

ASSOCIATION OF MIDWEST MUSEUMS

GET INSPIRED WORKSHOP

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>> DAN YAEGER: Well, good morning or good afternoon wherever you are and welcome to the Digital Empowerment Project Module 2 on the live streaming events tours and programs. This topic has become very important in this past year so we're delighted to have you with us today. Digital Empowerment Project is a nationwide initiative organized by the six U.S. regional museum associations dedicated to providing free, self-paced training resources focused on digital media and technology for small museums.

This series of online webinars and toolkits is made possible by funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. My name is Dan Yaeger and I'm the Executive Director of the New England Museum Association. My pronouns are in the he series and I am a white male with gray hair pulled back and a close-cropped salt-and-pepper beard and I'm wearing round black rimmed eyeglasses. Today I am wearing a blue

collared shirt under a black V-neck sweater and I'm sitting in front of a large bookcase full of books and assorted knickknacks from my home office.

Before we get started, I would like to acknowledge the places in which we gather. In this era of virtual meetings, when digital places may substitute our physical sense of place, it is important to reflect on the land we each occupy and honor the indigenous people who've called it home. I am speaking to you from Swamp Scott, Massachusetts the historical homelands of the Massachusett peoples.

Wherever we are, let us acknowledge all indigenous nations communities as living communities, their elders past and present as well as future generations. We the Digital Empowerment Project team recognize that our organizations and those of our members were founded within a colonizing society that 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 respect the diversity of cultures and experiences that inform the richness of our world and our profession.

Thank you. And now for just a few housekeeping notes before we introduce today's presenters. First, the best place to view this session is in realtime on the Museum Learning Hub website under the watch live tab at museum-hub.org. Here you will be able to see all of the captioning, chat and questions posed by all of the attendees.

I would also like to acknowledge today's ASL interpreter who will be on the left side of your screen 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.

Following today's program, we ask that you complete a short survey to give us feedback. At the end of the webinar, we will drop a link to the survey into the chat stream and we'll email a link to those of you who preregistered. We would greatly appreciate if you would share your experience with us and help us improve our work.

We encourage you to pose questions to our presenters which will be addressed at the end of the program after the presentations. Please type your questions in the chat and a Digital Empowerment team member will be gathering them. We will get to as many

questions as time allows. However, we may not be able to address all the questions during live sessions and others may arise after reflecting on a program. For this reason, we have set up an online community forum for raising questions, posting answers, and connecting with your fellow Museum practitioners on the Museum Learning Hub website which you can find again at museum-hub.org. If you're looking for help between programs, please visit this forum, create a login and post your questions. A member of the community or one of our Student Technology Fellows will get back to you.

Finally, to stay connected with us and be aware of future programs, please follow us on social media. Links will be posted in the chat.

It is my pleasure to introduce the speakers for today's peer-to-peer introductory session Get Inspired. Ross Stanton Jordan and Kristi McMillan. Ross is the Interim Director and Curatorial Director of the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum in Chicago, Illinois, interested in the confluence of politics, history and visual culture.

In his position, Ross supports the production of exhibitions and programs that connect the social justice issues in the past to the present via a collaboration of artists who work with the community.

Kristi is the Director of Learning and Engagement at the Asheville Art Museum in Asheville, North Carolina. Kristi plans and implements programs for college age through older adults including tours, talks, classes, films, performances, travel and more. She also oversees the learning and engagement team internship and docent programs and has particular interests in interpretation, accessibility, collaboration and technology.

We are so grateful for offering their experiences and insights today. Please join me in welcoming Ross Stanton Jordan and Kristi McMillan. Thank you.

>> ROSS STANTON JORDAN: Hello and thank you for that introduction. I think I'm first here. I'm waiting for my screen to share. My name is Ross Jordan and I want to thank the Museum Learning Hub and the Association of Midwestern Museums for the invite to talk today. I also want to say that I'm a black man, I have dark glasses on and a white background with an etching behind me.

Let me get the share screen up. My name is Ross Jordan and I go by his and him and I'm the Interim director and Curatorial Manager of Jane Addams Hull-House Museum and the museum is part of the College of architecture and design at the University of Illinois, Chicago. The Museum is a memorial to international peace activist and feminist Jane Addams and the other social reformers who worked alongside their immigrant neighbors to create social change on the northwest side of Chicago.

