it is Native American arts at the Plains is what we use on Facebook.

I want to thank the Museum Learning Hub and here's their contact information for bringing me in. The group has been absolutely wonderful in working with me. With all of that being said I would now like to turn this over to Amanda Gustin.

>> AMANDA KAY GUSTIN: Hi, everyone. My name is Amanda Gustin. Thank you so much to the Museum Learning Hub for having me here today. As I mentioned, my name is Amanda Kay Gustin, I'm a Public Program Manager at the Vermont Historical Society and the Vermont Historical Society located in Barre and Montpelier, Vermont, and we acknowledge that we do our work on land that has long served as a site of meeting and exchange of indigenous peoples, the western [indiscernible] have been caretakers of this land, which they call [indiscernible]

We seek to address historical inclusion by embracing an inclusive understanding of the Vermont experience and in partnership with multiple communities we work to educate the public about inequities and work to change our own institution on the inside.

I want to give a brief overview of things I will be talking about today. First, a focus on storytelling. Second, a section I call function drives form. Third, organizational capacity. Fourth, partnerships. And finally, some takeaways. I wanted to design this as things I wish I had known when I started doing a podcast almost four years ago.

So hopefully, you will get some process notes as well as some lessons learned. You

may come across things in this presentation and think gosh, I have no interest in doing that, but part of what we will do is provide those examples.

So the Vermont Historical Society I always find it useful when people give context of their institutions. We are an independent nonprofit. We are the Statewide Historical Society for the State of Vermont. We have an annual operating budget of around \$2 million. We have 12 full-time staff and 3 part-time staff. We have two physical spaces, the Vermont History Museum, that is in the capital of the state, Montpelier, and the Vermont History Center, which is where I'm speaking to you from today in front of this beautiful mural that was installed in February of 2020.

So you are among the handful that have seen it in its place. And that is where we house our research administration and our collections storage. Just a brief note on Vermont for those of you who are not familiar with our little corner of the world. It is tiny. Those two cities I mentioned Barre and Montpelier together have just under 15,000 people, which makes this one of the larger metropolitan areas in the state. And we have a statewide mission. So we have a physical location in the center of the state, but our mission is across the entire state and across the entire sweep of the state's history.

So as you can imagine with that staff we work hard to get out and cover as much of that as possible and the podcast is part of the way that we do that. Joe had mentioned, and I want to second this, that for us podcasts have been a way to provide engagement outside the physical space of our museum.

So our podcast is called before your time and it's at [beforeyourtime.org](http://beforeyourtime.org) if you want to look at the back episodes. We began in 2017 as a full partnership with the Vermont humanities council and initially partnership at the local news organization called [vtdigger.org](http://vtdigger.org). They stepped down after about 12 months and now it is just with the Vermont Humanities Council.

We have produced a total of 24 episodes, and they run about 25 minutes each. Our

style of podcast is highly produced. It is a narrator, a central neutral narrator that links three to four story segments and it is always centered around an object.

I will talk a little bit more about what that means. By starting with our storytelling question. So on the screen you can see a photograph that I took not too long ago, actually. And this is on the right the older gentleman is Paul Carnahan, our longtime VHS librarian. And standing behind the camera is Hannah, who is an intern from the University of Vermont who has been working with us on all sorts of AV production and works a little bit on the podcast with us right now.

And I use this photograph to illustrate for you that collections equal content for us. We started this podcast as a way to bridge our collection storage. The old saw about museums having most of their collections in storage at any given time and not on exhibit. We started this as a way to get the collections out of the physical walls.

So for us content always starts with our collections. One of those examples is -- I want to give a couple examples of episodes we have done. On the left you can see a photograph of a 19th century ballot box. You can't get a sense of scope or size from this photograph, but I tell you this is a small wooden handmade box that would fit about in the palm of your hand.

It is quite small. It shows signs of wear, there is handwritten paper on it indicating which office it would have been used for at any given time. This is an example of how we use podcasts to build on our collection. We take an object, and we ask it questions. I like to think of it as asking the object questions. So in this case we ask the ballot box questions and some of the answers we got spun off into stories about democracy.

For example, we did a segment on post-World War II American nation building using Vermont as a model. The State Department filmed a news reel called a town solves a problem of a town meeting in Pittsborough, Vermont, and they used that around the world after World War II.

