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# Local Museums, Global Publics: how online programing during COVID-19 impacted the way museums define their audiences

Madeline R. Duffy
*Western Washington University*, maddied2611@gmail.com

**Local Museums, Global Publics: how online programing during COVID-19 impacted the way museums define their audiences**

By

Madeline Duffy

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of the Requirements for the Degree
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ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Dr. Josh Fisher, Chair

Dr. Kathleen Young

Dr. Sean Bruna

GRADUATE SCHOOL

David Patrick, Dean

**Master's Thesis**

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Madeline Duffy

15 November 2021

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A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of
Western Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Madeline R. Duffy
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ABSTRACT

In the peri-pandemic ‘new normal,’ museums occupy physical and online spaces. Many museums responded to the COVID pandemic by moving much of their programing to online modalities. One consequence of the dramatic increase in online programing compelled by COVID-19 is that previously location-based museum programs are suddenly more accessible to global publics: worldwide populations of cultural heritage stakeholders, defined more by common interest than by geographic location. I hypothesize that increased interaction with global publics during the pandemic has inspired an expansion of museums’ concept of Publics (or key audiences) to include a broader Global Public in addition to their traditional local stakeholders. After the pandemic, moreover, museums will maintain many of the online programs they started in 2020 with the intent to continue engaging Global Publics as part of their patronage. Drawing from a survey of 56 North American Museums and seven ethnographic interviews, representing 18 US States and three Canadian Provinces, this study seeks to contribute to the discourse around the role of museums as cultural heritage institutions amid and following the COVID-19 pandemic. As museums continue to adapt to additional, unprecedented challenges, continual re-evaluation of how the field defines publics will help cultural institutions adapt to fulfill their mandates in an ever-more globalized world.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I wish to acknowledge and pay my respect to Indigenous people past and present as the traditional owners of the land on which I conducted this research, namely the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, the Lummi Nation, and the Nooksack Tribe. As Indigenous people continue their struggle for justice, I acknowledge many of the central themes of this thesis, including community, sense of place, and place-based pedagogy, have been important for and practiced by native peoples of North America for thousands of years before I began thinking and writing about their application to contemporary museum work.

I owe the most gratitude to the many participants and collaborators in this research (listed in full as Appendix B). In particular, I offer heartfelt thanks to my case study institutions and their representatives:

- Dr. Janalee Emmer, Director of the Brigham Young Museum of Art, who has been and continues to be a valuable mentor and support in my museum career
- Molly Wilmoth of the Washington State Historical Society, whose work directly inspired this research
- Amelia Layton, Public Programmes Manager at The Tacoma Art Museum, for 'nerding-out' with me about art history and critical theory and for offering powerful examples of how museums can foster community
- Dr. Kim Sajet, Director of the National Portrait Gallery, whose contributions elevated the intellectual rigor of my analysis
- Peter Tush of the Dalí Museum, who contributed honest and critical insights

- Dr. Benjamin C. Pykles, Curator of Church History Sites for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, for sharing valuable perspectives from a cultural heritage institution unlike any other
- Emily Kate from Global Art Access Corporation (GAAC), who also provided insight from a different sort of cultural heritage institution— one that lives in the global, digital context—and who I'm glad to consider a new friend.

Other contributors merit personal thanks, including Dr. Steven L. Olsen, who is unflappable in his support and connected me with several of the museums that would participate in this research. Dr. Pinar Durgun was also a valuable help in the early stages of my research as I developed my hypothesis and worked to define Global Publics in this context. I thank Dr. Anthony Shelton as well for connecting me with his network and for his work in critical museology which was essential to this analysis. Dr. Julia Sapin, Professor of Art History at WWU, has been an excellent (if inadvertent) mentor in academic, professional, and personal matters.

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## Table of Contents

## Table of Figures

# FOREWORD

The idea for this research came in a sudden rush in the Summer of 2020 while I watched, fittingly, a digital museum program. I was sheltering-in-place at my then-partner's home in Bellingham, Washington, and with lots of free time to watch things (added to my ever-present compulsion to spend every minute learning) I tuned in via Zoom for "Common Concern," an online seminar for museum professionals (MPs) produced by the Washington State Historical Society. The seminar (again, fittingly) was entitled "How Can I Engage Audiences Through Virtual Public Programs During COVID-19?"

During this program, Molly Wilmoth, Lead Program Manager for the Washington State Historical Society, said something that set alarm bells off in my head. Curled up on my partner's futon, in my pajamas, participating in a seminar that I would typically have had to drive two hours to Tacoma attend (four when there's traffic on the I-5), I realized for the first time the extent to which the COVID-19 pandemic was going to—and had already started to—transform the nature of museum work.

Wilmoth described an experience early in the pandemic when WSHS decided to host an online iteration of their "After Hours" program (an event where guests would gather at the museum for drinks and talk about State history, targeted at local young professionals). WSHS invited past attendees to the Zoom meetings, hoping to keep their members and patrons engaged despite closures. What happened next challenged the historical society's expectations, moved Wilmoth to re-think the WSHS programing strategy, and inspired this research: WSHS's online 'After Hours' events were unexpectedly and unprecedentedly popular with patrons from outside of the Puget Sound area.

Of course. As cultural heritage institutions (CHIs) strove to maintain their publics in the face of the pandemic, *of course* any online programs they produced would come under the notice of publics outside of their geographic area. That is simply the nature of the internet and contemporary global networks of cultural exchange. My questions were: What were these new, remote publics *doing* to museum practice? Were MPs taking notice of this phenomenon? Did they change their programing to cater to global publics at all? How might knowing that they serve an ever-broader audience shape how cultural heritage professionals (CHPs) construct their work in the peri-pandemic era and beyond?

All fascinating things to ponder; but I was working on my thesis and far too busy to investigate. I was on my second thesis topic at the time. For the first year of my master's program, I had been preparing to study how collaboration with indigenous communities impacts the language used in museum exhibitions and how language can either perpetuate or challenge settler-colonial narratives. When the pandemic closed museums indefinitely, it became clear that I needed to change my topic. So, I started working on a personally significant project: a collaborative exhibition about a Yakama rock art site five minutes from my childhood home in Yakima, Washington, which used to be open to the public as a State Park but was closed in 2007 due to vandalism. By the time December 2020 came around, however, it was apparent that the Yakama Nation did not have the bandwidth to divert energy to a museum exhibition while they were trying to manage a pandemic that hit the Yakima Valley particularly hard.

Fifteen months into my master's and I didn't have a thesis topic. Others in my cohort had already done their fieldwork over Summer 2020 and were in the writing stage. I had no idea what to do. Several of my professors recommended I look at digital museum work during COVID, but nothing sounded more boring or more stressful. I already spent all my time stressing about the

pandemic, worrying about my at-risk family, aghast at the conspiracy theories taking hold all around me. The last thing I was going to do was *voluntarily* spend *more* time thinking about COVID. Besides, I've never been too interested in the tech side of museum work. I thought digital programmes were important, but I never imagined specializing in them.

Then I came across a call for proposals for Issue 25 of *The Museological Review*:

> The theme of *Museological Review* Issue 25 is '(Re)visiting Museums'. As museums around the world reopen their doors to visitors after the closures imposed by the spread of the pandemic, we invite researchers and practitioners to reflect on the impact of the unprecedented events that marked 2020… How do these shifts impact the relationship between publics and museums? How do these influence museum practice?

I can write about that. I drew up a proposal for a paper on "global publics" based on Molly Wilmoth's story during 'Common Concerns' which had been stuck in my head for months. I figured *if* the proposal were accepted, I would feed two birds with one scone (thanks for the idiom guilt, vegan friends) by making global publics my thesis topic as well. Why not stretch the research as far as it will go? The editor of the *Museological Review* sent this response soon after:

> November 16, 2020
>
> Hi Madeline,
>
> Thank you for your email.
>
> The call is open to students who have already obtained their MA, current PhD students or early career researchers.
>
> I would strongly encourage you to participate again next year. We publish annually 🙂
>
> All the best,
>
> [name redacted]

Well, shit. I was pretty mad at myself. Were my close reading skills that bad? How did I miss that the call wasn't open to MA students? I'd wasted a whole day on that proposal—a day better spent working on my coursework or prepping to lecture on Critical Race Theory later that week. Exactly a month later, I received another email:

> December 16, 2020
>
> Dear Madeline,
>
> Thank you for your submission to *Museological Review Issue 25 – (Re)visiting Museums*. We decided to consider your proposal as the editors thought it met the editorial standards of the journal and we are pleased to inform you that your submission has been selected to go through the peer-review process… We are now looking forward to receiving your full article by the end of **Sunday 17th January 2021**.

