Resiliency in a Time of Crisis
Digital and Hybrid Strategies for Modern Museum Partnerships

Julia Bloom

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Author's statement

I decided on my capstone topic during my summer 2020 internship at the Harvard Art Museums, where I examined the websites of museums across the US, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand to see how they were operating during the pandemic. My original internship plans had been altered due to the closure of the historical society I planned to work at, and my interest in online learning led me to wonder how, or if, museums could educate the public while their physical buildings were closed. The range of online offerings I found on museum sites surprised and delighted me, as there were online seminars for adults, activity sessions for kids, and virtual tours of museums just to name a few. The wide range of digital content available inspired me to examine how digital programming was helping museums and their audiences during the pandemic, and how such practices might change and improve museum practice in the future. I also found that many museums created digital programs through institutional partnerships, which led me to wonder if such partnerships improved or hindered the content produced through them.

As museums face increased pressure to confront biases in their institutions and collections, and become fully accessible to all audiences, I believe digital programs and tools provide unique ways to build more inclusive and open institutions. While the COVID-19 pandemic has tested museums, it has also taught them valuable lessons about inclusiveness and the power of technology, which may be forgotten if museums "return to normal" once the pandemic ends. My capstone seeks to examine how digital programming has affected museums during the pandemic, how museum partnerships have influenced the creation of digital content, what lessons institutions have learned during this time, and how these lessons can improve museum programming in the future.

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Introduction-The Impact of COVID-19 on Museums in the United States and Massachusetts

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed a massive challenge to industries throughout the world, as local and national governments-imposed quarantines and shut down numerous businesses and institutions in their efforts to control the spread of the disease. The cultural sector and museums have been hit hard by the current crisis as well. According to the UNESCO report from May 2020, 90% of museums around the world have been closed due to the pandemic, and 10% of those may not reopen (*UNESCO Report*). In addition, 29% of museum directors surveyed in October 2020 said they were either unsure if their museum would survive or were facing a strong risk of closure ("National Snapshot" 16). This situation threatens the integrity and existence of many institutions and requires them to stay relevant and connected to their communities in a highly challenging time (*UNESCO Report* 4). Museums in Massachusetts have been equally affected by the pandemic, with many forced to close during the initial shutdown, only some of which have reopened since March 2020.

The closure of academic and public museums has led to the development of new digital content, the migration of planned in-person events online, and the expansion of hybrid in-person and digital programming and initiatives. The pandemic came at a time when museums were under pressure to confront ingrained biases in their communities, make their institutions more accessible and diverse, and truly represent their whole communities instead of just sections of them (*Culture+Community*; Stanley.) These pressures have increased after the protests against racial injustice in 2020 and 2021, and some museums have used the pivot to digital during the shutdown to create programming focused on more diverse communities and that is more accessible to disabled and remote audiences, attracting new audiences to these institutions

(Maler; Gubala; *Culture+Community.*) This new digital programming was created to ensure museums would survive the pandemic, but it also made museums more diverse through their focusing on the stories of minority groups and the opening of their collections to distant and disabled communities (Maler; Gubala.) As vaccines are introduced to combat the pandemic, museums are planning to "return to normal," threatening to end these new diverse and accessible online programs. As such, it is important that these practices stay applicable when the shutdown ends, and that museums do not forget the lessons of pandemic era museum practice (*UNESCO Report* 4-7 15-17; Redden). "Resiliency in a Time of Crisis" will examine how academic and public museums in Massachusetts are partnering with universities, other cultural institutions, and their own communities during the pandemic, and how they are using digital media to support their education and accessibility goals. It will explore how partnerships created prior to the pandemic have been adapted to changing circumstances, what partnerships were created during the crisis, and what existing practices can help ensure successful partnerships between museums and institutions in the future.

United States Museums and Their Past and Current Partnerships 1980-2010

Overview of Museum Partnerships

In order to examine the state of museum partnerships in a pandemic focused world, it is important to first look at how these partnerships as a whole evolved in the decades leading up to 2020. In the 1980's and 1990's economic policy changes in Western Europe and the United States called for a reduction in social services and a move to a more consumerist governmental policy. This change reduced the amount of government funds sent to cultural, educational, and

other social organizations, with the requirement that "non-essential" institutions prove their social worth in order to receive government support (Boylan; Kozak; Speight 3-8). With a lack of funds and greater pressure to prove their benefits to society, some museums formed partnerships with other institutions in order to make their collections relevant to modern teaching, improve museum facilities, and share staff and collection-based resources. This shift in view of what makes an institution valuable persists today, requiring museums to rethink their approach to supporting their communities in order to avoid irrelevance (Boylan; Kozak). Many museums in the United States continue to form partnerships with other institutions to reach the same goals of maintaining their financial health, social relevance, and value as a community resource. These partnerships are being tested in new and increasingly difficult ways during the pandemic, leading institutions to increasingly look to their partners for additional support (*Culture + Community*; "National Snapshot".)

The Challenges and Importance of Forming Museum Partnerships

The educational and outreach missions of academic and public museums, along with a recent move toward greater community outreach, have led to an increase in the number and breadth of partnerships between educational, arts, and community focused institutions and schools prior to 2020 (Boylan; Ennes; Friedlander). The scope of these partnerships varies, and they are created for a wide variety of factors including economic necessity, expansion of the subject breadth of collections and programming, greater institutional visibility, and a desire to increase interdisciplinary and object-based learning (Maloney and Hill 247-248; Redden; Kiley). Creating effective partnerships is a dedicated process that requires support from faculty, staff, and upper management at each partner institution. As the Guest Editors of the *Journal of*

Museum Education, Beth Maloney and Matt Hill point out, the recipe for museum partnership success involves some key components:

> While the specific formula for success is ever evolving, we believe that there are some key considerations that help guide effective and successful partnerships. Purposeful investment in collaboration by all involved parties-expressed in time, accountability, and (when possible) funding-nurtures more sustainable, and even transformative partnerships. This investment in time and resources, whether financial or material, is critical; it makes for an integrated, equitable venture and a successful experience for organizations and participants alike. Additionally…realistic and mutual understanding of goals, accountability for activities, and clear institutional agendas help yield productive outcomes. A focus on the end result and the needs and interests of all partners involved is key. (247)

These partnerships can benefit museums which gain useful insights from student's work, universities that allow students a chance to test their knowledge in a real-world environment, and students who gain valuable connections and work opportunities. In addition the museum's communities also benefit from the partnership, as their members involved in these projects can enrich their hometowns (Miele et. al 254-259; Gallagher Worthley 187-194; Ennes.) However, museums can face challenges when forming partnerships with institutions, including determining shared goals both institutions will work towards and creating programming that is valuable and relevant to multiple and diverse audiences. However, these partnerships provide multiple benefits for all involved by letting community members and partner staff work directly with museum staff on shared programs, allowing them to share experiences and expand the reach and depth of

museum programming and education (Barbagallo et. al; "Memorandum"; Gubala; De Zorzi; Magee; Maler; Chamberlain 2-17).