With all of the problems inherent in that. Another segment on how democracy in Vermont adapted to COVID. We interviewed legislators who were responsible for passing legislation for mail-in ballots. And town clerks who worked on adapting our traditional town meeting format. And we also talked to a scholar of democracy on the lessons American democracy can draw from Vermont's small format town meeting tradition.

Another example of drawing on collections for an archive is an example of a partnership episode. On the left you can see a T-shirt with a design by Alison Bechtel, some of you might recognize the cartoonist. It is a pride T-shirt from the Vermont queer archives just housed at the Vermont Pride Center, and it's got a grumpy looking cow holding up a sign. We will call him a resolved-looking cow holding up a sign that says Stonewall 25.

And the source we spun out of that were we visited the Pride Center and talked to the curator of the Vermont queer archives about their holdings and early pride parades, that was actually our object and our collections focus for the episode.

We worked with an individual who had been gathering for quite a long-time oral histories of Andrew's Inn, a very early gay bar and community space in Bellows Falls, Vermont. We invited guest podcaster Reggie Condra to spin a segment based on his long-standing podcast called brown and out, and he asked members of the LGBTQ community what does it mean to be brown and out in Vermont. And shared those answers with us.

And we focused on the life and career of Ron Squires, who was Vermont's first openly gay state legislator and interviewed members of his family. Lots of different questions of that from that. What I mean by focusing on storytelling through podcasts is that it is your story to tell. And we work very hard, and I would recommend to anyone to use your strengths. Identify those strengths and work from those strengths for a podcast to tell your story. So collections, mission, and audience connection. Those can all be

different strengths. Do you have a connection with a specific audience? Do you have a question that is particularly rich in an area?

We always talk in museums about focusing in as tightly as possible. And as thoughtfully as possible on your mission and that has absolutely been the case for us at the Vermont Historical Society here. Developing your voice to tell that story. You are going to have your own perspective and you are going to have your own expertise. But a podcast I want to emphasize I say but also share. It can and should be an opportunity to reach out and to connect with other communities within your area, with other individuals, and share that voice of authority.

And last, I emphasize for our podcast quality over quantity. And I also note that you define quality, and you define quantity. But you should also focus on consistency over either of those things. Which is to say gradually improving the quality of your audio, improving the quality of your storytelling and so on is terrific but we work very hard not to have one episode be of a totally different style, a totally different quality than the other and we also work hard not to dump three episodes in two months and disappear for a couple of months.

Which is tricky. I would emphasize and focus on quality over quantity. I also want to say that podcasting is an intimate medium. There's something about having a human voice in your ear that makes you feel connected to the people talking to the institution that is producing it, or to the group that is producing it.

And it can be a way to deeply connect with your audience. And that can be a real benefit for you in playing to your strengths. So function driving form. This is my lessons learned section. I just tossed up -- you will learn a lot about the technical aspects of podcasting, but I tossed up some possible forms here. And I'm sure some of you out there watching this thinking about starting a podcast or working on a podcast have listened to podcasts and you have your own favorite styles and your own favorite form.

I am here to say that when I work in nonprofit institutions with limited time, budget, and staff resources that as you are thinking about starting a podcast you should consider that function can drive form. For example, what are you able to do? I will -- the list here is are you able to pay a professional neutral narrator? Are you able to be your own charismatic narrator? Early on I knew that was something that I could not do. We did not necessarily have an individual who could be the consistent, always charismatic voice of a podcast, which is fine.

But that is something you have to know whether or not you have. Do you have the ability to interview multiple people for a single podcast? Or would you like to drill down and interview one person for a podcast? How much time do you have available to edit the podcast? And for that matter expertise, do you have available to edit the podcast? Are you doing this by yourself, or do you have other staff members to draw on? I do for the Vermont Historical Society side probably 75 percent of our podcast work. And then we are lucky to have a handful of interns that have worked on it over the years and a handful of other staff members who have taken on a segment here and there.

But you need to be realistic about that upfront because things change. Do you have the ability to use archival audio, or do you plan to use archival audio? Do you have the ability to do a ton of additional research to frame an interview or segment that you have done or not? Do you have the ability and time to work with outside and partner organizations? All of these things will add complexity, they will add time to your workflow. So all of those things can also drive your form.