I had a month, during the winter holiday, to produce what I had promised. It is nothing short of a miracle, in my mind, that so many generous cultural heritage professionals (CHPs) corresponded, introduced me to colleagues, took the survey, and participated in interviews. In just about the least convenient time to help a graduate student—under the tremendous professional pressures of a pandemic— many took an interest in this research. I am inspired by their generosity and their passion for critical, introspective museum work.

The article, which interested parties can find in Issue 25 of *The Museological Review* (2021:80), is an analysis of the preliminary data and case studies that comprised the foundation of this thesis. Whereas the article featured three case study museums, this paper addresses seven case study institutions. The survey, which had twenty respondents when the article was written, had 56 upon its closure. It turns out there is significant interest in this work, both from inside and outside

of the cultural heritage sector. This research has also become, instead of COVID-focused torture, a helpful way for me to find silver linings during a dark time. In this paper, we will turn a critical eye toward those silver linings as well as "the cloud" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2021) to study how COVID has impacted museum work.

I hope this research will also push the positive institutional changes which have emerged during the past 18 months forward. I'm particularly encouraged by a survey comment which read: "We realized that we were not keeping stats for our online engagement. Big oversight and are doing that now. Your survey prompted this awareness!" Studies that bring together the experiences of multiple different institutions across specialty and region represent the sort of collaboration that has been so beneficial during the pandemic. We are all learning from each other.

# INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 Pandemic constituted an "unanticipated upending of our relationships to time, space, technology—and each other" (Lehrer & Butler 2020: 4). When forced to close their galleries in early 2020, North American museums adapted their programs and practices (literally) overnight, hoping to retain the interest and support of their publics. The result was an unprecedented surge in the application of innovative digital techniques to museum work that not only revolutionized the ways cultural heritage institutions (CHIs) engage audiences but sparked an institutional effort to reassess how CHIs define their publics in a digital age as CHIs attract more engagement from outside their local communities.

The digital museum is the ultimate "museum without walls" (Malraux 1967). Online cultural heritage programs can engage and serve people across national or cultural boundaries (Shelton, 2001:1) as they interact with an "ever-broader public in ever-bolder ways" (Gaither 1992: 58). This capability is not exclusive to digital programing, nor is it new. Concepts like Community, Public, or Culture which traditionally refer to social groups that reside in a particular geographic location, (Zolberg 1992: 109; Giddens 1991; Shelton 2007) have always transcended geographic boundaries (Gupta & Ferguson 1992; Gaither 1992: 58; Papastergiadis 2005); but never has that been so apparent in museum work as in 2020 when "everything" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2021) moved "from onsite to online" (Gigante & Cui 2021: 8). With more online programing than ever before, CHIs peri and post-pandemic increasingly serve worldwide audiences of cultural heritage stakeholders, defined more by shared interests and "shared conceptual maps" (Hall 2020) than by geographic location (see also Castells 2001; Smith 2012; Tawfeeq Fattah 2016).

The research in this paper documents and discusses a significant increase in non-local engagement with cultural heritage programs, which accompanied increased digital programing during the COVID-19 pandemic. I will start by defining the phrase "global public" as used in this research. Second, I will present a brief history of museums and their social role. Then it will be necessary to set the stage by presenting some of the findings from my survey, which establishes the context of peri-pandemic cultural heritage work. Fourth, I will establish via a literature review and analysis of survey data the ways CHIs define publics and argue that institutions with online presence serve global publics. Fifth, I will provide commentary on how the peri-pandemic context changes the social role of CHIs. Finally, I will incorporate survey data and case studies to analyze by theme how changes in the way CHIs imagine and define their publics have reshaped and will yet influence cultural heritage theory and practice (Friedman 2016:121).

## Global Publics

I refer to those more geographically dispersed museum audiences as 'global publics,' after Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's application of "global polity" to world museums (in Karp et. al. 2006:161). Throughout my research, I asked all contributors whether they felt 'global publics' was an apt identifier for this concept. Emily Kate, Founder & Executive Director of art digitization company Global Art Access Corporation, summarized the general reception I received: "I love that, because it couldn't be more true. 'Global public' is very descriptive. [Ours] is a completely global public. It doesn't matter if you're down the street or across the globe, [online resources are] accessible to everyone equally" so long as they have internet access (personal communication, 2021). "It doesn't matter if you're near or far. The projects I'm working on span from right down the street to the Middle East" (Kate 2021).

Dr. Kim Sajet, Director of the Smithsonian Institution National Portrait Gallery, seemed lukewarm about the phrase global publics as applied to this unique peri-pandemic moment. Sajet sees global publics as part of a trend that has been picking up speed for the last several decades, noting (after Friedman 2005) that museums in particular "have been getting flatter and flatter" (Sajet 2021; see also Friedman 2016). Artist Ho Tzu Nyen also raised some concerns, being (rightly) hesitant to support the terminology because of associations words like *global* and *globalization* have with "a certain moment and a certain discourse" (Nyen 2021). Nyen prefers to circumvent this by referring to the public-at-large as "the planetary audience," especially since humanity is thinking very seriously right now about the planet itself and on a planetary scale (2021). I understand and share Nyen's concerns, but still decided to use 'global publics' as the term of art for this research. Every other respondent reported that the terminology was intuitive, accessible, and straightforward.

## A Brief History of Museums and Their Social Role

Imagining the development of museums and galleries genealogically has its dangerous drawbacks (Russell, 2010). However, it is critical when approaching contemporary cultural heritage practices to consider the implications of museum history: the legacy we have inherited and upon whose shoulders modern institutions stand.

As the construct of cultural heritage itself (Hall 1999:6), museums have always been about power. The first museums were private collections. The earliest known museum was created by Sumerian Princess Ennigaldi-Nanna sometime around 554 BCE (Merritt 2021:3). Later, European royalty, landowners, and merchants established what we today would recognize as museums under a variety of names: *Wunderkammern, studioli,* cabinets of curiosities, etc., intending to display their private wealth and status for the benefit of personal guests (Bennett 1995:40, 73).

Museums as we know them today are relatively modern institutions (Bennet 1995). They emerged as part of the "exhibitionary complex" (Bennett in Karp et. al. 2006) during the Age of Enlightenment (Bennet 1995; Macdonald 2003:1) along with the modern conception of the nation-state, to serve specific socio-political functions (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2021; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), namely the twin forces of Enlightenment-era Western ideology: nationalism and colonialism (Durgun 2021b). Private collections and "Cabinets of Curiosities" opened to the masses as National museums during this period (the Louvre being one striking example) were intended to be emblems of national legitimacy—designed to reify and (re)produce a particular type of national identity (Hall 1999:4), one which would elevate the lower classes to a higher standard of character and taste (Bennett 1995).

Museum theory in the United States underwent a significant populist shift in the late 20th century, now known as New Museology, where the primary emphasis of museum work was diverted from caring for collections to public programing and events (Hooper Greenhill 2000; Geismar 2012). Museum historians credit this shift largely to economics, as institutions felt pressure to prove their societal worth so they wouldn't lose essential public funding (Weil 2002; Bennett 1995). At this time, rather than seeking to elevate themselves above the everyday, museums began to imitate other places of popular assembly (Bennett 1995:104; see also Weil 2002).

Today most museums in the United States exist as hybrid public-private institutions, receiving funding from both government and private entities and responsible, to varying degrees, to both. The politically neutral museum is a myth; every piece accessioned, and every word written on behalf of a museum sends a message about the priorities of that institution *and* projects an image onto the communities and disciplines they represent (Hall 1999: 7). "Funded by the state

and guided by official cultural policy, no matter how enlightened, public museums are by their nature governmental" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006). Balancing the interests of the state with those of museum publics is a critical issue for many publicly funded CHIs today (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2021).