Challenges and Benefits of Museum Collaboration 2010-2020

In the last ten years some museums in Massachusetts have formed official and informal partnerships with universities and arts institutions. One of these partnerships was officially formed between Fitchburg State University (FSU) and the Fitchburg Art Museum (FAM) in 2015 to "directly benefit Fitchburg State students and FAM audiences, as well as communities in the City of Fitchburg and North Central Massachusetts" ("Memorandum".) This agreement made the FAM the "de facto" art museum of FSU, effectively establishing it both as a public and academic museum (Barbagallo et. al; "Memorandum".) The two institutions agreed to share physical meeting spaces, make their educational resources freely available to the other party, and collaborate on community development initiatives, programming development, and course planning ("Memorandum".) One of the classes developed under this partnership was the Document Design Class taught at the FAM by an FSU professor. This class guides students through the process of developing media materials for the FAM, including exhibition catalogues and promotional videos. The FAM gets to use these materials to promote their programming and upcoming exhibitions, and students end the class with professional marketing materials they designed, which they can use in their portfolios as they pursue future careers. Since students in the course work directly with FAM curatorial and marketing staff, they can learn from their experiences, and leave with valuable knowledge that has helped some FSU graduates win internships at the FAM and other positions in the art world. This partnership works for both institutions because each one collaborates with the other to enrich the students, museum visitors,

and museum staff members involved, and their continued commitment to the partnership's goals has allowed it to continue for the past five years (Barbagallo et. al).

The Worcester At Museum (WAM) in Worcester Massachusetts has also partnered with local universities in the area, but these partnerships are more informal, and not based on a signed document like the FSU-FAM partnership. Instead, the WAM enlists university students to collaborate with them on creating museum exhibitions, sometimes as part of class projects that cover a specific area or theme (Barbagallo; Gallagher Worthley et. al). In 2018 two classes at Worcester State University (WSU) in the Occupational Therapy and Speech Pathology programs collaborated with staff at the WAM to improve the museum's facilities and guided tours to be more accessible to visitors with disabilities. These collaborations were part of a longstanding partnership between the two institutions that was strengthened in 2012, when the WSU President and WAM Director began working closely together to develop joint programming that would benefit museum staff, university students, and the Worcester community (Barbagallo; Gallagher Worthley et. al.)

The Occupational Therapy (OT) students visited the museum to learn about Universal Design and examine the WAM facilities to see how its building met the standards of the Americans With Disabilities Act, and what parts of it could be improved. At the end of their visit the students provided a list of suggestions for practical facility and building improvements that could make the WAM more accessible, benefiting the museum and its visitors. Students in the Speech Language Pathology (SLP) program also helped the WAM improve its accessibility by helping docents develop tours for visitors with hearing loss and language disorders. During a training seminar the graduate students discussed communication disorders and how they affect people, demonstrated ways for docents to adjust their presentations to accommodate visitors with

these disabilities, and let docents practice these techniques in small groups with feedback from the students and colleagues. This partnership between the WAM and WSU provided benefits for the museum and its visitors, as well as the graduate students, allowing them to practice and hone their skills in their respective fields. By providing ways to make the WAM more accessible to all and complementing the studies of WSU students, all parties benefitted from this partnership (Gallagher Worthley et. al).

In addition to partnerships with universities, museums have also partnered with local communities to strengthen connections between museums and their communities and improve the lives of museum's most direct audiences. One such partnership is through the New Bedford Whaling Museum's Apprenticeship program, which trains students from New Bedford High School in museum work and interpretation over three years while developing their skills in public speaking, audience engagement, and other skills related to their individual career paths. The program provides Apprentices with internships with the museum and in local businesses, support in applying to colleges, and guidance throughout their college career focusing on helping them obtain degrees. The New Bedford Whaling Museum also partners with three local colleges: Bristol Community College, Bridgewater State University, and the University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth, to let alumni from the program access support services with their academic needs, career goals, and work for the museum in mind. In addition, alumni provide mentorship to current Apprentices, and some are offered paid positions at the museum after they graduate from the Apprenticeship. This large-scale program relies on clear communication, shared goals, and financial support between the museum, the universities, and several local community organizations to function effectively. By cooperating with the shared goal of promoting the success of New Bedford high schoolers, the New Bedford Whaling Museum is able to use its

partnership with the local community to harness educational and other resources to help students succeed (Rose "Museum University Partnerships" 286-191).

In order for traditional museum partnerships to work, they should involve close collaboration between the institutions involved, and clear goals for what the museum and its partner(s) hope to achieve through the partnership. In addition, both partner institutions should decide jointly what responsibilities each of them will take on, and what collaborative projects they will develop together that aim to achieve the partnership's goals (Ennes; Maloney and Hill). While formal agreements like that used in the FSU-FAM partnership can help support and guide partners goals and obligations, they are not required for successful collaboration, as the larger consideration is how much investment partners put into supporting and enriching each other's work. As mentioned by Maloney and Hill above, museums and institutions engaged in joint partnerships must make significant investments in time, money, educational, and other resources in order to create effective partnerships that benefit both institutions and their greater communities (Maloney and Hill). But while these best practices worked for museum partnerships prior to 2020, they will need to adjust to a pandemic and post-pandemic world.

Digital Technology and Best Practices-2020 Museum Case Studies

In the initial months of the pandemic, digital museum work was the only option available for museums, as normal in-person programs were no longer safe, and would remain unsafe for the foreseeable future. Following the shutdown of most museum buildings in March 2020, Massachusetts academic and public museums had to adjust quickly to a vastly different situation and come up with solutions for continuing to reach their audiences and communities. Since it was uncertain when their buildings could reopen, museums found that their physical collections were no longer accessible to the public and some staff members, and that previously scheduled

events, programs, and classes would have to be either cancelled or moved to an online format (Middleton; Schmull; Gubala; Rose *Interview*; Magee; Chamberlain 2-17.) Like many other public institutions, museums moved some of their programming to Zoom in order to keep past commitments and engage their audiences as best they could. Museum staff were forced to come up with new ideas for programs and initiatives on the fly, and move programming normally conducted in-person online while adjusting it to fit the new format, as well as constantly changing safety regulations (Chamberlain 2-17; Chamberlain 7-22; Gubala; Middleton; Magee; Schmull). Although the circumstances of individual museums differed, with some museums reopening during the summer of 2020 and others staying closed, reuse of previously digitized content and the creation of new content to fill the gap in in-person programming were common factors (Gubala; Maler; Chamberlain 2-17). Some of the most effective of these programs were ones created through museum's new or ongoing partnerships with other institutions, as staff pooled their resources to attract new and existing audiences and expand the subject matter and richness of their resulting projects (Maler; Ennes; Janairo.) As shown by the case studies below, these unique programs helped Massachusetts museums overcome the challenges of the pandemic to educate and support their communities.

The McMullen Museum of Art at Boston College had created virtual tours of several of their past exhibits before the pandemic and used these early on to transfer their docent tours to a virtual space. Docents with in-person guide training hosted these tours on Zoom while clicking through the virtual exhibit space, allowing them to produce professional virtual tours earlier than some museums (Chamberlain 7-22; Chamberlain 2-17). The museum has remained closed to the public since the start of the pandemic and is currently open to its academic community by appointment only. Since the museum has not been able to fully reopen, digital programming at

the McMullen has continued to thrive, with a focus on livestreaming lectures, art talks, and class visits with professionals in real time to students and museum members via Zoom. These talks have been highly popular with members, students, and faculty, and the museum plans to use the digital format to increase the accessibility of these programs for all and make it easier for far away speakers to participate virtually. The McMullen has also formed new partnerships with other museums, including New York University's Grey Gallery, with which they are presenting a travelling exhibit on Arab abstract art (Chamberlain 2-17). Over the summer of 2020 the McMullen Museum also engaged in new partnerships, including with the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute for a joint webinar related to the museum's past exhibit on the Indian Ocean. In addition, the museum's collection of livestreamed and digital tours of their past and present exhibits are free to access on their website and were used for the professional training of members of the National Docents Symposium Council in summer 2020 (Chamberlain 7-14). The turn to digital content has benefited the McMullen by creating opportunities to collaborate with other museums on best practices for virtual tours. However, the pandemic has weakened the museum's connection to its community, as it cannot replace all in-person programs with virtual ones, and certain audiences, such as seniors and young families with children, are harder to engage virtually (Chamberlain 2-17).