For her work, Jane Addams was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931. Other social reformers at Hull-House were doing what Jane Addams called socializing democracy. And the most congested and marginalized neighborhood of Chicago during the largest influx of immigrants in U.S. history, reformers experimented with new forms of social goods. This included developing well-baby clinics, kindergartens, playgrounds, the juvenile Justice Center and some of the first interventions of this kind in the country, certainly in Chicago. They protected immigrants' wages and agitated for workers' rights to unionize and provided adult education classes and language learning outside of the local factories in the area.

Hull-House cofounder Ellen Gates Starr was determined to provide access to the arts for populations that were often deemed undeserving. Hull-House's first building was an art gallery that was followed by a 300 seat theater, kilns, a book-binding studio. At its height, Hull House served 10,000 people per week in its 13 building complex.

The Museum is located on two of the remaining buildings and you can actually see one here that is called a Hull-House home and a residence dining hall which is just adjacent to this building. I am saying this to make a point that 90% of the power of our Museum and the work we do is really harnessing the power of place and site to tell the stories of the men and women who fought for democracy in the early third of the 20th century.

And Covid-19 of course closed our site and it removed our primary resource for sharing this important kind of history which is the site itself. And we are still closed to this day. This is an image of Jane Addams riding down Michigan Avenue in Chicago in front of the Art Institute Museum. This is during the 1912 Republican convention. And you can see the votes for women flag draped on the door of this car and Jane Addams is in the front seat there.

In anticipation of the 2020 suffrage Centennial and Jane Addams of course was one of the premier suffragists of her time we were anticipating that and opened up exhibitions and programs in 2019 to begin to talk about that history and Jane Addams' particular role. We opened up two exhibitions in 2019 in the fall. This is why women should vote and it is based on a 1910 essay by Jane Addams. And this essay explored the widespread grassroots national movement organized by men and women to demand the right to vote.

We also put up True Peace which is based on a quote by Jane Addams. True peace is not merely the absence of war but the presence of justice and it spotlighted the international work that women did to ground, to build a peace movement during World War I. That exhibition also featured two contemporary artists, Monica Trinidad and Sarah-Ji and we were really off to a good start in 2019, we thought, with these exhibition series. And of course that would change, so I'm setting that up here.

We also opened up public tours and family programs and events in 2019. In the fall of, in January 2020 we launched a centennial suffrage series called With You or Not at All, which is focused on the history and the role of race and suffrage movement in partnership with the Francis Wood Museum and Northwest University Museum or Northwest University.

This series raised questions about telling the history of suffrage and race and the role that played in those battles and the title of the program series With You or Not At All is an excerpt from a quote from journalist and anti-lynching activist Jane Adams, I mean Ida B. Wells, excuse me, who founded the NAACP with Jane Addams and Wells refused to be relegated to the back of an important national suffrage parade in 1913 and she said she would walk with her white counterparts or she would not walk at all. So our first public program as part of the suffrage series was with Michelle Duster who you can see on the screen now and she is an author and advocate but also the great-granddaughter of Ida B. Wells. She spoke at the, in the very site, which is a residence dining hall at Hull-House which you're seeing on the screen right now at a place where her great-grandmother might have actually spoken.

Our site does connect these kinds of legacies in a really concrete way and so Covid did close our doors and it kept us from doing these specific things but since we had already opened a suffrage exhibit, we had this really vibrant suffrage series happening and programs and in 2019, it started in 2020 and really we were just going into March when we began to close. We were one of the few museums, one of the few sites in Chicago that had opened an exhibition and had a ready program series when we began to close down because of Covid. A few partners began to reach out for us because we had content that was available, we had exhibitions that were up and we received emergency funds from the Terra Foundation of American Art that helped us deal with some of our unpublished videos online and that was actually really exciting and we actually decided to build out our YouTube channel with our friends from **ADIV**. These are our partners on the screen that helped us get back into place after our closure.

We also reached out to suburban libraries. So these are libraries that were kind of further away. These are audiences that would not necessarily have access to Hull-House, they weren't driving in to see us at Hull House on a regular basis but these libraries reached out to the museum because we had content, we had our exhibitions up and they said we would normally be producing our own exhibitions and we can't because of Covid. We would normally do our programs but cannot because of Covid.

And so these library partners allowed us to implement some programming that we wouldn't be able to do ourselves but they also allowed us to reach a broader audience that would not normally come to our specific historic site to access us directly on a regular basis. So this partnership was about reaching out to new audiences and helping to fill the gaps in the programming for these public libraries.