You could do a single interview podcast, as Joe's podcast was. As he described, you can do multiple interviews, which is a little bit more the Vermont Historical Society, what we have done with our podcast. You can do conversational, back and forth with two people or are you focusing on one voice? That single charismatic narrator. You're in there to follow this narrated individual's journey through the story.

Or do you have a neutral narrator who bridges your interviews and your segments, that

is where we have gone with. There's another podcast here in Vermont from the Vermont Folklife Center that is more or less pure archival sharing. They have this extraordinary collection of oral histories, and they share them through this podcast. They do brief intros but largely they rest the strength of the podcast and it's a really good podcast on these voices from the archives.

Which is not to say they have eliminated all of their editing work. They still spend quite a lot of time editing but that has been their signature style and their introduction to their collections. Do you have a broad or a specific theme? This is going to be driven by your mission and is it ongoing? Do you do it on a regular basis or do you do it for a short-focused series or season? Do you do six in the season and take an X number of months break and do another chunk of them? All of these are going to be driven by what you are able to do.

I would encourage you as you are thinking about this to be extremely pragmatic. I feel like every time I give a presentation in a museum setting, I am the person saying be as pragmatic as possible, be realistic and for us lessons learned whatever you do has to be sustainable.

We started off at the absolute, and I'll show you in a second, our process we started off at the absolute top end of all these things because we had a certain vision for the podcast that we wanted to and we just worked extraordinarily hard to get there. And sometimes I wish maybe we had gone a little more simplistic when we first started doing this. So with that in mind this is a lot. But I wanted to lay out for you what goes into making every episode keeping in mind these are about 25-minute episodes. I just book-ended an average time per episode, which is about 25 hours, which I actually think is a little low.

And an average cost per episode of about \$1000. So just briefly running down it, identify the topic, identify the speakers, interview speakers, interview VHS staff for the object pieces, create a podcast script from transcripts, we have to send it out to be

transcribed, and stitch that script together, rewrite the narration, we edit that script sending out to a second or third set of eyes. We do a first clip of the interview audio, we do a rough narration, then we do a rough cut, pairing the narration with the audio.

We listen to that rough-cut -- my counterpart at the Vermont Humanities Council swears I'm listening to it in the car. We make changes based on that. We share the script back with the speakers for their approval and any changes that they feel strongly should be made.

We record a final professional narration then we do another round of editing to produce a smoother final project adding in music and transitions and we upload it for a distribution site. We create the website learning page, which includes photos and a final transcript of the episode. We prepare marketing materials, photos, short clips, social media pieces, and then we release the episode. We also then follow up by tracking metric at 7 days, 30 days, and 90 days.

You can see we're in the deep end of process here. It is quite a lot of work. Which is a natural lead into organizational capacity. This is again where I am going to say be pragmatic. What skills and capacities do you already have on staff? You never know. People have skills -- Joe was talking about he already had this production company that has some of the equipment necessary. In our case we had received a grant a couple years earlier for an oral history project that meant we had some high-quality recording equipment that gave us a jumpstart.

We were lucky to have that. What skills and capacities are you willing and able to develop? This may be a great growth area for someone. Learning more AV skills, especially in this moment where we are often doing things remotely, is rarely a bad idea.

What budget can you commit to the project? Both as a startup cost, which is almost going to be more, especially if you do have to purchase equipment, software and so on.

And what is going to be sustainable over that longer-term? And I want to emphasize here, podcasts -- I find podcasts to be like exhibits, they expand to fit the time, space, and budget available. They will soak up everything that you have if you let them and if you are not careful. So guardrails are a useful thing as you are thinking about these. All of these -- answering all of these questions. I want to say a brief note on partnerships. As I mentioned, our podcast is produced in full partnership with the Vermont Humanities Council, who are terrific. And you may also be thinking to yourself maybe I can seek someone else out for a partnership to take on some of these skills and capacities that I don't necessarily already have.

Some of these are things that are probably not going to be new to you, but I did want to reiterate them in context of producing a podcast, which is that a partnership is a relationship before all else.

You should value in your partnership, especially a complicated digital project that may be running on tight deadlines and that is going to reflect a shared vision and a shared institutional representation.

You should have before all else as I headlined there, flexibility, honesty, and communication. My notes are that partnerships can add capacity, perspective, audience, authority, and joy. I love, so my counterpart Ryan always looks at things from a slightly different angle than I do. I'm a historian and he is a marketing person and a humanities scholar. And I love getting his perspective on these things and which object speaks to him as we are choosing objects and which stories speak to him.