Old Sturbridge Village (OSV) also had to change its outreach strategy quickly at the start of the pandemic, but the museum's programming and outreach strategy was helped by two factors: staff were able to target specific segments of their audience based on a previously conducted audience study, and they were able to reopen during the summer of 2020, allowing visitors to attend in person if they wished (Gubala). OSV's digital content began with "behind the scenes" videos showing work in the village posted on social media and expanded over the

spring and summer to include virtual tours of some of the village's buildings. Similar to the McMullen Museum's goals, Old Sturbridge Village also plans to make its digital content available to anyone and promote accessibility by leaving the content up after the end of the pandemic. Since members and visitors may be unable or uncomfortable visiting in person as pandemic restrictions ease, letting them access the museum online will help them remain connected to the institution (Gubala; Chamberlain 2-17).

OSV also utilized hybrid programming early on in the pandemic, organizing their "Friends Day" membership fundraiser with a limited number of tickets for physical spots and simultaneous livestreams of the various events. This event helped OSV work out best practices, technical skills, and logistics for hybrid and livestreamed events, and similar hybrid events are planned for the future. They also started producing videos for social media and the museum website early on, often creating them quickly and cheaply to fill the immediate need for new content. As the long-term nature of the situation became apparent, the village created 3D virtual walkthroughs of some of their buildings, while developing content to support learning at Old Sturbridge Academy (OSA,) a K-6 school on the Village's grounds. The Village transferred OSA to a hybrid model after the shutdown, providing in-person teaching at the village for some students while creating virtual content for students who needed to learn from home. OSV also is moving toward taking content used for past in-person school field trips to the village and putting it online, for use in educating students at the OSA and in other schools across the country (Gubala.)

While OSV reopened to the public in the summer of 2020 its staff were aware that fluctuations in the number of COVID-19 cases in the state made their opening tentative, and that many potential visitors would be unable to visit in person due to safety concerns, financial

issues, or geographical distance. As such, the importance of digital content to the museums'

missions came to the forefront, with OSV making commitments to keep their digital content up

long-term, develop safe in-person and hybrid events, and continue to add new resources, even

after the pandemic eases (Gubala). These commitments helped support OSV's partnership with

the Coggeshall Farm Museum (CFM) in Bristol, Rhode Island, formed in early 2020 to support

the smaller CFM and invest in an institution holding shared values on advancing living history

programming (Donahue; "Re: Information About," "A Groundbreaking New Partnership".)

Although the pandemic impacted the long-term goals of this partnership, OSV was able to

provide financial support and professional development to CFM staff, allowing the farm museum

to reopen in July 2020 after it was closed to the public for over a year, and stage a joint

Halloween event, Phantoms and Fire, at both institutions with socially distanced theater

performances and treat walks (Urban; "Re: Information About".) These efforts in designing and

implementing digital, in person, and hybrid content have paid off for Old Sturbridge Village, as

they remain strongly connected with their community (Gubala.)

The Fitchburg Art Museum (FAM) has also adapted its programs to the pandemic, as the

partnership with Fitchburg State University (FSU) has moved online, with the Document Design

Class being conducted remotely (De Zorzi). In addition, FAM has created other online content,

including moving their Art Matters talks with local artists to YouTube, where the videos acquire

hundreds to thousands of views, gathering an audience much larger than the in-person versions

of these talks. The museum also plans to experiment with hybrid media, as they are currently

working to exhibit their annual "Art in Bloom" program, where FAM art is interpreted with

floral designs, both in the galleries once the museum reopens on March 26th, 2021 and on their

Flickr website. This allows audiences with various levels of comfort in returning to the building

to view the event in the way that feels most comfortable to them (De Zorzi). Fitchburg State University is also supporting the FAM in community programs outside the Document Design class, by providing funding and logistical support for the "Fitchburg Families First" initiative, a community program that distributes food, gift cards, and art supplies to needy local families ("Fitchburg Art Museum to Launch"; De Zorzi.) Although the food bank will likely be discontinued after the pandemic, the FAM will continue to support its community through educational events and tiered pricing options for programming (De Zorzi).

Worcester Art Museum (WAM) had partnerships with the local public school system and community groups before the pandemic, and these continued after March 2020, with studio art classes and exhibitions moved online. The museum also has Institutional Memberships with all the colleges and universities in the greater Worcester area, allowing students and staff there to access staff resources, receive discounts on art classes, and participate in community exhibitions in ways that fit the mission and goals of each specific educational institution. In addition, WAM holds memos of understanding with local secondary schools that provide museum resources and rental spaces to their teachers and students, and partners with other local museums, including the Ecotarium, to develop richer programming (Weir). Since the WAM holds multiple partnerships with community, educational, and cultural groups in the area, it was able to work with them to move content online during the pandemic, open up new exhibitions in-person following the WAM's reopening in October 2020, and begin investing in hybrid programming though the strong relationship the WAM has with its partners and greater community. By listening to their community and expanding their audiences through short virtual "Zip Zoom" exhibit tours and other programming, the WAM's partnerships have enabled it to continue to enrich the Worcester community (Weir.)

While the digital strategies undertaken by museums during the pandemic share many similar practices, it is important to note that programs created through museum-university partnerships differ from those created though museum's partnerships with other cultural and community organizations. Programs created with the support of secondary or higher educational institutions mainly focus on their student's education, often with the goal of helping them learn certain skills or complete specific classes in ways that will also provide benefits to the museums involved. These educational goals tend to differ between institutions, requiring the Worcester Art Museum to create multiple formal agreements with the many schools and universities they currently partner with (Weir.) Academic museums at Harvard and other universities operate primarily to support the students and teachers of those institutions, requiring them to adapt their teaching content to digital and hybrid forms during the pandemic (Chamberlain; Middleton; Block; Schmull; Rose *Interview*.) Some of these partnerships also work to directly support university students by offering them a stipend to conduct research work for the museum (Sauer.) In contrast, programming created through museums' community and organizational partnerships has the goal of supporting and educating the museum's community. During the pandemic Historic New England, Old Sturbridge Village, and other Massachusetts museums worked to put their content online to ensure it was still accessible to the public. These online programs were also educational, but unlike with museum-university partnership programs, they encouraged informal learning for all ages, and were not tied to the goals of specific educational institutions. As these museums tried to move previously scheduled content online, some were able to create new institutional partnerships, deepening their links with other arts institutions and their communities. Although some museums, like the Fitchburg Art Museum and Worcester Art Museum, created programming with both academic and institutional partners, this programming

was specific to the group served and kept separate from other museum communities, showing that programming created for one group is designed primarily to serve that group's needs (Maler; Magee; Gubala; De Zorzi; Weir.)