These are some of the other suffrage public programs that we planned with our library partners and this would be fall 2020 that we would not have produced in the same way. They also helped us with a virtual tour, self-guided tour that included audio components and visual components that really enhance and again allow people to actually come back to our site and walk through it on their own which is something we would not have thought of doing without Covid happening and not allowing us to do what we wanted to do with our public tour.

So we both now give virtual tours with this thing and invite people to come and use this tool in their classroom whenever they want to. We have had a lot of outreach from international sites that know of Hull-House that cannot come here but can use a virtual tour as a way to guide them through our historic site and put them back in touch with that history.

And our partnership gave us an inspiration to do a little bit more than we normally would. Just before the election, about a month out, we were lucky enough to have representative Lauren Underwood who is the first millennial youngest black woman to serve in Congress. She serves in the Naperville district just west of our location in Chicago. This is a public program, we were able to screen a film about her campaign in 2018 and have her presence virtually. And of course we were playing this program outside of Covid but it didn't seem possible to do but because of people's new availability and our partnerships and the virtual capabilities they had and brought to our programs, we were able to have her even given her limited schedule because of her own campaigning. I lost my thing here.

One exciting outcome of our, of that partnership and I will share these last two clips that set us up where we are now. And I think Jason, you will have to help me with the first slide there, that first clip of the man sitting down if you want to play that for me.

>> I dream of a world beyond the [indiscernible], way beyond Western canon. A supernova of possibilities. And I invite you, dear foreigner, in my performance country to dream with me and send me your own letters imagining a better art world or rather a myriad art worlds coexisting in synergy with nature, radical imagination and community.

Your surrounding multiple communities. Do you have ideas to propose for a museum of the future? Please, send them to the following email address.

>> ROSS STANTON JORDAN: This is performance artist Guillermo Gomez-Pena who worked in San Francisco and Chicago for many years and we're now partnering with a local radio station in Chicago broadcasting his radio, weekly radio program and he's doing a video call for people to send in their visions and ideas for the future of museums.

And of course the challenge we have right now, museums are really struggling to figure out how to respond to the calls for cultural and structural change and his call is part of that. And of course this radio program is a great project while the Museum is closed because it allows us to access more audiences and different kinds of audiences than we otherwise would have. And we wouldn't of course have entered into a radio partnership if it hadn't been for Covid exposing us to other partners we could work with and artists to work with that we otherwise would not have had access to.

I think there is one more clip of the radio show. Jason, do you want to pull that up?

>> Dear [indiscernible], Orphan children of two or more [indiscernible], identities [indiscernible]. Welcome to an impromptu conceptual experiment. An attempt to reinvent ourselves in times of pandemic to bring performance poetry, audio art and critical thinking to our everyday lives in forced lockdown. To turn our homes into techno performance laboratories and to cross geographical borders with our cyber [indiscernible]. [background noise] Tonight, Gomez-Pena Salvador is unplugged, uncensored, thinking out loud. You are about to hear a selection of my audio art curated by work colleagues at Lumpen Radio Chicago. Broadcasting from Bridgeport, the community of the future. Disclaimer. If you disagree with the content, please cover your eyes and ears.

You can turn off your computer or simply walk away. But do not call me out. Instead, practice your civic will. Enough. **Eschuchamos.**

>> ROSS STANTON JORDAN: So it was at the end here, as a historic site, when I got to Hull-House I was focused on leveraging that history and the place, but I think Covid has really taught me our audience needs other ways to kind of access that history beyond showing up at our site and partnerships that we are able to advance during the last year have been inspirational in trying to find ways to reach different audiences with the history and the artists that we work with.

Thanks a lot.

>> KRISTI MCMILLAN: Hi. Thanks so much to the Museum Learning Hub and Zinnia Willitz at the Southeast Museums Conference for the invitation to participate today. I

am a white female with short blonde hair, blue eyes, dark framed eyeglasses and I'm sitting in my office at the museum today. I use she/her pronouns. I'd like to start with a background on our institution so you out there can draw parallels or compare differences with your own unique situations.

The Asheville Art Museum is located in beautiful downtown Asheville, North Carolina which is nestled in a picturesque valley in the Blue Ridge mountains. With a population of over 90,000 inhabitants and 10 million tourists per year, Asheville is the urban center of the largely rural 24-county western North Carolina region, which is situated upon the ancient southern Appalachian homeland of Cherokee people and the present-day home of the Eastern band of Cherokee Indians.