Museologists spend a great deal of time and spill a great deal of ink debating how to reconcile this function, universally accepted until recently, with contemporary intellectual opinion. Among women working in Middle Eastern museums in 2005, some abhorred nationalist agendas in museums, arguing that museums should be above politics and "should exist solely in service to truth and enlightenment" (Malt 2005: 35). However, museums define relations with communities "whether they intend to or not" (Karp 1992a, p. 4). The American Alliance of Museums asserted in 2000 that museums bear a responsibility "to be resources for humankind and in all their activities to foster an informed appreciation of the rich and diverse world we have inherited" and to "preserve that inheritance for posterity" (AAM 2000). These obligations are more potent and more pressing as cultural exchange on a global scale continues to form part of day-to-day life.

The hegemonic role of museums, throughout history and now, cannot be understated (Coombs 1988). As Foucault observed, "there is no power relation without the relative constitution of a field of knowledge nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute...power relations" (1977:27). As MPs go about their work, accessioning and deaccessioning objects, choosing which objects to display and which to store, etc., they also choose "which elements of the past are of value, memorable and worthy of preservation" (Macdonald & Alsford 2007: 276). They exercise a symbolic power "to order knowledge, to rank, to classify and arrange, and thus to give meaning to objects and things through the imposition of interpretive schémas, scholarship and the authority of connoisseurship" (Hall 1999: 4). Since their conception, museums have been

one of the principal sites for defining culture, constructing identity (Bennett, 1995; Hall 1999), setting canon, and establishing "authority, dominion, and social imperialism over the 'collected other' in the service of individual or state sovereignty" (Kreamer 1992:368). This is a political process which, like history, never has been nor could be objective or "authentic" (Papastergiadis 2005:53; Shelton 2013a:10; Smith 2012:77; White 2000). As some of the most trusted public institutions in today's landscape, museums during and after the COVID-19 pandemic are or ought to be engaged "in the service of strengthening the resilience of civil society" by supporting *21st-century competencies* (after Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2021) like critical thinking, social responsibility, informed debate, and media literacy (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2021).

**How Cultural Heritage Institutions Define Publics**

Modern cultural heritage institutions understand that their audiences are not homogenous groups, each equally well-served by the same types of programing (Macdonald 1992:163). As such, they commonly practice audience segmentation. Audience segmentation, often associated with marketing, is a way to look at a population by dividing it into groups with the intent to understand how those groups behave and how they are motivated to make decisions. Audience segmentation is not easy; and never presents a perfect picture of a CHI's audience. "All such breakdowns, like any classification system, involve some generalization *and* some subjectivity" (Macdonald 1992:165; see also Williams 1983:300), yet audience segmentation remains a valuable way to discuss and plan for museum publics. Because "There seems no end of ways in which the public can be broken down—the ideal being to address the specific needs of every individual" (Macdonald 1992:165), cultural heritage professionals must decide how specifically they need to define their publics to support their institutional missions, thinking critically about which variables are critical, and which to leave out of their analysis.

Publics and Place

Concepts associated with audience segmentation, words like *community, public*, and *culture* are often employed to reference social groups "whose members reside in a specific locality" (Zolberg 1992:109). According to such an understanding, ideas, values, and practices are mapped within the physical and territorial boundaries of a specific place (Papastergiadis 2005:49).

Limiting *community, public,* and *culture* to proximal understanding is untenable. Culture has always transcended geographic boundaries (which themselves are neither inherent in the landscape nor static). Cultures are fluid, "entangled," and "constantly mutating" (Shelton 2013: 18; see also Conklin in Araujo et al. 2019:1650; Nederveen Pieterse 1996). With little to no exception, communities have always bumped into and influenced one another (Boellstorf 2015: 180; Gaither 1992:58). If cultures were strictly confined within and defined by a relationship with a particular place, what, then, would be the "fate of cultures which must coexist in a common space" (Papastergiadis 2005:49)? Another factor: modern telecommunications enacted a "time-space compression" (Harvey 1989) which loosened the already problematic relationship between identity and locality (Giddens 1991). What is a community in digital space, where members may never share a physical location?

I do not mean to say that place is not/cannot be a vital part of culture or that all cultural forms are interchangeable—only to emphasize that, in an interconnected world, all of us navigate hybrid cultures and identities—as complex as the histories and values which determine them. Contrary to theories of cultural essentialism, which "claim that cultural identity is rooted in a particular landscape and locked into atavistic values," the very nature of culture is constantly shifting amid the processes of mixture which result from the migration, fragmentation, and/or

displacement (Conklin in Araujo et al. 2019:1650; Smith 2012:29) of individuals and ideas (Papastergiadis 2005:41).

Cultural heritage professionals today must recognize that no place's history is utterly separate from broader world culture. When considered in the context of museology, communities can and do transcend classifications like geography or ethnicity. In a digitized world, space is being *re*territorialized by myriad factors outside of physical location or territory (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 20). Digital platforms have further softened the boundaries of museum *space,* shifting *place*-based cultural institutions to more dispersed (Post)modern spaces—a change that has been in process since the first museum websites (Bautista 2012:1), but which was dramatically accelerated by COVID-19. Because all "museum real estate [is] suddenly virtual, this is a moment ripe for inversion" of previous notions about whom exactly museums serve (Lehrer & Butler 2020: 4).

Museum audiences belong to many communities, often simultaneously, and programing should acknowledge that fact (Karp 1992:12, 25). In a peri-pandemic world, we need more than ever what Shelton (2001:15) calls "a museology of hybridity" – a museology that can fluidly respond to the movement of objects and ideas across boundaries which would allow museologists "to trace the effects when the boundaries themselves are distorted, disappear, or are redrawn" as they have been during the COVID-19 (Shelton 2001:15).

## Publics Out of Place

Essentialism is both the great enemy of audience segmentation and a necessary evil. A community can be defined "in multiple ways: as physical, political, social, psychological, historical, linguistic, economic, cultural, and spiritual spaces" (Smith 2012:128). To further complicate matters for CHPs, individuals interpret offerings within the context of their prior

experiences, "culturally learned beliefs, values, and… skills" accrued throughout their lives via membership in *multiple* communities and ownership of *multiple* identities (Karp 1992a:3; Kuo Wei Tchen 1992: 294). The act of designating communities is as "syncretic, diverse, and complex as the fractured realities we are trying to define" (Gómez-Peña 1992).

Dr. Rhiannon Mason's (2005) typology defines community by six factors:

1. shared historical or cultural experiences
2. specialized knowledge
3. demographic/socio-economic factors
4. identities (national, regional, local; or relating to sexuality, disability, age, and gender)
5. museum visitation practices
6. exclusion from/of other communities

Because all six of these tenants of identity aren't necessarily bound by physical location, the nature of museum publics has evolved past a colloquial, place-based understanding of community and toward Hooper-Greenhill's (1999) understanding of *interpretive communities*, defined more by shared interests and strategies of interpretation that different visitors "use to make sense of the experience of the museum" (Watson 2007:8) than by geographic location (see also Castells 2001; Cuauhtémoc & Morales in Karp et. al. (eds.) 2006:325; Hall 2020; Smith 2012; Tawfeeq Fattah 2016).[1] Interpretive communities can also be defined based on the emotional needs of different audiences (see Jones 2020). Such empathetic engagement may be particularly valuable as the world navigates the collective trauma of the COVID-19 pandemic.

[1] "Just as people who belong to the same culture must share a broadly similar conceptual map, so they must also share the same way of interpreting the signs of a language, for only in this way can meanings be effectively exchanged between people" (Hall 2020:5).

**What is a Global Public?**

In the digital age, to understand a museum is to understand, per Bautista, "how its online (global) community is related to the physical (local) community and to all the points and flows of interaction within its distributed network" (2012:2; see Wellman & Hampton 1999). Recent closures of museum buildings further muddle the boundaries of contemporary museum *space*. In digital contexts, CHPs refer to online "visitors" to pages or programmes—but what does that mean where said visitors may never visit an institution in person (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2021)? Use of online modalities in programming "reveal the extreme fluidity that defines the institutional boundaries of museums today. This fluidity is a good thing, because when we define museums too rigidly, we risk losing sight of their widespread potential. Ironically, their ability to endure as a socio-cultural institution that embodies authority, trust, and expertise, lies in their ability to adapt to a changing society" (Bautista 2012:2).