While the situation with the pandemic is continually shifting, and the circumstances and resources of museums differ, the varied digital strategies cultural institutions engaged in during the past year have brought to light a new series of practices that museums can use to continue to engage their communities. First, museums can promote accessibility by making digital content easily accessible, keeping it up post pandemic, and using virtual tours to bring those who cannot visit "into" the museum. The interviews conducted for this capstone found that many of those interviewed learned the importance of increasing accessibility for all visitors during their institution's closure and found that virtual tours and other digital programs helped bring the museum to guests who were previously unable to visit (Gubala; Chamberlain; Maler; Schmull; Magee). A chief staff member at Historic New England, Michael Maler, discussed how the new virtual tours of his organizations' historic houses attracted guests with physical disabilities, who were able to access the digital buildings more easily than they could their physical equivalents, given the latter's lack of elevators and accessible facilities (Maler). Most of the interviewees also stated their plan to keep digital material created during the pandemic on their institution's websites after it ends and make it freely and easily accessible for all who wish to view it (Gubala; Maler; Chamberlain; Schmull).

Second, museums can use feedback surveys to assess their audiences and determine what kinds of programming are working and which are not. Old Sturbridge Village used their previously conducted survey to succeed in their digital strategy, but also used informal surveys to test various types of digital content and see if it was resonating with their audiences (Gubala).

Even if museums lack an audience assessment, conducting feedback on programming and exhibits is standard museum practice, and in a situation where the museum's outreach opportunities are physically and financially limited, learning what programs work and what changes need to be made is increasingly important ("Professional Practices"; *Excellence in Practice*; Maloney and Hill). Finally, museums can partner and collaborate with other institutions and organizations to share knowledge and best practices while creating unique programming. The case studies above show that museum partnerships bring benefits to partner institutions and their audiences, while introducing these audiences to new organizations.

The benefits of museums forming new partnerships are shown by Historic New England, as it was able to livestream a Handel and Haydn concert scheduled before the pandemic online, which allowed for a much larger audience than a physical concert. The two organizations partnered due to their pandemic closures, allowing NHE to form a relationship with a local cultural organization that enabled both partners to continue their work and sparked potential for future joint projects (Maler). Recently HNE has also made or strengthened partnerships with additional performing arts organizations in the Boston area, including the Boston Baroque Orchestra, the Boston Camerata, and Mass Opera. These partnerships provide musicians who are unable to play on their own stages with an alternative digital space for performances, while exposing HNE audiences to content they may not have seen before, and audiences of the arts organizations to the historic buildings managed by HNE ("Re: Some info…"; Maler.) These partnerships can be continued after the pandemic and can attract new audiences through the new and innovative programming the partners develop together. By creating digital and hybrid content with both in-person and virtual components, museums aim to increase their accessibility to their audiences, while providing them with educational resources, entertainment, and a

connection to fellow members with similar interests. The livestreamed and hybrid content

they've developed aims to ease the isolation of communities in quarantine, while helping them

make connections between each other and the museum (Gubala; Maler).

While community investment, financial support, creation of relevant content, and clear

goals support the development of cross institutional partnerships, they rely on the time, financial

resources, and administrative support of institutions and museums, which vary based on their

overall circumstances. With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, museums, community

organizations, and universities finances were sharply reduced, making it harder to maintain these

partnerships. Collaborations between museums and their audiences remain essential today, both

for the survival of museums and the educational, accessible, and engaging resources they provide

to the public (Kingsley 250-252; Maloney and Hill 247-249; "National Snapshot".) While some

museums have reopened since the start of the pandemic, they are still inaccessible to those who

are unsure about their safety, and audiences who are too remote to visit. By creating new, and

uploading existing digital content to museum's websites, including Zoom learning sessions and

3D models of objects and buildings, museums were able to stay "open" online while they were

physically closed, or only open with limited space (*UNESCO Report* 15-17; *Report: Museums,*

Museum Professionals 9-13.)

Best Practices

Due to the closure of museums from the COVID-19 pandemic, funding and grants have

been reduced due to the financial downturn, and the lack of visitor and other revenue have put

many museums under threat of large-scale financial loss and bankruptcy (*UNESCO Report* 4-5,

13; *Report: Museums, Museum Professionals* 1-8; "National Snapshot" 2-17). The long-term

implications of the pandemic on society and museum work specifically are still emerging, but

museums face increased pressure today to protect their organizations while proving their value to society and in education (*Culture+Community* 2-36). Preserving and strengthening partnerships with their academic, local, and national communities can help museums support, educate, and entertain their audiences, making their institutions relevant to people in the midst of uncertain times. The expansion of digital content during the shutdown has helped preserve some of these partnerships and spark the creation of new ones, while easing the isolation caused by quarantine through interactive livestreams and other programs. (*UNESCO Report* 15-17; *Report: Museums, Museum Professionals* 9-13; Maler; Chamberlain; Gubala). In order for this foundation of practice to continue, though, it should be linked to best practices that promote the creation of rich, meaningful, and relevant digital, in-person, and hybrid content. In the midst of a pandemic current best practices may fall short, as they are based on an in-person museum visitation model that is currently unsafe to pursue (Block; "Professional Practices" 3-23; *Excellence in Practice* 2-11). As such, new best practices should be developed that speak to the current situation and address contemporary concerns and challenges in the museum field. The results of this capstone's research developed a list of best practices in the creation of digital and hybrid media for museums to follow during the pandemic. These best practices are based on four themes: Engagement, Accessibility, Interactive Hybrid Programming, and Reaching all Audiences.

Museums should strive to engage their audiences through their virtual content by giving them spaces to interact with each other and the museum at large. Virtual livestreams and programs where viewers get to interact with the presenter and each other are great ways to engage people, as their participation shapes these programs and helps the museum address community concerns. Live programming also lets guests and hosts share relevant knowledge and topics of common interest, engaging them with the museum community (Maler; Gubala.) Virtual

programs should be created to be as accessible as possible for national and international viewers with different needs and circumstances. Keeping content free, archiving it online, and adding accessibility features for users with disabilities like closed captioning will help virtual and hybrid programs reach ever larger and more diverse audiences. It is important to note that due to the financial difficulties many museums are facing during the pandemic, not all institutions can afford to digitize their materials, or provide them online for free (*UNESCO Report;* "National Snapshot") An alternate solution could be funding these projects via grants or money set aside for digitization projects, or by using funds from memberships to cover part of these costs. Museums should keep interactive hybrid programming as an option even when the pandemic eases, as some audiences may not feel comfortable visiting in person for various reasons (*Cuture+Community* 22; Maler). Hybrid programs are a strong way to engage local and outside audiences with the museum's work and keeping them available into the future will make the museum feel more open and understanding of user's needs. Finally, museums should strive to reach all audiences in at least their local communities, while working to overcome biases and communicate the stories of minority and underrepresented groups in the museum's work and programming (*Culture + Community*.)

