

Arts Wisconsin and Wisconsin Arts Board Listening Session with Wisconsin museums

5-8-2020 | notes by Kiera Bair, Anne Katz, and Karen Goeschko

When words fail, art prevails. ~ Tony Angell, sculptor and nature/ornithology writer from Seattle www.tonyangell.net/, originated while on his way to NYC on 9/11/2001 (Thanks to Kathy Foley for sharing the quote.)

Purpose – To hear how WI’s museums and arts centers are dealing with the impact of COVID-19, to share information on helpful resources and networks, and to learn how Arts Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Arts Board might be able to help.

[Museum staff contact list](#)

Resources:

- Arts Wisconsin’s newly developed “Wisconsin museums listserve” – sign on to keep the conversation going and share info and resources: <https://groups.io/g/WImuseums>
- Best practices and safety guidelines for Wisconsin businesses as part of Gov. Evers’ Badger Bounce Back plan: www.wedc.org/reopen-guidelines (released 5-8-20)
- Event Safety Alliance Reopening Handbook www.eventsafetyalliance.org/esa-reopening-guide
- American Association of Museums: <https://www.aam-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Considerations-for-Museum-Reopenings-5.4.2020.pdf>
- Arts Wisconsin’s COVID-19 resources and info webpages: www.artswisconsin.org/covid-19
- Wisconsin Arts Board’s “COVID-19 and the arts in Wisconsin” resource webpage: www.artsboard.wisconsin.gov/Pages/COVID-19-Update.aspx
- The Arts Board and Arts Wisconsin produced a webinar led by Anne Basting of Timeslips Creative Storytelling on how artists and cultural organizations can effectively engaged the elders in our communities during this time, and going forward. **Check it out [here](#).**
- Americans for the Arts’ COVID-19 resources and research center (including information about the negative economic effect of the pandemic and shutdowns on creative businesses and workers): www.americansforthearts.org/by-topic/disaster-preparedness/coronavirus-covid-19-resource-and-response-center
- Here’s some good news at this unprecedented moment in time: according to the latest data issued on March 17, 2020 by the **Bureau of Economic Analysis of the US Department of Commerce** and the **National Endowment for the Arts**, the creative sector is a vital component of the U.S. economy. [Click here for more](#)

[info](#). Nationally, arts and cultural economic activity accounted for 4.5 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), or \$877.8 billion, in 2017. *To sum up the most recent numbers for Wisconsin (as of 2017):*

- **\$10.1 billion** in value-added to the state's economy through the arts (up from \$9.7 billion in 2016)
- **96,651** jobs in the arts – more than the state's beer, papermaking and biotech industries (up from 94,167 in 2016)
- **\$5.8 billion** arts worker compensation (up from \$5.6 billion in 2016)
- **3.1%** arts' value-added as a share of state's economy (same as 2016)

General questions/comments

- Is anyone charging for virtual programming/offerings?
 - Would museums consider posting how much it costs for their organization to serve their community (i.e. to run their organization), and then providing a donate button next to both that information AND their virtual programmatic offerings?
- I think it would be enormously helpful if Wisconsin's museums can arrive at a set of "common" practices so that visitor experiences WHEN we again open "look and feel" the same to the best extent possible throughout the state.
 - Is it possible to develop a "standard practices" checklist?
- As museums transition a lot of their classes to digital, they will need to monetize the programs to meet even revised education revenue goals.
- Cleaning supplies: Having access to enough of these supplies to keep the doors open for more than the first few weeks of visitors is an issue.
 - Check your INDUSTRIAL supply businesses in the area for hand sanitizer etc... we were able to get industrial sized supplies from Fastenal! Also, your county health dept should have access to sanitizer and supplies that you might be able to access.
- What about events? Are museums cancelling their events for the summer? Fall? Year?
- What clever strategic things have you been doing on social media?
- Are your school related materials completed yet?
- We are operating under the expectation that our planned events up through September are not happening in a traditional format.
- We are preparing contingencies for programs for October- January.
- We are putting all of our summer camps on Zoom, and charging a reduced fee to cover the cost of supplies and the artist.

- An interesting approach that the restaurant industry is taking to build consumer confidence - maybe an opportunity for the WI Museum community to do something similar – can be found here: <http://wirerestaurant.org/resources/covid-19/reopening-resources>
- Is anyone else using PPP funds to hire temporary positions? We have just created and hired a staff artist to do some mural work in the museum during the time covered by our PPP loan.
- Is anyone trying out a timed reservation system? Does the price fluctuate? During a Blackbaud/Center for the Future of Museums webinar focused on financial sustainability, there was discussion about that and how zoos and aquaria have maximized revenues through that approach.