The museum is an independent 501(c)3 non-profit organization. We collect and exhibit American art of the 20th and 21st centuries, both from the United States at large and art of significance to western North Carolina and Appalachia. Our collection is comprised of over 6000 objects and a wide range of media including fine art, decorative art, and traditional arts and crafts. Our budget of about \$2.5 million per year supports 18-20 full-time and 10-15 part-time staff. When not in the midst of a global pandemic, we welcome about 100-150,000 visitors per year.

From 2016-2019, the museum was closed for a major expansion and renovation. We had our grand reopening in November 2019 only to close again in March 2020 like most of you due to Covid-19. The state of North Carolina allowed museums to reopen in September 2020.

Today, I will be talking about our Third Thursday program. After reopening our new museum facility, we began establishing a normal suite of exhibitions and programming. We were building educational offerings for adult audiences on our weekly Thursday late open nights and did not want to lose momentum during the Covid shutdown of uncertain duration.

A small team of education and development staff decided to try out some program formats for Thursday evenings that might start out as virtual offerings as part of our museum from home initiative, transition to a hybrid virtual in-person model once it was

safe to do so, and finally be offered purely in person as the world found its footing in the new normal.

First we came up with four program formats that we wanted to try: coloring, trivia, games, and crafts. Then we thought about what elements we'd want to incorporate into each program. Those included an experience, we wanted each virtual program to have a cohesive theme with each element contributing to an overall experience for participants.

Asheville is known not only for its burgeoning culinary scene but for the outsized ratio of breweries, cideries, distilleries and wineries per capita. Great food and drinks are a way of life here, so we decided that each virtual program would feature a beverage that was related to the theme and showcased the wide variety of craft producers that Asheville is known for.

In our small community, most everything is enriched with partnerships through individuals, small businesses, nonprofits and more. Some of our favorite regular partners and local businesses like us were suffering unimaginable losses due to the pandemic. So we wanted to use our platform however we could to draw attention to everything our community has to offer.

We wanted all Third Thursday programs to be lighthearted, fun opportunities for socialization and learning related to our collections and exhibitions. And finally we wanted anything we offered via virtual Third Thursdays to be replicable or adaptable to an in person experience in a post Covid world. Our limited financial and human resources have taught us to be thoughtful about program design and allocation of staff time and energy.

One big challenge we faced in developing Third Thursday programming from the start was our staff's inexperience with virtual programming. Before Covid we offered most programs in person and on site with some outreach to pre-K-12 classroom and adult audiences but we did not offer virtual programs. So we did not already have in-house expertise in distance learning or online program production.

As an institution with a relatively low budget for the scope, size and scale of exhibitions, programming and staff size we were also tasked with limiting expenses to a bare minimum. Fresh in our memories, though, were lessons learned during the previous three years of construction and alternate means of offering programs in spaces not our own with the support of community partners.

Armed with one Zoom Pro license, varying comfort levels with technology, and a cultivated spirit of experimentation and making do, our pivot was perhaps quicker and less painful than it might have been for institutions with strongly established ways of working.

Quickly, I would like to go through a few of these Third Thursdays so you can get a feel for the program. Recordings are archived on the museum's YouTube page, so if you like to see how any of them worked, head over to ashevilleart.org/museum-from-home and follow the link to videos on our YouTube page. Our first Third Thursday was a program called Coloring and Cocktails.

One of our exhibitions at the time was A Telling Instinct: John James Audubon and Contemporary Art which featured animals and works in all media. We played with that idea with animal-themed cocktails such as the Bee's Knees and the Salty Dog mixed up from home by a local bartender who had been furloughed. Recipes were posted on our website and ingredients available for curbside pickup at a local distillery, one of our community partners, for folks to make their own cocktails at home.

As luck would have it, one of the exhibition artists had just published a coloring book so she granted us permission to email out a couple of pages for participants to use or participants could pick up a copy of the book from our museum's store curbside.

Our associate curator interviewed the featured artist, who is based in California, for about 20 minutes about how animals played a pivotal role in her work. To give participants leisure time to color, the Asheville Symphony introduced and streamed about 30 minutes of curated animal-themed classical music.

We spotlighted the featured artist's camera during the music and she worked on a monumental scale drawing in her studio as participants watched and colored. At the

end of the program, everyone turned on the cameras and shared their coloring in progress to foster a sense of togetherness even while we were apart.

All of these program elements fit into the basic functions of Zoom and would be easily replicable in person later on. Our second program model was Artful Trivia. Our geeky staff loves participating in area trivia nights, so this was a natural fit for us.