Museum Programming Data Summary 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically changed the programming of museums across Massachusetts and affected the numbers of guests who were able to attend, both virtually and in-person. The fiscal year reports from the Harvard Art Museums (HAM) clearly show this change, as the numbers of both programs and attending guests dropped between the 2019 and 2020 financial years, with the number of programs decreasing by 55% and the number of guests by 74% (Thum and Muir; *Academic and Public FY19*; *Academic and Public FY20*; *Virtual Public*

Programs). However, the HAM's teaching and programming staff put their resources into

producing several new kinds of virtual content during the shutdown, ranging from art talks aimed

at young children and families to docent-led explorations of the history and culture of specific

items in the HAM collections. In addition, the HAM has continued to partner with other

institutions, including Historic New England, to create new content related to the HAM's

collections and local New England history ("Re: Some info"; Thum and Muir; *Academic and*

Public FY19; *Academic and Public FY20*; *Virtual Public Programs*). Between June and

December 2020, the number of programs the HAM offered continued to decrease by an

additional 55%, but the number of guests attending these digital programs increased by 56%,

from 6,313 to 11, 233 guests over the course of six months (Thum and Muir; *Academic and*

Public FY19; Academic and Public FY20; *Virtual Public Programs*). Figure 1 below shows the

changes in the Harvard Art Museum's programs offered and guests attending from fiscal year
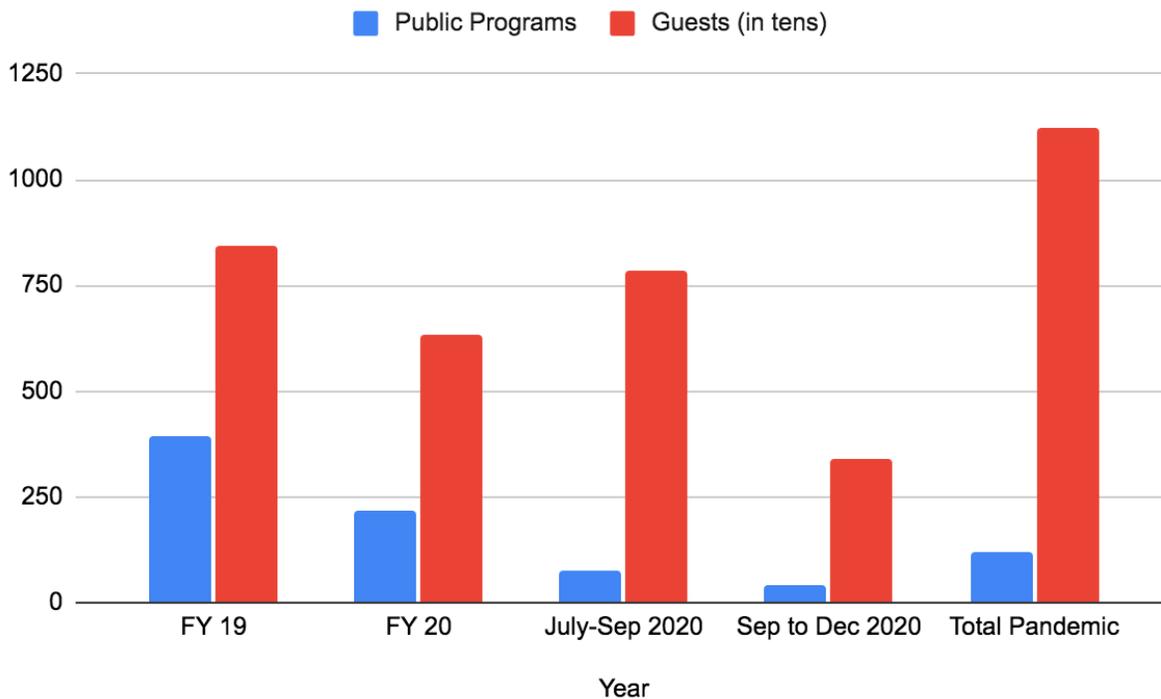
2019 to December 2020.

Fig. 1. Harvard Art Museums Public Programs and Guests (2019-2020). Thum, Jen and Laura Muir. *Teaching Remotely in Spring and Summer 2020: Final Report.* Harvard Art Museums, *Academic and Public Programs at the Harvard Art Museums FY19.* Harvard Art Museums, June 30th, 2019, *Academic and Public Programs at the Harvard Art Museums FY20.* Harvard Art Museums, June 30th, 2020, *Virtual Public Programs Report-Fall 2020.* Harvard Art Museums.

The interview results ranging from summer 2020 to spring 2021 revealed some shared museum practices, including a focus on making museum programs more accessible and a commitment to expanding the digital programming of institutions through investments in hardware, software, staff training, and hiring of digital professionals (Schmull; Block; Maler; Gubala.) Another key finding from the capstone research was a growth in the number of partnerships between museums and institutions over the past year. Historic New England's (HNE) historic houses deepened their existing

partnerships with other institutions during the pandemic, while forming new ones with local arts and culture institutions. These partnerships resulted in new programming for HNE online, while allowing staff from partner organizations, including the Harvard Art Museums and the Handel and Haydn Society, to contribute their skills and research to HNE online lectures and other programming. While the large influx of museum and cultural programming after March 2020 threatened to cut into the HNE's program viewership, the organization's partnerships and rich online programming, in addition to a "pay what you wish" revenue model for purchasing tickets, helped HNE dramatically increase its audience size during the pandemic. The amount of online content produced by the organization increased from 20% to 100% over the past year, and Figure 2 below shows an illustration of this change in HNE produced online content as compared to in-person content. ("Re: Some Info").
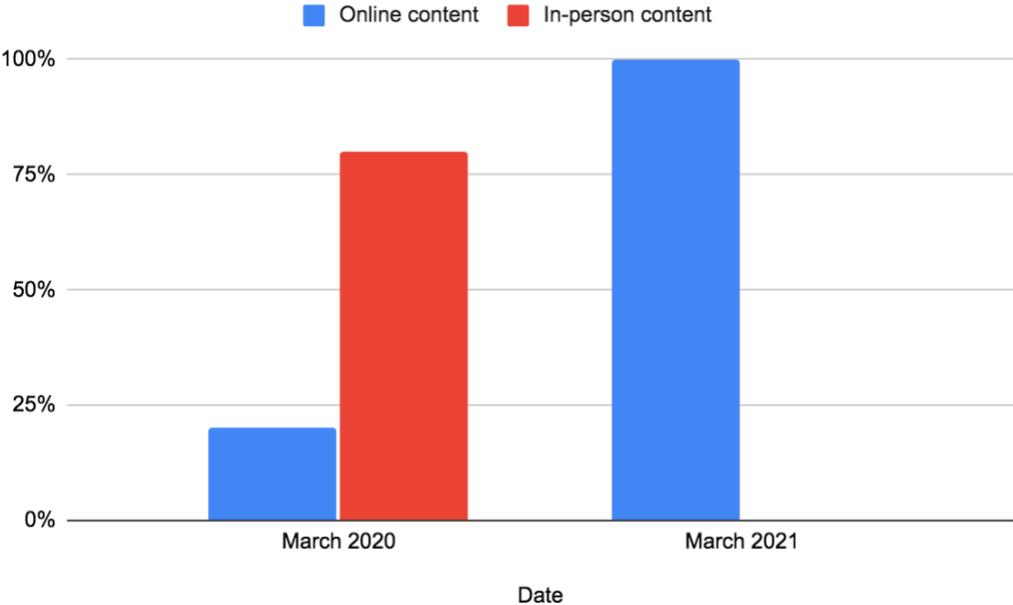

Fig. 2.   Historic New England Online vs. In-person Content (2020-2021). Maler, Michael. "Re: Some Info…" Email received by Julia Bloom, 18 March 2020.