Notes and comments identified by specific speakers:

- Kathy Foley – Woodson Art Museum, Wausau
 - Working remotely, but in the office as well.
 - Just completed our 45th anniversary Birds and Art online.
 - Suspended opening weekend activities.
 - Primary concern is to keep staff safe and healthy and how to open with community safety top of mind.
 - Here’s a possible source for re-opening guidance: our local healthcare community. Here in north central Wisconsin, Aspirus is taking a leadership role in sharing “best practices” with community businesses and organizations to ensure safety and well-being and flatten the curve.
- Jessica Zalewski – Racine Art Museum
 - Spent a lot of time working on virtual experiences.
 - Consistent social media posts; many videos about artists and the RAM permanent collection.
 - Trying to determine the details of how best to open and to hold classes.
 - Difficult to make plans
- Amy Beck – Woodson Art Museum
 - Promoting the extensive resources that exist within their collection.
 - Trying to plan for uncertain circumstances.
 - Need to put a plan in place.
 - Also need to convey to people what they can expect when they come to the museum.
 - This is a challenge.
- Debby Gonzalez – Harley-Davidson Museum, Milwaukee
 - Actively looking at Visit Milwaukee and Badger Bounce Back plan to see what to do next.
 - Interested in understanding what people want to see after quarantine.
 - Thinking about the business differently.

- Harley-Davidson Museum events are postponed till Badger Bounce Back Plan phase 3, even though we don't know when phase 3 will be. Are other Museums canceling all summer events?
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- Greg Vadney – Rahr-West Art Museum
 - As the director of a city entity, he has been able to work from the office during this time
 - Considered essential
 - Working a lot with other city department heads.
 - Shifted programming to online.
 - Undertaking a full survey of collections to put them online.
 - The conference we were co-running with Midwest Museums was postponed.
 - Trying to get information to Wisconsin Federation of Museums members.
 - Trying to make sure their affiliate members are getting the relief they need.
 - Trying to give out financial support.
 - AAM has been a great resource.
 - Looking at museums in Italy and Germany to see how they are reopening.
- Haksihanaziwi (Josie Lee) – Ho Chunk Nation Museum and Cultural Center, Tomah
 - Just opened in January
 - Trying to figure out the best ways to safely reopen.
 - Difficult to program online.
 - Having to change the ways we communicate with people.
- Patricia Lutz, Luxembourg American Cultural Society, Belgium
 - We are doing an online concert from Luxembourg and are adding a donate button.
 - Should we be looking at the guidelines for how shops and smaller businesses are opening up? We are smaller and the state guidelines are for larger museums.
- James Kieselburg, Grohmann Museum, Milwaukee School of Engineering
 - Smaller venue but taking directions from their university.
- Kevin Osgood – Door County Maritime Museum
 - All properties are closed
 - Keeping our staff employed and going online.
 - Cassie Bunton, Retail Sales and Visitor Services Manager, launched an online store and puzzles are flying off the shelves.

§ We almost made our monthly budget from this.

- We are going to navigate our way back the way we got here.
- Want the staff and guests to know we are keeping their health in mind.
- Cassie Buntin- Door County Maritime Museum
 - If anyone wants to chat about museum stores, please feel free to reach out to me, cbuntin@dcmmm.org

- Aaron Sherer, Paine Art Center and Gardens, Oshkosh
 - Formed a healthy workplace taskforce.
 - We don't have a lot of cleaning supplies on hand.
 - Even if we opened tomorrow, we would have to shut down after 2-3 weeks because we would have run out of supplies to keep the museum safe and clean.
 - Trying to determine if we are going to open by reservation only.
 - Only a limited number of people on the property at once.
 - Kind of in limbo and everything is harder right now.
- Eric Flesch – Mining and Rollo Jamison Museums, Platteville
 - We're a municipal museum.
 - We usually welcome 10,000 visitors from May-October and host a lot of school field trips. Both of these are important revenue sources.
 - Trying to demonstrate how we are doing good for our community.
 - Trying to continue with collections and care work.
 - Ramping up social media campaign and distance learning.
 - On Facebook we had 50,000 engagements.
 - Trying to develop our virtual curriculum content.
 - Trying to create a virtual field trip experience.
 - Trying to push ourselves to do new virtual programming.
 - Might also do a by-reservation-approach when we re-open.