The pandemic-inspired exodus to online programing has further diversified forms of cultural exchange (Friedman 2016). Most of us found ourselves very specifically located during 2020 (Douglas in Nyen et al. 2021). But simultaneously, forces of globalization and global exchange have "both contracted and expanded the frameworks with which people can make sense of their place in the world" (Papastergiadis 2005:55), courtesy of digital communications technology and the context provided by a disease that truly can spread across the entire globe. Not only have "the boundaries of attachments" progressively expanded, "the nodal points of connections are increasingly complex and diverse… Artists and scholars have in recent times recognized that cultural identities are at the cross-roads of local and global forces" (Papastergiadis 2005:55).

Cultural heritage institutions may, now more than ever, be well-described by open systems theory—which was initially put forth in the biological sciences (Bateson 2000; Capra 1996; von Bertalanffy 1933, 1972) but has been applied to the cultural heritage sector within this decade (Jung 2017; Jung & Love 2017; Jung & Vakharia 2019). Open systems theory characterizes organizations as open and networked structures which are "part of and affected by external environments" (Jung & Vakharia 2019). Now more than ever, individuals, unburdened by issues of proximity, "build their networks, on-line and off-line, on the basis of their interests, values, affinities, and projects" (Castells 2001:131; see Smith 2012; Tawfeeq Fattah 2016). Today, CHIs serve global publics: worldwide audiences of cultural heritage stakeholders defined more by shared interests than by geographic location (Sandahl 2005).

## Online Programming During COVID-19

Did online museum programming significantly increase in response to the COVID-19 pandemic? In the Spring of 2020, the Network of European Museum Organisations (NEMO) surveyed 650 Museums from 41 nations (2020: 2) which provides evidence in the affirmative.[2] Where museums were closed due to social distancing measures, 60% of respondents to NEMO's survey reported boosted website traffic since closure (NEMO 2020: 1). Of those, 21% noted an increase of over 80% per week (NEMO 2020). Moreover, the demographics of those online visitors during the pandemic have been dramatically more diverse than in-person visitors to museums pre-pandemic (Merritt & Honeysett 2021).

Another testament to the popularity of digital programme production during the pandemic is The American Alliance of Museums (AAM) Education Professional Network's Repository of

[2] Results included museums from all 27 EU member states, from nine member states of the Council of Europe, plus feedback from museums in the USA, Philippines, Malaysia, French Polynesia, and Iran (NEMO 2020:1).

Distance Learning Programmes, published in October 2020. This collection includes over 1,000 resources and experiences representing institutions across the United States and in Canada, Argentina, and Mexico, in eight spoken languages and American Sign Language (AAM 2020).

This research, which surveyed 56 cultural heritage institutions from Canada and the United States, shows a similar trend in North American cultural heritage institutions: 74% of respondents reported an increase in website traffic of greater than 10% in 2020 (n=23). Nearly 10% (n=3) of respondents reported doubled and even quintupled online traffic.

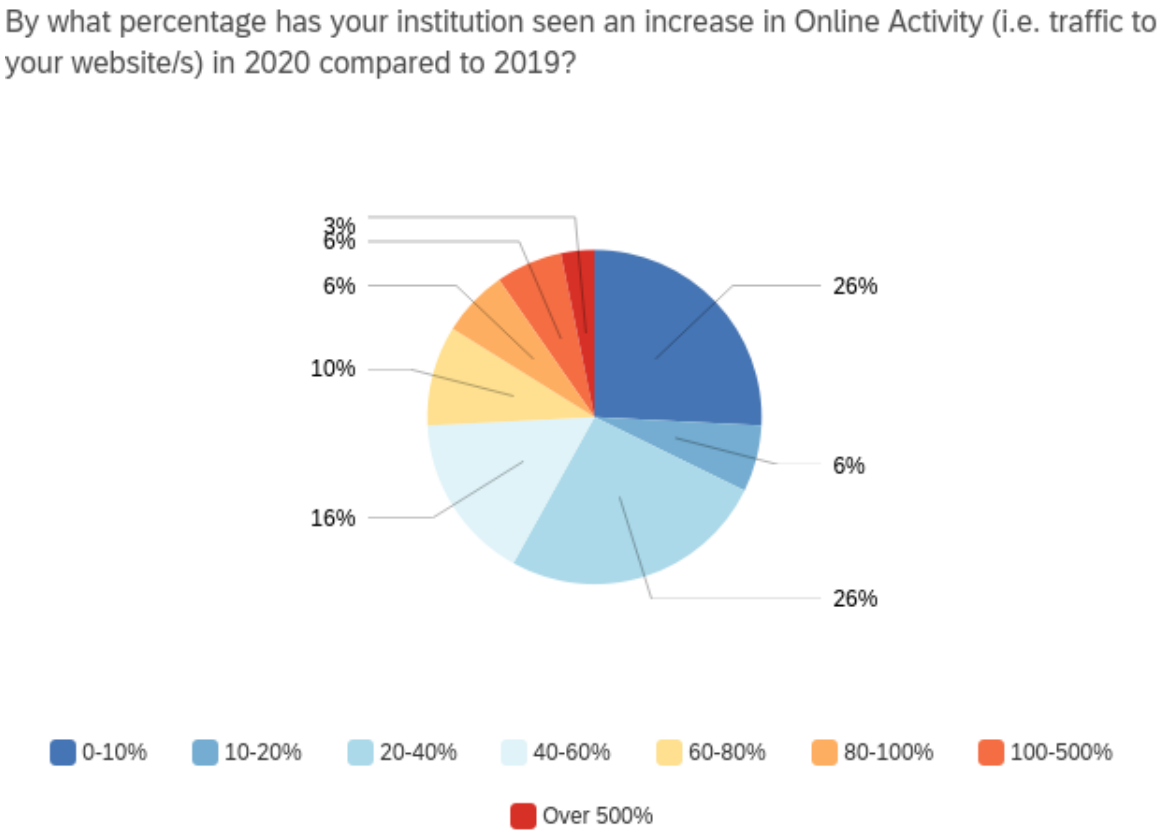


*Figure 1- Percentage increase in online activity from 2019 to 2020*

Pre-COVID, digital strategy was seen as playing a supportive or superfluous role in the cultural heritage toolkit. Cultural heritage professionals wanted to use digital marketing strategies to get people in the door, but they did not consider ways digital content itself could fulfill their institutional mission (Kate, personal communication, 2021). When COVID-19 made all museum

real estate virtual (Lehrer & Butler 2020:4), museums "had to begin to reevaluate what happens on the digital sphere" (Kate, personal communication, 2021). Many of the innovations that cultural institutions have put on the back burner for a long time, like updating websites, have been forced to the center of museum public programming (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2021; Merritt 2021).

Increased reliance on digital programming and consumption of digital content has had an impact on museum staffing, funding, and priorities (Merritt 2021:17). 65.4% (n=17) of respondents to this research reported investing more institutional resources (increase in staff hours, new staff appointment, funding, and so forth) into Social Media Engagement in 2020 than in 2019. This percentage trends with NEMO's survey of European museums, wherein 70% of respondents reported increased social media activity (2020:6).