Owing to the historical importance of arts and crafts in our museum's mission and to the contemporary draw of craft food and drink in western North Carolina, we decided to theme our first trivia night around American art, craft and beer. Our staff wrote four rounds of original trivia related to this theme including a visual round (we are an art museum, after all) and planned breaks in between rounds.

One break was hosted by a local brewery that had not only released a beer in honor of the museum's grand opening in November 2019 but also that's known for its artist-created can signs. The brewery's artist, who is based in Wisconsin, talked about his process of designing can art from concept to completion. The second break was hosted by our associate curator who spoke briefly about bar-themed items from the museum's collections.

The third break was hosted by a local glass maker whose work had recently been on view in one of our exhibitions. He blew a pint glass in his hot shop live on air and at the end of the program opened the annealer to show us the final product. Participants were invited to pick up the brewery's products for the program and to shop online at the artist's website afterwards. Artful Trivia was one of the trickiest for our staff to figure out technically because we were not sure how best to collect trivia answers.

We had attended other programs where colleagues had used a third-party trivia collector or had participants email responses after each round. In the end, we decided to use Zoom's poll feature so participants could answer in Zoom in realtime. The only drawback to this method was you cannot get a report of poll results until after the program, so we could not announce the winners until the next day, but no one seemed to mind. All in all, most of these program elements would be fairly easy to replicate for in person trivia later on.

The third program model was a game night. We knew a game night would be easy to implement in person but because games are usually interactive for multiple players, game night in the virtual realm was the hardest for us to conceptualize technically. So we decided not to play a game, per se, but to look at the history and art of games.

Our beverage partner was a local ginger beer brewer who embraces a very playful aesthetic in its branding. We also liked the idea that ginger beer is not quite what it seems and it can be mixed in a lot of ways. Cocktail and mocktail recipes were posted on our website in advance with instructions at curbside pick-up at the brewery for participants.

Our program partner was a local board game cafe. One of their staff explored the history and artistry of card games and then their game master talked about designing new card games using one he had recently launched on GoFundMe as a reference. The program was complemented by our assistant curator, who gave a short presentation about game-related or game-inspired art in our collection as well as virtual puzzles and a word search related to our collection that we posted online ahead of time.

All of the program elements from this virtual game night fit into the basic functions of Zoom but ultimately we decided this program type would best be suited to in person programming later on and offered the first in person game night once we were allowed to reopen in the fall.

The fourth and final program model we tried for Third Thursdays was a bring your own craft night. We at the museum collect and integrate craft into our galleries as a matter of course. Western North Carolina is a historical and contemporary hub of crafts in a variety of media and most museum staff are crafters or artists of some kind. The idea behind this program was akin to craft in public events so while the program was underway, participants were invited to work on their own craft at home to share at the end of the program.

Our featured craft for this first program was knitting. Inspired by countless stitch nights with friends, we started the program with a virtual wine tasting with a local craft vintner who had prepared kits for participants to pick up before the program. We also partnered

with a local galley to interview a local artist that they represent and who is featured in our collection who knits with glass. We had not been able to bring this artist for a talk before since she is based in Washington State so we're thrilled for the opportunity to Zoom with her.

Following the artist interview, we were joined by the owners of a local yarn store who partnered with us in the past for knit in public days and they gave a short presentation on craftivism. They too had put together yarn bombing kits for participants to pick up before or after the program. At the end, participants turned on their cameras and shared what they had been working on during the program.

All of these program elements from the bring your own craft night fit into the basic functions of Zoom with endless options for future featured crafts and community partners. For all of these Third Thursday programs that I have gone through, the museum's cafe designed a take-out pick up menu for family-style dining options available for preorder with pick up available the day of the program.

To date, we have posted three Coloring and Cocktails programs, two Artful Trivia nights, two game nights and one bring your own craft night. Since we reopened in September, staff has looked for ways to hybridize Third Thursdays in order to respect our members' and visitors' comfort levels venturing out during the pandemic.

For example, for our second Artful Trivia night, while virtual participants watched and participated at home as before through Zoom and its poll feature, we moved a flat screen TV into our rooftop cafe for on-site participants to enjoy the program and score sheets for them to hand in to staff at the end of each round. Another example is for our most recent Coloring and Cocktails program, we invited our guest bartender to mix drinks all evening in our rooftop cafe and to live stream her program segment on site.

Again, we had a flatscreen TV in the cafe for on-site participants to listen to the music and artist interview and left coloring sheets and pencils on the tables to enjoy during the program. Third Thursdays are currently on a brief hiatus as we set our sights on safe ways to transition the program wholly in-house.