- Trisha Blasko – Racine Art Museum
 - Really reaching out to silent seniors -important to keep in contact with them.
 - Trying to create a group of Racine non-profits in order to help the community.

- Oliver Zornow – Building for Kids, Appleton
 - We have convened a group of local museums (art, history, science center, children's museum) that are meeting weekly and working to develop a list of shared visitor expectations to help educate the public as we move forward.
 - Have kept our team employed so far.
 - Back in the museum doing curbside pick up with activity kits.
 - Revenue went WAY down.
 - We need to keep advocating for arts and cultural organizations in the state.

- Helpful resources come from AAM and the Fox Valley group. We are learning how to reopen and are making guidelines to follow.
- We have not utilized this service yet, but are exploring <https://dexibit.com/covid19/> as part of our effort to project visitor attendance.
- As far as resources, we are also strongly leveraging our auditors and law firm. If you don't have one, you can still access their resource pages. Some examples we have found useful:

§ <https://www.wipfli.com/covid-19-resource-center>

§ <https://www.vonbriesen.com/our-services/practice-areas/1689>

§ <https://www.kerberrose.com/covid-19-resources>

- Beth Kowalski – Neville Public Museum, Green Bay
 - Have a travelling exhibit that can actually make it to us.
 - Hopefully will be able to open with ticketed groups.
 - Making virtual arts galleries to display student work.
 - Anticipating opening this summer.
 - Coordinating with vendors and members.
 - Following Brown County guidelines.
- Christine Anderson – Guardian Fine Arts, Milwaukee
 - Not dependent on admission.
 - Putting exhibits online.
 - Working on making the warehouse a space for public gatherings.
- Ann Sinfield – Harley Davidson Museum
 - Concerned about guest expectations and numbers of those who will come.
 - Also, concerned with cleaning procedures.
- Andrea Welsch – Children’s Museum of Fond du Lac
 - March, May, June, July, and August are usually the most revenue making months for us.
 - PPP funding has enabled us to keep staff.
 - Getting some reimbursement funding.
 - Doing a survey for our visitors to see what their “appetite” is.
 - Did a garden club kit giveaway.
 - Really interesting to see how differently our families will respond.
 - The usual revenue models are not working.

- Jude Pultz – Fort Winnebago Surgeons Quarters, Portage
 - Had to move our opening day to June 6th and might have to push that back.
 - Cancelled school tours and special events along with other events.
 - Trying to avoid having too many people in one place.
 - Looking for guidance on how and when to open.
 - How should we transition to online?
 - Receiving helpful newsletters from local chamber of commerce.

- Kurt Griesemer, Wisconsin Historical Society
 - Closed right now and making plans to reopen
 - In the spring we usually see 20,000 students.
 - Transitioning to online methods, sending out free textbook and other materials online.
 - Free textbook: <https://wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS15257>
 - Big History: <https://wisconsinhistory.org/BIGHistoryIsHappening>
 - Covid19 Journal project: <https://wisconsinhistory.org/records/Article/CS16333>
 - Poster project: <https://wisconsinhistory.org/BIGHistoryIsHappening#art-display>

- Bridgitt Zielske, Kohler Foundation Program Manager
 - Listening on the call for guidance on how to open the Waelderhaus.
 - Also how to do online programming.

- Karen Goeschko
 - Kathy Foley's question and suggestion about having a set of common practices is a great idea. It sounds like Oliver from Building for Kids in Appleton has a group that's already working on that. The WI Presenters Network is working on a similar approach, so that audiences and visitors can be comforted and be reassured when they see similar signage, similar practices, etc. Who can coordinate these conversations to the benefit of all?
 - About the visitor appetite: Colleen Dilen of [Know Your Own Bone](#), presented a [webinar](#) for the Association of American Community Theatre on 5/7/2020
 - Reference Materials (coming soon): **How COVID-19 is Impacting Intentions to Attend Cultural Entities (and what will make visitors feel comfortable visiting again)**. IMPACTS is collecting data on intentions to visit cultural entities, the types of organizations that may experience greater demand upon reopening, what people say will make them feel safe visiting again – and many other metrics. During this presentation, IMPACTS shares timely and pressing data to aid in informing strategic direction to maximize engagement upon reopening. Presenter: Colleen Dilenschneider, IMPACTS Research & Development