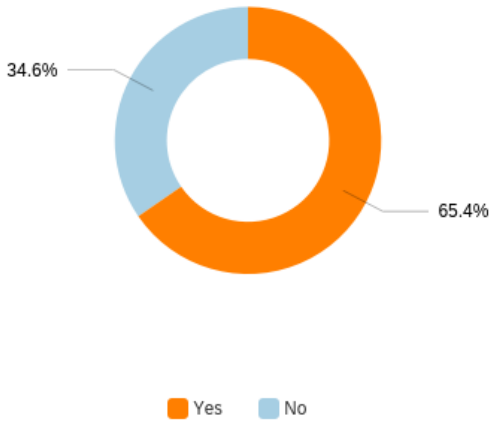


*Figure 2- Has your institution put increased resources into Social Media Engagement since January 2020?*

Table 1shows data from a survey question that asked respondents to compare the frequency at which they offered different online programmes in 2019 versus 2020. The answers which received the highest percentage of responses are outlined in red. This table demonstrates that the number of programmes produced increased in 2020 compared to 2019 for most types of online programming. Only podcasts (which 30.56% [n=11] of CHIs are considering implementing in the future), newsletters (which 58.33% [n=21] of CHIs continued to offer at the same amount), and

| Field | Same as before | Increased | Started Planning | Considering implementing in future | Decreased | Not currently facilitating & no plans to implement in the future | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Online exhibitons | 23.08% 9 | 51.28% 20 | 20.51% 8 | 5.13% 2 | 0.00% 0 | 0.00% 0 | 39 |
| Virtual tours | 7.69% 3 | 69.23% 27 | 15.38% 6 | 7.69% 3 | 0.00% 0 | 0.00% 0 | 39 |
| Social media | 27.50% 11 | 72.50% 29 | 0.00% 0 | 0.00% 0 | 0.00% 0 | 0.00% 0 | 40 |
| Online learning programs | 10.26% 4 | 69.23% 27 | 15.38% 6 | 5.13% 2 | 0.00% 0 | 0.00% 0 | 39 |
| Museum podcasts | 22.22% 8 | 16.67% 6 | 5.56% 2 | 30.56% 11 | 0.00% 0 | 25.00% 9 | 36 |
| Youtube programs | 21.05% 8 | 55.26% 21 | 7.89% 3 | 7.89% 3 | 0.00% 0 | 7.89% 3 | 38 |
| Special Newsletters | 58.33% 21 | 27.78% 10 | 2.78% 1 | 5.56% 2 | 0.00% 0 | 5.56% 2 | 36 |
| Live content (such as a live museum tour) | 5.26% 2 | 68.42% 26 | 7.89% 3 | 10.53% 4 | 5.26% 2 | 2.63% 1 | 38 |
| Adding objects to the museum collection online | 44.74% 17 | 31.58% 12 | 7.89% 3 | 10.53% 4 | 0.00% 0 | 5.26% 2 | 38 |
| Guest Speakers (available online either live or recorded) | 26.32% 10 | 63.16% 24 | 2.63% 1 | 2.63% 1 | 2.63% 1 | 2.63% 1 | 38 |
| Panels and Conferences (available online either live or recorded) | 29.73% 11 | 32.43% 12 | 10.81% 4 | 8.11% 3 | 5.41% 2 | 13.51% 5 | 37 |
| Featuring individual objects to the online audience | 37.84% 14 | 37.84% 14 | 10.81% 4 | 5.41% 2 | 0.00% 0 | 8.11% 3 | 37 |
| Quizzes, games, and contests | 27.27% 9 | 48.48% 16 | 6.06% 2 | 3.03% 1 | 3.03% 1 | 12.12% 4 | 33 |
| Resource guides for educators | 20.51% 8 | 51.28% 20 | 7.69% 3 | 10.26% 4 | 0.00% 0 | 10.26% 4 | 39 |
| Links to other museum's programs and resources | 31.58% 12 | 50.00% 19 | 5.26% 2 | 0.00% 0 | 0.00% 0 | 13.16% 5 | 38 |

*Table 1- Comparative frequency by which programmes were provided in 2020 vs. 2019*

collection digitization (which 44.74% of respondents reported maintained the same pace as before) did not increase in most cases.

These data demonstrate that "the digital museum is not a distant promise or a source of untapped potential" (NEMO 2020:1). Digital programming has proven its value in the last year "by bringing people together, encouraging creativity, sharing experiences, and offering a virtual space to build ideas together" (NEMO 2020:1). In the peri-pandemic era, engaging with communities worldwide is now more manageable and rewarding than ever before. Perhaps it's also more necessary. As the isolated yearn for enrichment, connection, and comfort (Longo 2020), this research represents the value of cultural heritage in times of crisis.

Lockdown and isolation have dramatically shifted the "ways that we move through the world" (Hong in Nyen et al. 2021). Likewise, online cultural heritage programming alters local and global currents of information, culture, and ideas (Friedman 2005, 2016). This moment is fertile for revolutionary change in the cultural heritage industry—particularly for questioning widely held notions about the boundaries of museums as institutions and thinking differently about the communities museums serve. After all, as Elizabeth Merritt wrote in the American Alliance of Museum's 2021 TrendsWatch annual report, digital technology transforms "every area of practice… making, teaching, seeing, sharing, thinking" (15). Citing one of the museums used as a case study in this research, she continued: "It's difficult to even talk about 'digital' as a coherent issue when it spans everything from sending an email to creating an artificial-intelligence-powered interactive simulacrum of Salvador Dali" (Merritt 2021:15).

## RESEARCH DESIGN

This thesis seeks to analyze ethnographic case studies and survey results, incorporating ideas from the various fields of cultural studies, museums studies, digital humanities, ethnography, sociology, communication, art history, de-colonial studies, indigenous studies, and media studies to distill how peri-pandemic shifts in the discipline have changed museum theory and practice. The critical engagement with COVID-era transformations in cultural heritage work presented herein center intersubjective reflection on each institution's "subject position, relationship to material culture, and relationship to the many publics and communities [with which they] engage" according to principles of *feminist intersubjectivity* (Fryer & Raczek 2020).

The study began with three general research questions based on a specific interest in inter-cultural museology:

RQ1: To what extent did online cultural heritage programing increase in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

RQ2: Did this increase expose cultural heritage institutions (CHIs) to more remotely located publics?

RQ3: Have conceptions of Publics changed in response to increased online programing?

This research employed mixed quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative methods were applied to survey responses to determine the extent to which respondents increased their amount of digital programing offered in 2020 vs. 2019 and whether they noticed a shift in the way their institutions conceive of their publics. Survey results were also compared to the results of a NEMO survey of European museum programing during the pandemic to see how the prevalence of this phenomenon compares in North America. These findings are presented as descriptive statistics.

I apply a qualitative methodology to semi-structured ethnographic interviews. Traditionally housed within anthropology and sociology, ethnography as a tool for social research

entered the field of communications in the 1960s. Ethnographic research in museums experienced a resurgence in the late twentieth century with the rise of visitor studies and audience segmentation. Visitor studies applies traditional ethnographic methods, including observations, interviews, focus groups, and data gathering, to categorize visitors by factors like interests, motivations, prior knowledge, and background. This research treats CHIs as cultural communities unto themselves, comprised of people and practices unique to cultural heritage spaces that merit observation. Such research builds on precedent work like that of Dr. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett who in 2006 asked, "If globalization is characterized by, among other things, the technologies it uses to organize far-reaching networks and flows, what are the implications of these technologies for the future of the museum?"

This research includes data from cultural heritage professionals (CHPs) at many different types of institutions. Since are all sorts of cultural heritage institutions have been reaching audiences online during the COVID-19 pandemic, I believe the 'genre' of institution (history, religious, art, science) is inconsequential in the context of this study.

**Online Survey**

Data were collected via a cross-sectional survey of museum professionals (MPs) and CHPs conducted online via Qualtrics. Herein *museum/cultural heritage professionals* are defined as individuals over the age of 21 employed in a cultural heritage institution (CHI) in the US or Canada during the year 2020 and were involved in planning online programs during that period. Respondents were recruited via email and social media (including LinkedIn, Facebook, and Reddit). Responses were collected from December 2020 to July 2021.

The initial goal was to collect a minimum of 100 responses to ensure a sample representative of North American CHIs. Ultimately, 56 responses (N=56) were collected—a small sample size which results in a larger confidence interval than desired. Further study with a larger sample size would be necessary to any detailed statistical claims about trends in museum work during 2020 (Creswell & Creswell 2018; Nesbary 2000; Sue & Ritter 2012). Because the primary purpose of this element of the study was to empirically evaluate whether online programing in CHIs increased in response to COVID-19 and what impacts those changes had on how CHIs perceive their publics, this research is sufficient to identify and describe general trends in peri-pandemic cultural heritage practice.