For us, our integration of virtual programs has come with many silver linings. We have grown awareness of the museum, our collection and exhibitions and educational offerings and in so doing have cultivated new members from around the state, country and even around the world. We have been able to feature artists, musicians, scholars and other special guests from across the state, country and internationally that we may not have been able to support in person due to limited program budgets for honoraria and travel expenses.

We post recordings of most virtual programs for visitors from near and far to enjoy after the live broadcast. The recordings are accessed regularly, making for a longer-lasting educational resource for adults.

Virtual participants register through our website in advance using our eCommerce platform, allowing us to ticket some programs and to collect voluntary donations for free programs. Online reservations also help us to capture email addresses and other information for all participants, allowing us to send follow-up evaluations after each program and to tweak our program, design accordingly in a timely manner, and to grow our email list to advertise future programs.

We can serve museum members and visitors with mobility issues, transportation barriers, or partial year residents who can now engage with us wherever they are. And finally we archive recordings on YouTube which builds in extra accessibility features like closed captioning at no cost to us.

Every virtual program that we have delivered over the past 13 months has been a learning experience for our staff, especially these Third Thursdays that have so many moving parts and featured guests spread throughout the country with varying levels of experience with technology.

Some tips I would give to other museum staff implementing virtual programs are embrace a platform and learn all about it. Whether it's Go To Meeting, Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams or another platform, they all have their pros and cons, bells and whistles. We went with Zoom and spent a good amount of amount of time watching

tutorials in order to figure out how to push Zoom to its limits to get the results we wanted.

Make a detailed script or run of show for all virtual programs. This helps the program to run smoothly. Include stage directions like change slide, mute participants or share screen and approximate timing to keep yourself and your team on track.

Program participants are expecting a seamless tech-savvy experience whether those skills were previously in our wheelhouse or not. Build redundancy into the production. We always have at least two staff members producing a virtual program and sometimes more if it is heavy on moving parts like Third Thursdays.

Divide up responsibilities like letting ticketed participants in from the waiting room, muting/un-muting featured guests, sharing/un-sharing screens, changing slides, launching polls, dividing the group into breakout rooms, keeping track of the chat box, et cetera. It is also good for your production partner to have a second copy of slides, videos, scripts, et cetera on their screen ready to go in case your computer decides to restart, if your video or microphone stops working, or as what happened to me last summer, we had an unexpected fire drill at the museum and I as the host had to leave my office altogether in the middle of the program.

That detailed script allows for your production partner to pick up right where you left off without any interruption to the program on the front end. And finally schedule preprogrammed tech checks or run-throughs with all presenters and production partners since folks have varying skills using online platforms, tech skills, time zone differences and to make sure all technical elements of your virtual program are working, it is important for everyone to be on the same page about program content and expectations. It is much easier to troubleshoot issues with a day or two's notice rather than just before or during the program.

Third Thursdays has been a welcome source of delight, fun, respite, fellowship, and creativity in these challenging times. Our staff and featured guests have been open-minded and always willing to step outside of their comfort zones to explore opportunities in this rapidly changing world. We have been incredibly lucky for the general support of

Art Bridges, a foundation whose belief in empowering small to mid-size art institutions like ours allowed us not only to invest in simple technology to quickly pivot to our Museum from Home initiative but also to compensate our featured guests.

We look forward to integrating virtual programs partly into our portfolio of educational offerings as on-site visitation picks up and as we slowly resume in person programs. Thank you again for inviting me to talk about the Asheville Art Museum's Third Thursday program. I would be happy to field any questions during Q&A today or off-line.

>> DAN YAEGER: Thank you, Kristi and Ross. That was terrific. Boy, this is really what it's all about in the museum field. You rise to the occasion with great creativity. Everybody participating in this, bring your questions into the chat and we will field them. I am going to start with a 30,000-foot question because museums are known to think things to death and plan and strategize and all that kind of thing.

We had to move quickly in this instance. How did you actually do the so-called pivot? Did you build a certain strategy into it? Did you identify audiences? Did you do a strategic framework or was it just by the seat of the pants?

>> KRISTI MCMILLAN: Ross, do you want to take that one first?

>> ROSS STANTON JORDAN: Sure. I think, there's two ways to answer that question. One is we did not have a plan because we did not know what to expect. We closed down super quickly. I think I came into work on a Friday and I came in that Monday and Tuesday it was like you have to get off campus because we are at a university campus. All of a sudden we were gone. I was literally going around closing up stuff and we didn't know when we were going to be back and our building is a 150-year-old building.