It -- our brainstorm sessions are a blast. But I also emphasize that not every partnership lasts forever and that's okay. I mentioned earlier on that we started this podcast with three organizations, and we are now down to two. And the most important thing knowing when we dropped to two was that VT Digger needed to step down and that we understood that. And that we had a discussion about ways to move forward. Which leads into keep talking to make sure you're roughly on the same page. Ryan and

I talk quite a lot. We're always shooting emails like hey let's check in about this, where is this, what is next on this? So on and so forth.

And always keeping in mind that different organizations have different values and priorities and that is okay. You may evolve differently from each other and away from your shared project. Also okay. But being honest and flexible about that is crucial. A memorandum of understanding, an MOU, can be helpful during the project but the moments when it's going to be most helpful are at the beginning and the end. You don't want to get to the end and realize we should have had an agreement on who gets custody of these digital files at the end of this project.

Or who is going to agree to pay the website cost to keep up perpetuity, you want that spelled out when you're in the throes of working on the project and have front of mind and have a full understanding of it.

My last tips and takeaways for you are that collections and mission drive storytelling. To be honest and pragmatic about your capacity and your resources, both those you already have on hand and those you are able to develop. And to seek out new perspectives and voices. As I mentioned, podcasting is an intimate medium, it is an extraordinary way to meet new people and to bring new ideas into the conversation.

And to expose yourself to different stories. Part of our mission statement is to connect people to Vermont's story, to connect you to Vermont's story and seeking out new perspectives is one of the most crucial ways that we do that through this podcast. I would be delighted to have any contact with any of you at any time. Reach me at the [amand.gustin@vermonthistory.org](mailto:amand.gustin@vermonthistory.org). My phone number is there, but like many of you, I am working from home largely. Although I am at my desk one or two days a week, so please feel free to reach me there, but please understand that I will not be immediately reachable there. I am one of those people who checks email constantly so that is probably the best way to get ahold of me.

And please check out the Vermont Historical Society. There is all of our social media pieces and I also want to mention again that the website for a podcast, because it is a partnership podcast, it has its own website, although you can reach it from all of our presences on the web. That is [beforeyourtime.org](http://beforeyourtime.org). All of those are the ways to reach the Vermont Historical Society and the last one is me on LinkedIn.

Thank you, everyone, for watching along. Hopefully learning something, hopefully not getting too intimidated, and thinking about producing your own podcast now. And thank you again to the Museum Learning Hub and to the Institute of Museum and Library Services for making this learning afternoon possible. And it is now my pleasure to turn it back over to Dan. It's my understanding that he will moderate any of the questions that you have sent in during this time.

>> : Awesome. Thank you, Amanda and Joe, that was really terrific. Great presentation. I do have to say I am very impressed by your podcasts. Everybody out there listening I do encourage you to take a listen to each of them. They are very different and distinct in terms of their look and feel and obviously, their audiences, but there are a lot of similarities as well. So I think listening to a few episodes will be very instructive. One question I really do have to ask is -- part of the creation story, what kind of hoops did you have to jump through in order to get this idea of doing a podcast approved by the powers that be? Did you have to dance a little bit and say this is going to fit into our mission or our strategy? And then how do you reenlist that support as time goes on to show that you're actually doing what you say that you did?

>> : I actually have a fun origin story for a podcast, if I can go first, Joe. Which is that in the spring of 2017 before we started our podcast our director was newish and as a fun thing for the staff to do is he broke us up into teams, and he said if I gave you \$5000 of seed money for any project you can imagine what would you do with it and we had four teams that came up with ideas.

All of which were phenomenal. Then we presented them to a group of constituents of the Vermont Historical Society, close friends and fortunately/unfortunately the podcast

was my team's idea and we won. I guess you can say we had buy-in from the very beginning. We had that budgeted seed money, and it took quite a bit longer to actually flush out the initial ideas that we had pitched in that just-for-fun presentation.

But it was from the beginning we had buy-in, and we are so small that we all talk constantly anyway. As for keeping it buy-in, you know I said that one of our last steps is to do stats check-ins at 7, 30, and 60 days to get a sense of how the episodes are doing out there in the world, what kinds of downloads we are getting. So that's an important metric for us in saying we have been able to reach this many people and it is this many times what many of our other programs reach for us, this is exponentially and without question our biggest way to reach people.