Capstone Interview Results

Although the interviewees had varying responses to the interview questions the data collected reveals similarities between the practices of different museums. One of the main trends in museum digital programming was that most programs originated through existing and newly created partnerships with universities, secondary schools, cultural institutions, and community organizations. Almost all the museums surveyed had created several kinds of online programming through these partnerships, and had more planned for the future in hybrid, online, and in-person formats. One key commonality was a focus on providing museum content virtually in ways that were similar to how it was presented in-person. Previously scheduled lectures and concerts were transferred to Zoom, and virtual tours of museums were held using Matterport walkthroughs and digitized images of collection objects. In addition, academic museums moved joint class sessions and art thesis shows online or provided classes that had scheduled visits pre-pandemic with relevant materials for their learning if the group was unable to attend a virtual tour (Block; *McMullen Museum Question*; Gubala; Magee; Maler; Middleton; Rose *Interview*; Schmull). These collaborative programs proved among the most successful of many museum's digital practices, and all the interviewees expressed their desire to expand and improve their digital resources and programs, with some hoping to hire a full-time staff member to take charge of the digital programming of their museum (Block; Chamberlain; De Zorzi; Gubala). It is clear that the increase in digital programming during the pandemic is due to its success in engaging and educating audiences, and both academic and public museums hope to expand these programs though different means, including partnerships with their universities or outside institutions.

Although the majority of interviewees supported an expansion to digital content in their museum's education programs, two of them voiced their doubts that such programs could reach

and support their entire audiences. Rachel Chamberlain at the McMullen Museum believes that since their digital programs mostly have a have a more scholarly or in-depth focus, they haven't reached their community virtually to the same extent as they used to in person. Since there is less space for informal programming and casual conversation during museum events, their connection to their audiences of Seniors and families with small children has weakened during the pandemic (Chamberlain 2/17.) Phoebe Magee at the New Bedford Whaling Museum also had doubts about the success of moving their Apprenticeship program online. Formal feedback conducted on the program after the summer of 2020 revealed that students were fatigued by having to participate in a virtual Apprenticeship on top of virtual high school classes and learned more easily when taught in-person. As a result, the museum may not continue its digital Apprenticeship program, and might instead focus on in-person learning in small groups (Magee.) These results show that not all digital or hybrid programs will work for all audiences, and that there are both benefits and costs to a digital education model. Museums should use thorough feedback and cost-benefit analysis to determine how to format their programming and education initiatives in ways that will best fit their audience's needs.

Data Results

The data collected from interviewees, along with information from museums currently engaged in formal and informal institutional partnerships, show that Massachusetts museums were able to increase their audiences and community connections during the pandemic through rich and engaging programming created through partnerships. The HNE, HAM, and other local museums often utilized partner resources when creating digital and hybrid programs, including image files and guest spots on themed lectures, and these programs attracted much larger audiences than similar in-person events, even with competition from other digital programs produced by foreign

and out of state cultural institutions. The success of these digital programs has led all the interviewees to plan an expansion of digital content post-pandemic, in order to remain accessible to disabled and remote audiences while exploring the possibilities of digital content for museum education. This data shows that museum partnerships enrich digital and hybrid content beyond what individual institutions are capable of, while expanding their audiences and continuing to engage their communities. Both partnerships formed during the pandemic and ones adapted during it will continue to enable museums to increase outreach through the use of digital media and hybrid technologies (De Zorzi; Gubala; Maler; Academic and Public FY20.)

Research Methods and Interview Questions-Three Phases of Research

The research goals for this capstone changed between when research was begun in the summer of 2020 and when the capstone was finalized in the spring of 2021. The changes occurred over three phases, during which the research goals and interview questions asked were adjusted as more was learned about museum practice during the pandemic. The capstone started off as a research project during an internship with the Harvard Art Museums (HAM,) looking at how academic museums in the United States were partnering with their universities and colleges during the shutdown. The questions asked during interviews in the summer of 2020 with academic museum professionals focused on what factors led to the success or failure of their adjusting class visits and other academic programs to digital, and what online tools could be used to improve these programs (Appendix A.) Unlike later research questions, these initial questions did not consider the importance and impact of hybrid museum programming, which became apparent as more research was conducted. The summer 2020 questions also only focused briefly on what pandemic-era programs could be continued following the pandemic, which later became a main focus of the capstone's current argument (Appendix B, Appendix C.)

Before and during the initial summer 2020 interviews, time was spent examining the websites of museums in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand to see what digital content, if any, had been uploaded to their sites, and what digital programs the museums were undertaking during their closures. There was a large range of digital programs offered, ranging from 3D Matterport virtual tours of museum buildings to animated models of natural history museum specimens and collections objects. However, there was a discrepancy between the amount of digital content available from museum to museum, as some smaller institutions lacked content beyond videos of past events, slideshows of student work in university museums, and printable activities for children and families. Many museum websites at the time also had incomplete or unfinished collections databases, with some links to objects not working or lacking information. Surprisingly, the size and funding level of a given museum did not seem to have a direct effect on how much digital content the museum had put online, with some large university and public museums lacking content while smaller institutions had a variety of options available. This research led to the conclusion that staff members skilled in digital education are needed to allow museum programming to pivot online, and that more research was needed to determine additional factors that enable museums to educate and reach their communities digitally. In addition, most interviewees expressed their interest in keeping some of their online content up post-pandemic, showing the importance of maintaining existing digital content for future use (Maler, Chamberlain, Gubala.)

Although the research for this capstone was largely based on interviews with museum professionals, it was also limited by them, as not all individuals contacted were able to interview, and the short timeline of capstone development meant not all interviewees could be followed up with later for comparative interviews. Of the five museum professionals interviewed in the

summer of 2020, Jay Block, Rachel Chamberlain, Adam Middleton, Emily Rose, and Michaela Schmull, only Ms. Chamberlain was contacted for a follow up interview that fall, leaving a gap in the research used for this capstone. To fill this gap in the research several additional museum professionals from public museums were interviewed in fall 2020 and spring 2021, but the lack of follow up means the picture this capstone paints is incomplete. Further research is needed to create a more thorough analysis of museum digital practice in Massachusetts during the pandemic, and how these practices changed over time.

During the fall of 2020, the research focus for the capstone shifted to public museums as the scope of the argument expanded to include additional types of museums. The decision was also made during this time to focus on museums in Massachusetts, as differing pandemic rules between states and abroad would make comparison between institutions harder. The questions asked during this time focused more on what programs museums created after their closure, and which of these could be continued following the pandemic. They also asked about museum's hybrid digital and in-person programming while trying to assess the success and failure of these programs (Appendix B.) These questions shared some similarities with the previous set asked to academic museums, as both inquired about how museum's audiences reacted to their digital programming, with questions on audience feedback and the strength of the museum's connection to its community (See Appendix B, Appendix C.) However, these questions did not specifically ask about what partnerships museums formed with other institutions to create unique digital programs, an angle that became part of the finalized focus of this capstone (Appendix C.)

In the spring of 2021, the focus of the capstone research, and the questions asked in interviews, changed to put more of a focus on how partnerships created and enhanced museum digital programming. The results of these interviews made it clear that hybrid and livestreamed

content had a strong positive impact on museum audiences, and that museum's partnerships with other institutions could both enhance and create new and rich content and shape the digital strategies of museums. Live programs like HNE's "Twilight Talks" and the WAM's "Zip Zoom" sessions give viewers a sense of normalcy by letting them interact with other audience members and museum staff, while partnership created programming like the FAM's Document Design Class' with FSU and HNE's joint concert with the Handel and Haydn society provides benefits to both the partner organizations and their audiences (Barbagallo et. al; Maler; "Memorandum".) While this capstone promotes unique digital strategies for museums, such strategies require significant financial investments, and cannot be put into place quickly and easily. While the financial aspect of these programs was considered, it was ultimately decided that it was outside the scope of the capstone but may be expanded upon in future research. The finalized research goals focus on how formal or formalized museum partnerships with other cultural or learning institutions help the partners create strong digital content that benefits all audiences, and how the museum practices created to enable this joint digital programming can improve museum practice in the post-pandemic era. In addition to the interviews, the research for the capstone is grounded in recent scholarship on how COVID-19 is affecting museums, best practice policies on museum education and digital technology from professional organizations, and case studies of past museum-university partnerships (*UNESCO Report*; *Excellence in Practice*; *Report: Museums*.)