The survey consisted of 17 questions, taking roughly ten minutes to complete (see Appendix A). Consent was obtained via a check box which, when checked, unlocked the rest of the survey. The name of each CHP and the intuition at which they work was collected to verify respondent's eligibility for participation in the research and avoid repeat responses from the same institution. Due to an awareness that "there is a lot more to the digital extension of the museum than so-called virtual tours or virtual visits" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2021), the survey asked about a variety of digital museum programmes (see Appendix A).

**Case Studies**

I carried out seven semi-structured ethnographic interviews with CHPs who, after completing the survey, expressed an interest in discussing the research topic in more detail. The interviews were conducted over Zoom and recorded to enable transcription. I identified recurring themes from these interviews, which I present in conversation with survey data and a review of pertinent literature.

While the CHIs in this research were not chosen based on their geographic locations, because many participants were recruited from the author's personal network, institutions based in Washington State (the author's home state) and Utah (where the author attended college) are disproportionately represented in this data which could have an impact on the trends in this analysis.

## CASE STUDIES

The following case studies derive from semi-structured ethnographic interviews and survey responses from staff at seven CHIs based in the United States (five museums, one historic sites organization, and a private art digitization company). Interviews were transcribed and coded for recurring themes and then assessed within a critical museological framework (Shelton 2013a) to determine whether online programming during COVID-19 impacted how CHIs define their publics. Each of these case study institutions maintains unique relationships with its remote and local publics, and therefore has unique insights on how exposure to online audiences during COVID-19 impacted cultural heritage practice. These institutions are:

1. The Washington State Historical Society (WSHS), a State historical society and museum. WSHS, est. 1891, operates the State History Research Center and Washington State History Museum in Tacoma, Washington. These institutions are dedicated to collecting, preserving, and vividly presenting the history of Washington State.
2. The Tacoma Art Museum, a local art museum with strong connections to its immediate community.
3. The Brigham Young University Museum of Art, a museum at a private religious university, sponsored and patroned by students, alumni, and a global church membership.
4. The Salvador Dalí Museum (The Dalí), of St. Petersburg, Florida. As an *artist's museum*, the Dalí is dedicated to the extraordinary "vision, talent, and life" of a world-renowned Spanish artist (Salvador Dalí Museum, 2020).
5. The National Portrait Gallery in Washington DC, a Smithsonian Institution Museum with a national mandate to serve the United States.

6. Church History Sites of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, a faith-based organization that oversees operations at twenty-four historic sites in the United States and abroad.
7. Global Art Access Corporation (GAAC), a private company that aims to "promote the public's access to and engagement with art and history though the creation of digital analog educational programs," by partnering with private art collectors, museums, academic institutions, and communications platforms to develop and apply "new and existing technology to reach a wider audience."

What follows are seven sections elaborating on common themes which arose during interviews and in surveys. Highlighting the narrative experiences of the seven institutions above, drawing from critical museological literature, and citing survey data, this section intends to discuss the impacts of digital programming during the pandemic in the context of 'in the trenches' peri-pandemic museum work.

**Preserving Publics, Surprise Patrons**

Molly Wilmoth's account of the Washington State Historical Society's online "After Hours" event demonstrates that the priority for most CHIs when they initially closed was to continue to serve those audiences they had before the pandemic. Nevertheless, whether they intended it to happen or (more often the case) not, museum audiences in a digital age are more geographically dispersed than ever before.

The Washington State Historical Society's online reach has continued to surprise staff throughout the pandemic. After virtually attending an event commemorating the 40th anniversary of the Mount St. Helens eruption, produced by WSHS in partnership with the Washington State

Parks, an individual from as far afield as Tennessee donated to the WSHS, became a member, and sent an email to express how impressed he was with the programme. In this case, the email did not indicate that the individual had any connection to Washington State-- just that he was interested in the programme and wanted to support the museum's work.

Amelia Layton, Public Programmes Manager at The Tacoma Art Museum (TAM), characterizes the TAM as a center for intercultural dialogue-- reflective of its urban, Washington State community (Layton, personal communication, 2020; see Hall 1999:4). Before the pandemic, TAM usually targeted public programmes to Tacoma and Pierce counties, occasionally expanding to the larger Seattle Metropolitan area for large events. Since TAM implemented more online programming, communities as far afield as Vancouver, British Columbia, and Portland, Oregon have become regular publics, and international audiences are also engaging with TAM's content.

The Brigham Young University Museum of Art (BYU MOA) is a mid-sized university museum with many 'fans' among alumni and local communities. The MOA also has a sizable, remotely located public consisting of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which owns the university. MOA Director Dr. Janalee Emmer stated in an interview that the MOA has always considered alumni and church members part of their broader audience (2021, 7 January). Nevertheless, Emmer has noticed remote publics engaging with the MOA more readily during the pandemic than they might have in the past.

When the BYU MOA closed to the public in early March, the staff was 'stunned' (Emmer 2021); but they quickly applied themselves to the work of reaching their audiences online—converting their exhibitions and related programmes to virtual platforms-- producing at least 75% more online programming than they had in 2019. One of these pre-pandemic programmes, "Take Five," had been an event where university faculty would offer lectures related to new exhibitions

in the MOA auditorium. In 2020, the MOA modified these lectures to a video format, posted online once per month. Those videos elicited positive responses among both the usual university public and online audiences outside the university community. According to Emmer, social media content geared toward adult audiences "has done quite well" during the pandemic (2021).

The growth the MOA has seen in remote audiences has been organic, according to Emmer. Rather than deliberately targeting remote audiences in particular, "we've been trying in almost any way we can to reach out to anyone interested in the museum and the programming we have right now" (2021). Even though the MOA was not intentionally catering to remote publics during 2020, digital content removed the physical barriers to museum patronage (Merritt & Honeysett 2021). These COVID-era changes made it not just possible—but easy—for patrons living outside of Utah to actively interact with MOA programmes. "Maybe, as we go forward, we might be more strategic about those audiences," Emmer said. But, like so many museums during 2020, MOA programmes have primarily been in "survival mode" during the pandemic (2021).

The National Portrait Gallery in Washington DC, a Smithsonian Institution, was endowed by Congress upon its 1962 founding with the "'serious national purpose' of answering the question, *What is an American?"* (Sajet 2019). Because that mandate is strictly national, the NPG made no deliberate efforts to engage international audiences in 2020. But regardless of their intent, 2020 did change the NPG's relationship with their national and international audiences.

Since the beginning of the pandemic in mid-March 2020, the National Portrait Gallery (NPG) produced approximately 700% of the amount of virtual public programmes compared to 2019. New YouTube videos (views increased by 130% during 2020) and Google Arts and Culture content drew visitors from 164 countries in 2020. The PORTAL scholarship program, which hosts digital discussions with artists, curators, historians, and thought leaders from across the globe,

attracted an average of 258 scholars per programme (approximately 3,600 participants over fourteen programmes) from 35 countries.

By contrast, because of their focus on the work of Salvador Dalí, the Dalí Museum in downtown St. Petersburg, Florida has always considered an international audience: "We have the blessing of being of interest to people from outside our borders," said Peter Tush, Curator of Education, in a 2021 interview. "It's even in the mission statement… 'Communities local, national, and international...' That is our audience, and it's perceived that we will be working internationally as well as locally. How quickly that happens, how diverse, how robust [our efforts are] might be really the best question of all."

Survey responses from the Evergreen Aviation and Space Museum in Oregon and the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum in Chicago, Illinois, observed that these interested global publics, of which they were not so aware before the pandemic, represent another audience "that we can market to… and have people engaging with the museum from all over" (Sinor 2021).

**COVID Inspiring Long-overdue Changes**

Museums have been "slowly migrating" toward online programming for years (Wilmoth, 2020). Digitized collections, online exhibitions, virtual tours, and social media campaigns are not new (the earliest online exhibition was published by the Museum of the History of Science at Oxford in 1995 [Bennett]). But, where pre-pandemic they were considered accessory and many institutions floundered in efforts to integrate technology into their work (Merritt 2021:14), digital programmes became the core of public engagement during the pandemic (Longo 2020).