The biggest number of people who connect to this product. And also, we keep an eye on if there is something that is in the news or something we want to talk about, it feels like we almost always have done a podcast on it. So we are able to keep pulling back in the archives and say we talked to this person about this topic about a year ago and you may find their perspective useful. So that is another measure by which we keep it going and we say this is an evergreen thing, this is a thing we can keep referring back to and that can keep being part of our content that we produce.

>> : Joe.

>> JOE WILLIAMS: I think from our place I really did not have too much effort to get it going. I had a lot of support from my boss. Although I think he said later that he assumed it was going to take many months to get worked out and to get it going. And all I needed from him really was just a yes and I started jumping on it and started making phone calls and doing interviews. And suddenly we were at an administrative meeting, and I was talking about my fourth episode that we had just released, and he was surprised that it had even gotten going yet.

So he was surprised, but then I also knew he was not listening to the podcast because

he did not know it was going on, which is fine. I think while it -- I had a green light in the beginning. I think the nice thing is that the museum hasn't so much interjected themselves into the process. They just gave me the space to go with it and we have been trying to seek support to expand the podcast and the production, so they have been active in trying to support that as well.

But that process takes a little longer.

>> : So tell me a little bit about -- you both mentioned that it takes quite a bit of time. Amanda, you put a dollar figure by it and so are people going to freak out and say look I just can't afford \$1000? Some of that must be in kind, that's staff time and whatever? That is out-of-pocket cost for you?

>> AMANDA KAY GUSTIN: Some of it is in kind. I should be more accurate. Some of this is in kind staff work and as I tried to emphasize, we chose the absolute most involved version we could be doing. I want to emphasize that. I don't want anybody to be scared off by that number.

>> : These are like NPR public radio kinds of productions, with a narrator and so on. Is that right?

>> AMANDA KAY GUSTIN: Yeah.

>> : So they're highly produced and the like. Joe, I don't know if it's the other end of the spectrum, but the interview format is a lot more straightforward. You put a mic in front of somebody's face and get their story. I don't want to discount the amount of editing that it takes, though, to break up all of that into something meaningful. Would you say that you two are at opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of what is required for producing something as a sort of a scripted type of a thing from Amanda and Joe, you doing the interview approach?

>> JOE WILLIAMS: I think that would be accurate. Although I do produce a script for

every episode. It's not as involved with research and whatnot.

>> : And that's like your intros and transitions and the like?

>> JOE WILLIAMS: Yes.

>> : Amanda, who does the scripting? Is that you that actually scripts? Because the whole thing is really nailed down.

>> AMANDA KAY GUSTIN: Yeah. That is partially why we use that process of having the interviews. Each interview some of what you're seeing in time there is each interview was usually about an hour long. And that is for about eight minutes of final audio. We are in Vermont so I'm probably driving to someone's house. For that segment on Ron Squires I drove to his mother's house, which is two and half hours away. We had tea first, we sat down and looked through the archives that she had kept of his life and his work and then we sat down and talked.

And then I drove two and half hours home and then we transcribed that, which is many, many pages. We looked through that for pieces that would tell the story, cut that via written script, used the narrator voice to bridge any pieces, fill in a little bit of back story, and backgrounds and things like that to drop in dates. I always tell people I interview we are going to make you look like a rock star no matter what.

We can edit this, we will cut out any of your hesitations, we will fill in the dates that you have forgotten. All of these things so that is part of the editing process. I would say for me personally the absolute biggest learning curve was not necessarily the tech or anything like that, it was the podcast voice.

Writing in podcast voice I kept tripping over it I can't even tell you. It was so different than anything else I had done, and I have done a ton of writing. From exhibits to academic --

>> : What do you mean by podcast voice? What is that?

>> AMANDA KAY GUSTIN: Joe is laughing. Joe knows what I'm talking about. It's something about writing out a casual voice on paper that it's really hard. It is really difficult. And I struggled mightily with it.

>> : Let me ask you this, how does your latest episode compare with your very first episode, both of you? How do they look? If you go back to your first episode, do you cringe now looking back, listening to it again? Or is it pretty much the same? Joe?