Lessons for Future Museum Practice and Conclusions

During the COVID-19 pandemic, museums expanded their digital offerings and programs in order to reach their audiences while their buildings were closed. The range of programs created is wide, and includes virtual tours, hybrid in-person and virtual events, and online seminars. This new digital programming has proved successful at educating and engaging museum audiences,

while expanding them to visitors who are unable to visit institutions in person, or who live far away from specific museums. It also made museums more accessible, as institutions started holding more talks and tours focused on minority groups and exhibited their buildings and collections online (Maler; Gubala.) As of spring 2021 the pandemic shows signs of waning with the introduction of new vaccines, and museums have either reopened with social distancing guidelines or are considering reopening their institutions in the near future.

While it is still uncertain exactly when the pandemic will subside, and when social distancing and other restrictions will be lifted, it is clear the new strategies and technologies used by museums during the pandemic will impact future museum practice. These changes may have future implications on post-pandemic museum work, and most of the capstone interviewees expressed their interest in continuing to use digital programming and increasing the number of their programs and resources that are available digitally. In addition, most of them shared a common goal of keeping new and existing digital content accessible post-pandemic and continuing to expand upon and improve it in the future, with some considering hiring full-time digital programming staff to assist in this area (Block; Gubala; Chamberlain; Maler). The increase in reliance on technology during the pandemic has shown its ability to attract visitors from all over the world, and museums will need a large audience base to support them as countries and states transition out of the pandemic (*UNESCO Report*; *Report: Museums*.) In addition, digital technologies like Zoom and the virtual tour software Matterport make it easier for remote scholars and professionals to present at museums, and for remote visitors to explore museums from home, opening up museums to new and wider communities (Gubala; Maler; Magee; Middleton; Schull; Rose *Interview*.)

The interview results also suggest that museums will move toward creating more diverse programming and confronting biases in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests, and other protests against racism and bigotry. Some museums have already started diversifying their content, including Historic New England, which presented talks on African American and Asian experiences in an effort to get away from their institution's perception as a museum focused on privileged landholders in New England (Maler.) The new audiences brought in through the expansion of digital content will necessitate museums confronting ingrained biases and unequal power relationships in their collections and their presentations. This "decolonizing" of museums is needed to make museums serve the needs of their whole community, and not just privileged sections of it (*Culture+Community)*. Finally, the capstone's research suggests museums will increasingly use their digital resources in teaching, including during class sessions held online. Institutions like Old Sturbridge Village created new hybrid educational formats during the pandemic, while moving content previously offered in-person to digital (Gubala.) With available digital education resources, including newly expanded collections databases, museums will have a rich supply of content to pull from in order to support virtual class visits, and follow up on learning done during in-person class trips. These digital learning programs were designed to operate similarly to equivalent in-person programs, allowing them to successfully educate remote students. Research suggests that the expansion of Zoom activities for children during the pandemic will continue after it, and the software will also make virtual student sessions easier and more convenient for remote schools (Chamberlain 7/14; Chamberlain 2/17; Magee.)

As academic and public museums cope with the ever-changing situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, they are developing unique digital content through their partnerships that can influence museum practice into the future. The interviews with museum professionals conducted for this

capstone have revealed a number of current practices that have the potential to assist museums in creating and strengthening their partnerships through the current pandemic and beyond. Although the programming strategies of these museums differ in type and scope, they share four key goals: Promoting Community Engagement, Increasing Museum Accessibility, Utilizing Interactive Hybrid Programming, and making efforts to Reach All Audiences. By following these goals, museums have invested in programming that has positively engaged their audiences and opened up new methods of museum education, especially through hybrid in-person and online events. This new programming can also be continued past the pandemic shutdown and can influence how museums educate and engage with their audiences as community resources (Gubala; Chamberlain 7/14; Chamberlain 2/17, Maler.)

Even when the situation with the pandemic eases, not all audiences will be comfortable returning to the museum in-person, leading to a mixed audience of those comfortable visiting again and those who choose to stay home. Museums are planning and developing interactive hybrid programming to serve both audiences, with event content presented for in person visitors and concurrently livestreamed on Zoom or the museum's social media channels (Gubala; Chamberlain 7/14; Chamberlain 2/17, Maler.) Since museum space is restricted and the technical requirements of livestreaming can be high not all content can be shown in a hybrid format. Museums should consider what programming is best served by hybrid distribution, and what needs to be restricted to in-person or digital only. One example of strong hybrid programming is online classes, as professors can collaborate with students at home while livestreaming from the museum, or vice versa. Some academic museums have taken this one step forward by splitting in-person classes into smaller groups and assigning them museum visits on different days. This setup can help students and professors maintain social distancing by allowing class groups to switch between virtual and physical

work (Janairo.) Historic New England has also engaged successfully with hybrid programming through its livestreamed H+H concert and its "Twilight Talks" on Zoom where guests are encouraged to join in the discussion. These programs meet audiences where they are and can use streaming and online resources to enhance their educational and engagement goals (Janairo; Maler.)

In order to increase museum's engagement with their audiences, museums are well served if they transfer programming scheduled before the shutdown to an online format, while creating new virtual content that fits their mission. Virtual livestreams, lectures, and other live content have proved to be popular among museum audiences and can drive strong engagement and positive feedback from them. Unlike prerecorded content, livestreams let the audience members engage with each other and the speakers. The McMullen Museum's "Into the Collection" live classes let students see all parts of collection objects and ask questions in real time, engaging them more than a prerecorded video of the same content would (Chamberlain 7/14, Chamberlain 2/17.) In addition, letting audiences interact with other people fills a gap in face-to-face interaction caused by the quarantine, allowing guests at the WAM's "Zip Zoom" tours and HNE's "Twilight Talks" to interact with both the presenters and other members of the virtual audience (Maler; Weir.) In addition, museums that collaborate with other nonprofit organizations can hold joint events such as virtual talks and concerts that bring in audiences from each organization, creating a space to introduce each audience to the other organization and its work. Such events have successfully brought in new audiences for both organizations, while creating and strengthening cross organizational ties (Chamberlain 7-22, Chamberlain 2-17; Maler; Weir.) However, not all digital and hybrid programming works for all museum audiences, increasing the chance that some groups may be left out. It is important for museums to gather feedback on all their programs in order to create programming that best fits the needs of their audiences (Chamberlain 2/17; Maler.)

Before the pandemic, museums were not fully accessible for reasons including lack of accommodations in buildings for those with disabilities, distance to museum locations, and cost barriers. The pandemic's effects on the United States have left more members of the public, along with museum members, unable to access physical museums due to building closures, health barriers for those with preexisting conditions, and fears relating to the virus and the safety of current vaccines (*Culture+Community*; Gubala.) Digital content can help resolve these issues by letting more people access museum's collections, buildings, and programs, making them accessible to anyone with a working computer and internet connection. Certain kinds of content can also increase the museums accessibility for certain groups. Some historic house museums, including many affiliated with HNE, lack elevators and other accommodations for disabled visitors, making it unlikely that members of those communities will be able to visit the buildings safely, and limiting their access to the educational and community resources those houses provide. In order to maintain access to one of the houses owned by HNE, the museum moved the content of its touch-based kiosks in the Eustis Estate online, allowing anyone to learn about the building, its history, and the people who lived there (Maler; "Re: Some Info".) In addition, 3D virtual tours at Old Sturbridge village and other institutions let visitors access all areas of the site without leaving home, opening up these institutions to those who were unable to visit them before (Gubala.) While these digital strategies inadvertently attracted audiences with physical and other handicaps, they can be utilized in the future to make museums more accessible to visitors in multiple locations, and with many different abilities (Gubala; Maler.)