It needs constant attention in the way an old house does. Like it has an attic, it has a basement that floods, it has walls that crumble, it has HVAC issues. Not being there is very challenging because we do not know the sense of the building. We had no plan or a plan that allowed us to be there and we couldn't be there on site. What is true is that partners we put together to reinterpret our virtual programs and provide access to our public tours were relationships we had already built, which was really great. All of the

libraries that we are working with are all libraries that were on a two or four year Chicago, Illinois suffrage conversation that our director at the time had been tapping in and out of for many months.

So it was partners we already had that worked really well, the funding we received from the Terra Foundation that helped us build and edit videos that we had previously recorded was really important and that was based on a previous relationship. I think, for us, our strategic plan was back behind us because we built strong relationships already and leveraged them for this particular moment. If we had not had those relationships, I don't think we would have fared too well. We probably would have spent more money we did not have.

Our staff is super small. We also did not have the funds to pay the persons we wanted to invite to speak at these events. Without those relationships, we would have been in a tough spot. No strategic plan, we relied on relationships that we already had to pivot quickly to make things happen.

>> DAN YAEGER: Good. Kristi?

>> KRISTI MCMILLAN: I would agree with Ross. All of those relationships that we had before and partnerships with community organizations were really important. Also, we, you know, as I had said, we had just reopened in November 2019 after three years of construction and then had to close again in March 2020 which was so heartbreaking.

As I said we had this sort of ingrained quality of making do and being out in the community and putting on our programs even if we did not have a building. So we had already learned sort of not to rely on a building. We talked with our docents about how could we leverage their skills in order to have public programs whether online or not.

And everybody had a willingness to try and we were able to incorporate not only this Third Thursday program I talked about today but we have a Slow Art Friday program. We transitioned our artist talks to online, we have all sorts of things. Our summer art camp became sort of a hybrid where our team said okay what can we do? Honestly, like I said, it probably was not as hard for us as it was for others because we were so

used to being in the mode of experimentation and at the height of the summer, we were doing between 3-5 virtual programs per week.

Now I think probably like most museums we are seeing some attrition in registrations and people wanting to do things on site or some people still do not feel comfortable so we are in this mode of having some virtual programs and some programs that are small group in person programs and continuing to maintain both and see where it goes.

>> DAN YAEGER: We saw Kristi, you had the silver linings slide. It raises a general question about the metrics you all are using to measure things. Do you get a sense of how many people actually participated in these live streamed events versus say what you would have ordinarily gotten at an event on site? Is that an issue? Is it a success based on numbers? A lot of people are trying to figure out how do you monetize these things. Has that been a measure?

What are the things you are looking at to say this worked or did not work?

>> KRISTI MCMILLAN: Honestly, we've had just as much virtual participation as we had on-site participation per program type. We offered all of our programs, I can't say all, most of our virtual programs were completely free through the summer. In the fall, anything that had been free before, we had a suggested donation but of course if someone still could not afford to participate, I'm sorry, make a donation, they were not barred from participating, it was just a suggested donation. And starting in December, we started to have virtual programs that were ticketed. We used the waiting room function of Zoom and cross-checked the people that had purchased a ticket and then letting them into the program.

>> ROSS STANTON JORDAN: In terms of our audience, I think we had enormous growth in our public programs and I think that was because they were focused on suffrage and the election and they were meant to be on top of a national conversation. Our space only holds as many as 80 people on site.

But in our fall programs we would have 130 people in a Zoom room, 500 people in a Zoom room and things like that which is really remarkable. I think we saw growth. I do

not expect that to be the case in the future, necessarily. We were just on the pulse of something.

What is true is we reached audiences we would not be in touch with otherwise. And there are audiences who want these kinds of dialogues around race and democracy but do not have access to them where they are. I think we picked up that audience as well. And generally we are a smaller museum. Both physically small and our audiences is not super big. This represented a larger growth than we would be able to achieve on our own and with our own space.

>> DAN YAEGER: Is it safe to say both of you feel confident you're going to be able to retain those new audiences that have come whether outside of your particular region or otherwise? Do you think you might be able to continue programming that will keep those folks in the fold or is this a pandemic thing?

>> KRISTI MCMILLAN: I don't know about you Ross, but we fully intend to keep some virtual programs in our lineup. It has been really eye-opening. Because as I said before most of our programs were in person and on site. This is really sort of transformational for the way we are offering our programs.