In the survey conducted for this research, respondents were asked to compare the frequency with which they offered specific online programmes in 2020 versus 2019. A clear majority of CHIs

surveyed offered online programmes of diverse types at an increased rate in 2020 (see Figure 3). This surge positioned CHIs to "invite and support the widest range of constituents" via online engagement (Lehrer & Butler 2020:4).

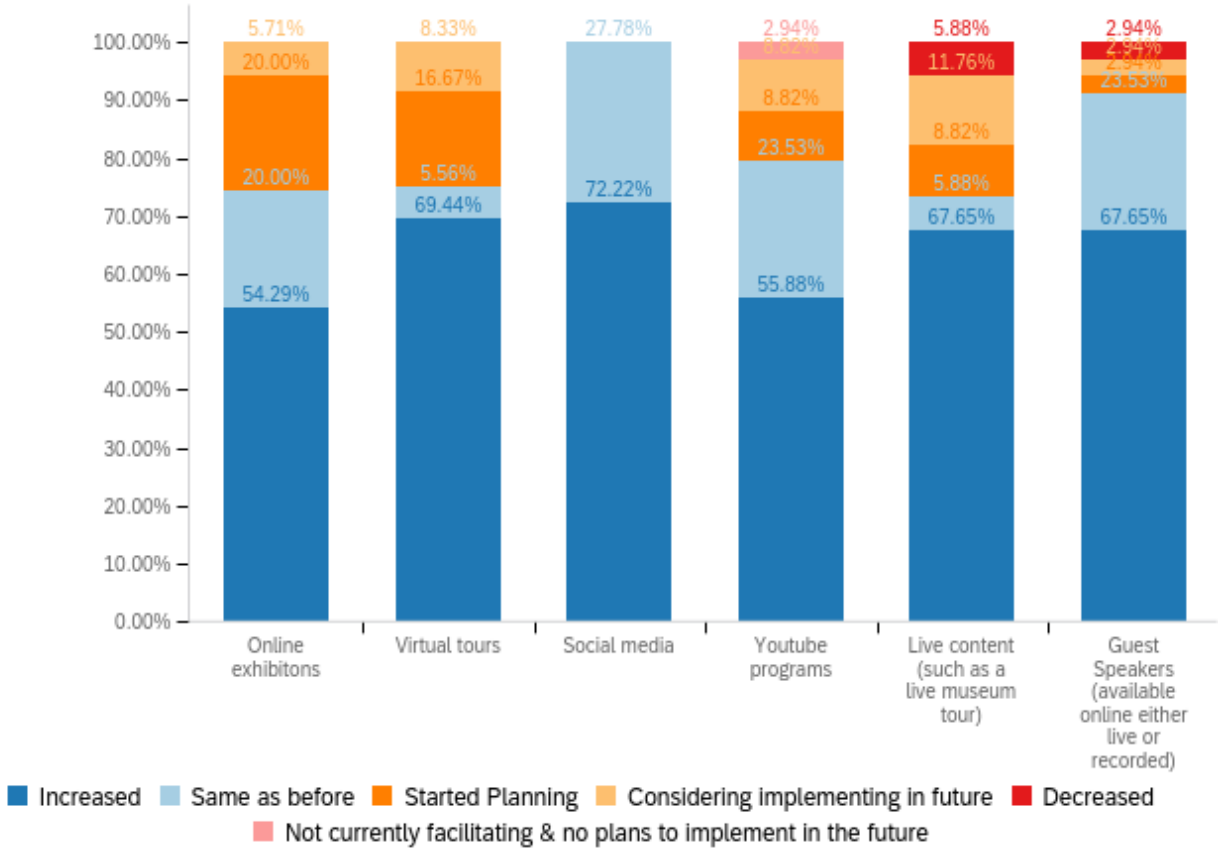


*Figure 3- Frequency of online offerings in 2020 vs. 2019*

When remotely located publics expressed interest in their online programming, Molly Wilmoth and the Washington State Historical Society staff started "rethinking everything" (2020, personal communication). As Wilmoth shared in a personal interview, engagement from patrons outside of the Tacoma area inspired her to ask: "How are we actually living out our mission? As the State Historical Society, are we actually serving the entire State?" (M Wilmoth 2020, personal communication, 23 December). Wilmoth credits COVID-19 with providing the extra push WSHS needed to interface with such questions.

WSHS staff had discussed updating their website to make it more user-friendly and better equipped to support online exhibitions. However, WSHS had no immediate plans in place to implement those changes until the pandemic, per Wilmoth, "forced us to reckon with the fact that we should've been doing a lot of these things a long time ago" (2020).

One staff member at WSHS had been resistant to online programming because they feared patrons who could see an artifact online would not bother coming to see the object in person. Since the pandemic forced WSHS's hand, online outreach has not been dissuading online visitors, so far as Wilmoth can tell. Instead, several patrons have said online resources inspired them to plan an in-person visit to the museum.

Other practitioners have reported similar effects from online programmes (Perin 1992; Kate 2020). Before the pandemic, Emily Kate, former North American coordinator for Google Arts & Culture, heard reports from affiliate institutions that Google Arts & Culture's Art Selfie application was inspiring visitors from all over the globe to visit their Art Selfie "match" in person: "An entire family took a trip to Ireland, or to Arizona, and they centered their family trip on this museum because their child/dad/great uncle had an Art Selfie match here… And what other reason would they have for doing that?" Would they ever have visited that museum had they not had that personal experience with a work of art via the Google Arts & Culture app?

Kate is now the Founder & Executive Director of the Beverly Hills-based art digitization company Global Art Access Corporation (GAAC). GAAC produces high-quality images of art—some of which would otherwise never be seen outside of a collector's private home—and catalogues them in digital repositories hosted by museums, academic institutions, or tech companies like Artsy, Artnet, Wikimedia, and Google Arts & Culture.

Since COVID-19, more museum clients have come to Kate about digitizing their collections—although that growth was delayed. Because so much was uncertain in the Spring of 2020, many museums opted to postpone their programmes rather than change the format, thinking the crisis would pass in a few weeks. "We didn't think long-term for a long time… I think it wasn't until about three months in where people started saying, 'we need to change this whole thing around'" (Kate, personal communication, 2021). Once museums realized they were going to have to close for the long-haul, digital programming (previously thought of as a marketing tool—a strategy for "converting" new patrons) was finally being accepted for what Kate has long known it to be: a means by which CHIs can meet their missions "without anyone walking through the door." In the peri-pandemic era, when the *only* publicly available museum spaces were digital, museums became "so much more interested and motivated to meet the mission on the digital sphere" (Kate 2021; see Merritt 2021:16).

Simply put, museums are paying more respect to the digital sphere since COVID. Instead of being this sort of threatening *other* that threatened to detract from the mission of the physical museum, digital programming during COVID-19 became "the lifeline" (Kate 2021). The best digital programming that came out of 2020, Kate says, is from institutions who were able to nimbly adapt to digital landscapes that already existed (TikTok in particular being a rising star for museum programming) and where so many people already "live" (Kate, personal communication, 2021; see Merritt & Honeysett 2021).

Before the pandemic, the Tacoma Art Museum did not have a "robust online landscape" (Layton 2021). Whereas other museums had been developing online programmes before the pandemic, the TAM, as Layton put it, "wasn't even facing that way" (ibid.). Before the pandemic, TAM posted on Instagram about three times per week. The last video uploaded to the TAM

YouTube channel was from 2012. Pre-pandemic, staff considered social media content something "we in the education department didn't really have time to do" (ibid.). That mentality changed "in COVID times" (ibid.). Social media is now a key engagement strategy at the TAM.

Owned and operated by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Church History Department's historic sites are inextricable from the spiritual mission of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (hereafter referred to as 'the Church'). Dr. Benjamin C. Pykles, Historic Sites Curator, stated in an interview that, whereas 90% or more of visitors to these sites are members of the Church, the Church History Department considers the historic sites of the Church to be "significant and relevant for all of God's children living on the earth… Accordingly, we strive to make our messaging at these sacred places understandable for all visitors, focusing on heritage interpretation, but also clear in the witness of the sacred events that happened" in these locations (Pykles 2021).