As museums strive to become more accessible and open, they can use digital media, along with support services and relevant advertising, to reach all segments of the museum's audiences, including more diverse segments of it. Museums like HNE created programming to attract more diverse

populations during the pandemic, in order to expand their programming to tell the stories of minority groups in New England. These programs included the "Driving While Black" discussion on African American experiences with travel, as well as current programming on the Asian-American experience in New England this spring (Maler.) Some of these programs, like the FAM's "Fitchburg Families First" initiative, gave direct aid to low-income members of the community, while also providing art supplies to families to encourage their children to get more involved in making art (De Zorzi.) However, these programs are best served if they are accompanied by the museum's commitment to end racism and promote diversity and civic action. The New Bedford Whaling Museum's "Museum for All Framework" is one step in this direction, as it works to increase access to the museum while creating initiatives to promote social justice (Magee.) Museums can use their websites, along with online, social, and traditional media, to promote these programs, while working with their communities and partners to improve their strategies and seek feedback (Magee; Maler; De Zorzi.) Academic museums can also attract their audiences through efforts to support students and professor's online teaching. One of these museums put museum resources, including videos, lesson plans, and essays, into a new section of its website called "Art and Ideas." This allowed professors, students, and the public to equally access the material, advertising the university while helping professors learn more about the teaching resources the museum provided (Janairo.) This wide range of programming can both reach and support diverse museum audiences, while expanding their reach to groups who were previously underrepresented at many institutions.

This past year, with its required changes in museum practice and financial and administrative challenges, has taught museums in Massachusetts valuable lessons that can benefit their institutions and communities in the future. The importance and relevance of digital and hybrid programming for museums is clearer now than before, as museums can reach wider and more diverse audiences

through online programming, while supporting them with freely available digital collections, online classes, and other digital resources. As most of the professionals interviewed stated their intention to keep new and existing online content up post pandemic, it is safe to say that museums will continue to expand their digital programming in the future (Chamberlain; Gubala; Maler; Middleton; Rose *Interview*; Schmull). In addition, museums have learned that their institution's accessibility to multiple audiences is key to making their museums fully diverse. As community needs increase and criticism mounts over museum's marginalization of minority groups, ensuring all members of a museum's community can access its online, physical, and other resources easily becomes ever more important for museum's relevance and survival (*Culture+Community*; *Report: Museums, Museum Professionals;* Maler.) Finally, museums have learned that both relevance and accessibility are needed to pull in visitors. Museums need to be able to provide information and resources that are valuable to their communities to invest them in their institutions, while making them available on easy to access and free platforms. These lessons from pandemic museum practice hold the potential to transform museum work and institutions for the better in the years ahead.

With the lessons learned from the pandemic and the programming it created in mind, here are some suggestions for actions museums can take to improve their programming, outreach, and accessibility after the pandemic. First, museums should expand the scope of their partnerships and engage in international collaborations with museums and nonprofits across the world. As technology blurs national borders, museums have fewer limits to other institutions than before, and can easily reach out to find similar institutions that share their goals and focuses. Forming partnerships with other institutions allows them to join together to create unique programming that benefits stakeholders in multiple countries and develops multinational collaborations. Second, museums should make a commitment to increase diversity in programming and bring in underserved groups to

their institutions. As issues surrounding diversity and racial bias become increasingly apparent in today's society, museums should work to be part of the solution by confronting biases in their institutions and collections, while expanding the scope of their programming to include marginalized voices and minority perspectives. Finally, museums should ensure accessibility and availability of digital, in-person, and hybrid museum activities and content after the pandemic. Online content should be free and easy to access for all audiences, to ensure peoples of all ages, backgrounds, and ability levels can learn and benefit from the museum and its resources. These suggestions have the potential to transform museums for the better and have them emerge from the pandemic with a stronger community and technology-based focus that brings museums to all members of their diverse communities.

A "return to normal" for museums after the pandemic threatens to obscure the lessons taught by the experiences of museums over the past year, all of which are vital for them to become more open, modern, and inclusive institutions. By being forced to move their content and programming exclusively online, museums have developed new digital strategies in programming, including livestreaming museum content, developing hybrid in-person and digital events, and creating virtual museum tours for physically distant and disabled guests. In addition, the pandemic led museum staff to prioritize new goals, including promoting accessibility to all audiences, and working to overcome ingrained biases in collections and education to make institutions more inclusive. These new practices all have the potential to create more community-focused and open institutions, while addressing community challenges and opening up museums to broader and more diverse communities. By learning from the difficulties of the past pandemic year, museums have a chance to improve their work and evolve to meet the challenges of the future.

Did you collaborate with faculty and/or conduct virtual class visits while your museum was closed?

What methods did you use for those collaborations or visits?

What feedback have you received on your collaborations and/or class visit? Have you used it to make any changes or improvements to them?

Which of your collaborations and visits do you think has been the most successful and why?

What models and best practices, if any, have you used in collaborating with classes?

What plans do you have for faculty collaboration and class visits for the fall semester?

If funding and resources were not an issue, what collaborations and visits would you develop for your museum?

My research has shown that collaborations between museums and universities can be difficult to set up due to institutional and learning style differences. What do you think museums could do to make these collaborations easier?

What programs or initiatives did you create after your museum closed for the pandemic? How did you plan to keep them relevant and educational?

What feedback have you received on your initiatives or programs? Have you used it to make any changes or improvements to them?

Which of your programs or initiatives do you think has been the most successful and why?

What digital practices that your museum is using during the pandemic do you think can be used after reopening and the end of the pandemic?

Do you think your museum has been successful in presenting itself online? Why or why not?

If funding and resources were not an issue, what collaborations, initiatives, or programs would you develop for your museum?

Do you think your museum has a strong or weak connection to your community? What do you think can be done to make this connection stronger?

Are you considering continuing any of the programs or initiatives you started during the shutdown after pandemic restrictions are lifted? Which ones are they and why do you want to continue them?

[For museums that have reopened] What programs and initiatives have you started or continued after your museum reopened?

Do you think hybrid digital/in-person programming would work for your museum?

What programming do you have planned for the near future?

What programs or initiatives did you create for your museum since last summer? How did you plan to keep them relevant and educational?

Have you partnered with other museums or organizations outside of the university? If so, how did you partner with them, and what resulted from that partnership?

Which of your programs or initiatives do you think has been the most successful and why?

What digital practices that your museum is using during the pandemic do you think can be used after reopening and the end of the pandemic?

Do you think your museum has a strong or weak connection to your community? What do you think can be done to make this connection stronger?

Are you considering continuing any of the programs or initiatives you started during the shutdown after pandemic restrictions are lifted? Which ones are they and why do you want to continue them?

Have you developed a way to earn income from your digital programs? If so, how does it work, and how do the earnings from these programs compare to those made in a "typical" year?

What programs and initiatives did you start or continue after your museum reopened?

Do you think hybrid digital/in-person programming would work for your museum?

What programming do you have planned for the near future?

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