

10 Thoughts on the Post-pandemic Future of Museums

Mid-town Detroit Cultural Center Planning Initiative
November 24, 2020

Elizabeth Merritt

Vice President, Strategic Foresight and
Founding Director, Center for the Future of Museums

@futureofmuseums

@aamers





- Blog
- Forecasting reports
- E-newsletter
- Research



**Center for the Future
of Museums**

Dispatches from
the Future of Museums

An initiative of the American Alliance of Museums



**American
Alliance of
Museums**

Today's Format

- 10 Lightning Topics
- Observations: During the Pandemic
- Speculation: In the Future?

Any of these could support a longer discussion!

#1

Digital Opportunities

During the pandemic

- 98% of museums closed
- HUGE pivot to digital
- 53% of public participate in digital cultural activities
- Many of these are people who don't usually visit museums!

In the future?

Will museums learn to monetize digital?

- Dues and subscriptions
- Advertising
- Cultivate donors
- Convert to visitors

#2

P-12 Education

Schools/students/parents

- Places to study, hold classes
- Mentoring, supervision
- High speed internet



In the future?

- More long-term integration of museums and formal education
 - Museum schools
 - Museums as accessory classrooms
 - Public funding of museums as part of the school system

#3

Supporting the Vulnerable



American
Alliance of
Museums

During the pandemic

- Growing food
- Making space available
 - For food distribution
 - COVID-19 testing
- Helping people access services

In the future?

- Long-term partnerships with social services/nonprofit relief services
- Museums as infrastructure to mobilize in emergencies

#4

Volunteers



American
Alliance of
Museums

During the pandemic

- 84% of volunteers on leave
- 90% anticipate fewer volunteers, 1/3 due to age
- Increased use of digital to stay in touch

In the future?

- Fewer museum volunteers
- Change in demographics of museum volunteers
- More digital opportunities

#5

Tourism

During the pandemic

- Collapse of international and interstate tourism
- Museums concentrate on serving local audiences

In the future?

- How to wean museums' financial models from tourism?
 - Court local repeat attendance
 - May affect types/schedule of exhibits
 - Museums as social hangouts

#6

Higher Education

During the pandemic

- Drops in enrollment
- Financial losses
- Deep cuts to faculty and staff

- >2,700 academic museums & galleries

In the future?

- Fewer academic museums
- More value placed on academic museums
- Pressure for academic museums to be financially independent

#7

Financial Impact on Museums



American
Alliance of
Museums

During the pandemic

- Museums anticipate losing 35% of income this year, 28% next year
- Most museums have 6 months or less of operating reserves
- 29% of directors are not confident their museums will be able to survive the pandemic

In the future?

- Partnering to share back-of-house services
- Mergers & acquisitions
- Going virtual

#8

Museum Labor



American
Alliance of
Museums

During the Pandemic

- 53% of responding museums have furloughed or laid off staff. (October)
- 41% foresaw reopening with smaller staff (June)

In the future?

- Mix of positions in museums may change
- High unemployment may drive wages even lower
- More use of contract staff
- More drives to unionize

#9

Orphan Collections

During the pandemic

- All the afore-mentioned economic stress
- Potential for closures
- Downsizing of staff/economic caution

In the future?

- Surge in orphaned collections
- National clearinghouse for adoptions
- Dowry endowment

#10

Grants and Endowments

During the pandemic

- Funders loosened restrictions on grant expenditures
- Some museums receiving permissions from their boards to release board-restricted endowments
- AAMD temporarily suspended sanctions for use of restricted funds for general operating expenses

In the future?

- Resurgence of general operating support
- More pressure on donors for unrestricted gifts
- “Emergency clauses”

Stay in touch

aam-us.org

[Bit.ly/futureofmuseums](http://bit.ly/futureofmuseums)

On Twitter:

[@aamers](https://twitter.com/aamers)

[@futureofmuseums](https://twitter.com/futureofmuseums)



American
Alliance of
Museums