I have to say, Dan, some of the folks joining us outside of the western North Carolina are the most loyal program participants. Some of them come to everything we put on. They are saying please keep offering these programs. We really enjoy them. We love the content. We love learning about things that we were not necessarily learning about in our own communities.

We will adjust the frequency according to how much people are signing up to participate in those programs. But I do not envision a time now. It is hard to envision us not having these virtual programs.

>> ROSS STANTON JORDAN: I agree with that. It is less about what we want to do and more, or retaining the audience, as much as it is about that we have gained audiences that hold an expectation that they have access to our site now in a way that they would not before and I think that is an important thing to keep in mind.

All of the planning we are doing now is for how can we make this program hybrid both for families, our family programs and our more adult-oriented stuff? So I don't know how we're going to go back. The open question I have around this is is there going to be new kinds of funding for these hybrid models that help us support it going forward in my institution to make these transitions?

Everyone has like one Zoom account now but the platform is super limited. I am excited to see where the funding and strategies come from to help museums really tap into the body of audiences and connect to each other. I'm excited to be at virtual conferences because it does give our team insight into what other organizations are doing that wouldn't necessarily be on our radar as well.

>> DAN YAEGER: That is a good point. Doing what you're doing and what we are doing and showcasing this kind of stuff is an argument for future funding because this is here to stay. I have some questions in chat. Folks, how do you keep from freaking out over technology?

You mentioned all of a sudden you're handling 500 people in a session and we talked a little about and we all know the vagaries of Zoom and Kristi had to leave because of the fire drill. How do you maintain from not only a technological standpoint but your own personal bandwidth in this kind of stuff?

>> KRISTI MCMILLAN: For us, we sort of chose a platform and stuck to it and that way we could learn how to make Zoom work for us even as they over the course of April, May, June made a lot of changes and improvements to their platform. They were not expecting a huge flux of people using their platform. But using the tutorials to find out if there was something I wanted to do that I did not know how to do and making use of their tutorials to teach myself how to do it.

It is really important as I was saying to have the script that tells me everything I need to do. Muting people, making them cohosts, letting them share their screen, unmuting, whatever and to have the program partner sort of behind-the-scenes at the museum to help make sure the program stays on track. I have been in a program before where my microphone just stopped working and nobody could hear me.

I needed to restart my computer. By having a program production partner there helping I could make that person host and she could pick up where I left off and I could log off and restart my computer and everything could go well. It is very nerve-racking in the middle of a live programming but these are the times we live in and we all are doing the best we can. And I think that our virtual visitors understand that.

>> ROSS STANTON JORDAN: I will echo all of that. I showed that partner slide because I wanted to reiterate what it took for us to launch and that was half of the programming that we ultimately did. It was a lot of people involved just to do our normal stuff. You have to think of it really as the same way as an on-site program in some ways where an on site program involves basically all of our staff greeting, checking people in, checking on the food and catering. We always have someone just dealing with microphones both when someone is presenting or the ones in the crowd and at our on-site programs we have a videographer and photographer on site who are working together to record the program and frankly it's the same. You have to have a similar setup with Zoom stuff. Having a partner, at least one other person and we absolutely did that.

We had someone else who was just in charge of audience questions and a moderator. Dividing up those things really helps. And advocating depending on what level you are in staffing, I think a lot of the program people and the assistant folks often have to be advocating up to their higher ups to get that extra support but it is critically needed.

I think advocacy is important. Doing the Zoom tutorials is helpful. I did a bunch of those as well. You have to bring in other people. You cannot do it alone. And everybody is scared.

>> DAN YAEGER: Thank you so much. Unfortunately, we are out of time, folks, and thank you again Kristi and Ross for your expertise and experience and wisdom on the subject. And thank you everybody for participating today and your questions. Before we go, I have a couple of housekeeping items. If you missed any of this session or just want to watch it again, you can access the recording on the Museum Learning Hub website which again is museum-hub.org under the recent webinars tab at the top of the page.

I'd also remind you to please complete the post event survey and feedback form using a link in the chat or via the email that you, if you preregistered, you will be getting. Do not forget to visit the forum on the Museum Learning Hub website to ask additional questions related to this presentation or others. Finally, please join us next Thursday May 13 for the first technical workshop of module two which is entitled intro to live streaming with David London, the chief experience Officer of the [indiscernible] in Baltimore which is going to be a terrific presentation. Getting into the weeds of actually how to do it.

Thank you again Ross and Kristi and thanks everybody for attending. May you be safe and may you be well and have a fabulous day. Thank you.

[End]