>> JOE WILLIAMS: My structure is pretty solid. The five questions and follow-up. I think structurally wise it is the same. Audio is a little different because we upgraded our microphones and editing tools since then. I try to make it a point not to listen to old episodes or to myself. I still can't get used to it. And the podcast is a thing. So I think it is pretty true to the beginning. I am sure -- I have definitely streamlined some things along the way. Things that I say, and I think about next season how -- I don't want to change it too much because I feel like sometimes if you change the brand too much you might lose interest.

I think it's pretty close to how it started off. It has only been a year, so it's not like we're too far into it.

>> : Amanda.

>> AMANDA KAY GUSTIN: We started ours pre-COVID so I would say that the process was different in that we had to go from that driving to people's living rooms and recording them to using -- we also use Zencast, which is the tool that Joe mentioned, which we found excellent. I would say the biggest change for us is not necessarily in quality but it's in confidence, in telling stories.

And taking a little bit more abstract questions from our objects instead of saying how

was this used as a core question. Our very first episode was about the 1927 flood, which remains the biggest natural disaster in Vermont's history, and we used a rug beater that was used to beat mud out of rugs in a home that had flooded, and we kept pretty closely hewed to that flood. We talked a little bit about how to encourage infrastructure in Vermont, but our more recent episode was about the catamount in Vermont. We have in our museum the last catamount shot in Vermont and we asked questions. We had a member of the Abenaki community and asked his perspective on the catamount and on landscape change in Vermont. We talked to the Director of Athletics at UVM about what it means to be a Vermont catamount and how the symbol of the catamount has translated to a sports symbol.

So we have got a little bit more flexible, a little more abstract with our questions but also getting a little bit more at the heart of why these objects connect to us.

>> : For those of you who are not New Englanders you will have to Google what a catamount is.

>> AMANDA KAY GUSTIN: Sorry, it's a mountain lion. I always do that.

>> : Let them Google it. Let me ask you this. The pandemic, has it changed your approach to the podcast at all beyond the obvious of needing to interview people in a different format and the like? Have you accelerated? Have you found additional visitors or viewers -- listeners? Because of what the pandemic has produced? Any differences?

>> AMANDA KAY GUSTIN: Sorry, Joe. Go ahead.

>> : Joe, you started kind of as the pandemic swept in, right?

>> JOE WILLIAMS: Yeah. We are a product of the pandemic. For the most part it hasn't really changed a whole lot. I was very excited for earlier this summer I had gone

out to a few people to interview people in their own spaces and that was a lot of fun. For the most part it has remained the same. Eventually I would like to be able to go on location and visit. We never aired it, but we actually did a cooking thing. And that was a lot of fun. It really doesn't fit to the format of the show, that's why we never aired it. But it would be great to be able to go on location and to experience things with the artists and have a high production of ambient sounds that are involved in the storytelling as well.

>> AMANDA KAY GUSTIN: It made it a lot harder. It made it a lot harder because our attention -- it made everything a lot harder. But for us specifically my counterpart and I became the point people for transforming all of our programming to remote programming.

So it got shoved to the back burner for a little while because our brains got completely consumed by doing everything else that had to be changed, that had to be moved, that had to be created anew to reach our audiences.

And we just did not have the mental space to figure out how we were going to completely change our working process for the podcast for some time. We took a half planned half not break from the podcast for a little while, but we are working back up now that we have the process figured out and now that everything is a little bit more smooth in the back end.

>> : Unfortunately we are at time, folks. It has gone quickly but I do want to thank you, Joe and Amanda, for your expertise today. Thank you everyone for attending today. Again, take a listen to their podcasts. They are absolutely terrific. If you enjoyed this programming, please do us a favor and share it with your own social networks and the like. We really appreciate participation, your participation, and we hope to see you in the chat for future programs.

After each module, all four videos of each module will be available on our website as

well as a complete toolkit of resources provided by our presenters. So stay tuned to the website, which is [Museum-hub.org](http://Museum-hub.org) for more information on upcoming events. And please remember to visit the forum on our website to ask questions, follow us on social media, complete the post event satisfaction survey and join us next week, same time same place, for tech workshop number one, introduction to podcasting for museums with Hannah Hethmon.

On behalf of the team at the Museum Learning Hub I want to thank you, again, for being with us. And Joe and Amanda, thanks so much. We will see you next time, everyone. Take care.

[ end of webinar ]