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, programming at the several dozen Church History sites across the United States featured programming geared almost exclusively toward in-person visitors. In 2019 they had "just barely begun" to experiment with doing virtual tours at four historic sites in New York and Pennsylvania (Ibid.). A missionary who was serving as a site leader at that time was interested in developing virtual tours. The Church authorized some focus groups to determine whether the programme would be meaningful to visitors and feasible for the volunteer missionaries who serve as docents. The Church History Department "had a global audience in mind from the beginning" for these tours, performing initial testing with Spanish speakers in Utah and Mexico City.

The number of virtual tours given in 2019 was, according to Pykles, "very modest" However, when the pandemic closed historic sites to the public in March 2020, as Gibson reported

in the Church's newspaper the *Church News*, "through 'lots of miracles' and the help of technology" these sites. "not only continued to share [their] message… but have also increased [their] reach" (2021). Largely because of the talents and enthusiasm of tech-savvy young-adult female Missionaries (Gibson 2021), the Church historic sites collectively offered virtual tours at a rate *one hundred times* (a 1,000% increase) the amount given in 2019. Most of these tours are small groups, but some non-interactive live tours have harnessed technology to include over one thousand people at one time. According to Gary Boatright, operations manager of historic sites for the Church History Department, these virtual tours have spread "like wildfire" worldwide (cited in Gibson 2021).

Per Pykles, virtual tours have drastically changed "the extent by which our programming actually attempts to reach audiences beyond those who can physically visit the sites. Before 2020, our attempts to share the Church's historic sites with a global audience were in their infancy. Although we are still experimenting and learning, our efforts to reach a global audience have significantly advanced since January 2020" (Pykles 2021). Boatright stated in *Church News:* "When you think about what we were planning for 2020 to be like and what it's turned out to be, in a real sense, we have a much more successful year this year in getting the story of these sacred places to the world" (cited in Gibson 2021). According to Pykles, the inability to offer in-person tours during the COVID-19 pandemic "really has changed the game in terms of our ability to access the people who we know find these places meaningful and significant. Missionaries are having amazing experiences with members of the Church around the world… Never in a million years would they have been able to do that without [these new] technologies and without these virtual abilities" (Pykles 2021).

For example, in 2019 and 2020, the Church collectively gave 15,275 and 15,871 tours at its five historic sites in upstate New York and northeastern Pennsylvania (Pykles 2021). Looking at the total number of tours offered, this is not a significant change. However, the big difference is that the 2020 online visitors originated from 44 US states and 33 different nations, a significantly more global audience than ever before. At the Church's Carthage Jail historic site in Illinois, early in the pandemic, a Church educator in Quito, Ecuador, looking for ways to engage his class in the history of the Church, reached out to request a tour. "That tour, conducted over FaceTime, ended up being the site's first virtual tour" (Gibson 2021). At another nearby site, Historic Nauvoo (Illinois), online visits by country broke down as follows for August 2020:

- 70% United States
- 10% Brazil
- 3% Canada
- 3% Philippines
- 2% United Kingdom
- 2% Mexico
- The remaining 8% of visitors were from more than 38 other countries around the world.

Pykles will be the first to acknowledge that "some of these are very tiny fractions." But compared to previous years "the breadth alone is incredible. Everything from Suriname to Zimbabwe, to Portugal and Jamaica— even China," where the Church is not recognized or permitted to proselytize. "We are reaching people from different cultures way more now than ever

before… people that have never been able to experience [Church History Sites] in any way or in any fashion before" (Pykles 2021).

Pykles sees these changes potentially impacting future staffing practices at Church history sites. In previous years, most of the visitors to Church Historic Sites came in June, July, and August. These summer months in North America were the peak season for historic sites, as more families from the United States visited during their summer vacations. Now, since visitors can access these tours from their homes, there is less of an off-season. Virtual tours allow missionary guides to stay engaged with the public year-round.

Peter Tush, Curator of Education at the Dalí, agreed that the pandemic forced museums to do things that staff had been putting off "very quickly" (Tush 2021, personal interview, 3 March). By March of 2021, the staff at the Dalí had created new content that amounted to an entirely new museum website, whereas before they only had 3-5 online offerings. Peri-pandemic changes have urged the Dalí to reassess the way they had been doing things. Before the pandemic, The Dalí offered docent-led tours every half hour. "So, every day, we would have anywhere from ten to twelve regular public tours, and additional private tours. And we have a rather intimate space. It was really starting to get overwhelming." When the pandemic hit, it allowed the Dalí to "take a pause and realize that that's a really unsustainable model." The Dalí is now fully rethinking the role of docents: "If we come out full throttle and we're back to 300,000 [patrons] a year," changes will need to be made. By adapting their existing programming to online formats, the Dalí was able to continue all their regular monthly programmes during their closure.

Whereas the pandemic inspired and allowed for some change and progress in museum practice, it also created a lull in other areas of advancement. Because of COVID-era staff cuts, some programmes—like collection digitization— were sent to the backburner because the

remaining staff had to pivot toward creating online exhibitions (see Table 1- Comparative frequency by which programmes were provided in 2020 vs. 2019). Kathryn Sinor of the Evergreen Aviation & Space Museum shared: "Our museum already had a small staff, and with COVID-19, there has been even further downsizing. So, while we've begun to engage with a much wider audience and the potential is certainly there, we aren't able to do as much as we would like with it. Hopefully, as we learn more and become better, this will be easier."

Tush gets the sense that many institutions right now, with the Dalí Museum, are questioning, "What can we accomplish? What do we assume needs to be accomplished? And how does this force change" in how CHIs experience collections and connect with new audiences? "New audiences are part of this moment," he says, "We're not always just serving the people down the street… we're serving people in California, or in Hong Kong, or elsewhere… Hopefully there's a way to connect with those people when they show an interest in what we're doing too" (Tush 2021). Despite knowing the importance of online outreach, many CHIs are only just now having the impetus to put their plans into motion (Kirshenblatt-Gimblet 2021) -- but to what effect? The following sections will focus on the institutional impact of these changes.

**Accessibility & Online Programming**

Before the pandemic, most plans for improving accessibility in cultural heritage institutions focused on adapting in-gallery experiences. When I moved to Madrid, Spain, to work as an intern in the education department of the Spanish Museo Arqueológico Nacional (National Archeological Museum, referred to as the MAN) in 2017, the museum was in the process of developing materials for a particular interpretive community that tend to be of concern among MPs (as stewards of object-based institutions where touching is almost never allowed): the visually impaired. The idea was to install touch stations with labels in braille and touchable replicas of key artifacts. With these

supplemental materials, in addition to audio guides, the MAN hoped to offer visually impaired patrons a richer museum experience wherein they could independently read labels and get a sense of what the artifacts 'look' like.

The touch stations were very successful in their mission; but I also noticed that they didn't only help their target audience of visually impaired patrons. Sensory learners and young children with busy hands also relished exploring how an ancient ceramic or a centuries-old stone tool would feel. At museums, where normally visitors are subject to a barrage of signage and verbal reminders not to touch the artifacts, many patrons eagerly embrace hands-on activities. I learned at the MAN that if the goal of a museum is to teach diverse peoples, it is vital to employ a pedagogy that is inclusive to different learning styles. In this example, interpretive community expands the target audience of touch stations to include 'tactile learners' rather than only blind patrons.

The limitations thrust on museums during the pandemic emphasized what has always been true: the barriers of the museum space extend well beyond the building itself, and there is value in considering the accessibility of out-of-gallery programming. As museum educators explore how the mass-communication environment of the internet makes museum collections more accessible to patrons all over the world, it is expedient to consider the needs of interpretive communities in an online space. Per Peter Tush, there is "a lot more that can be done [online] that doesn't rely on in-gallery changes. It's inevitable that that's going to be part of the offering going forward-- trying to find a way to [reach audiences online] that didn't get to come in the past."

Online programming expands opportunities to engage more inclusively with disabled publics who may benefit from digital offerings (Cecilia 2021). Dalí staff took the time during peri-pandemic closures to update their strategic goals for Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion (DEAI) with the impact of online programming in mind. The WSHS are particularly excited about

how accessibility to online materials enables patrons with disabilities to access collections and exhibitions from their own devices, in their own homes, instead of necessitating physical removal to a particular site. As CHIs reconsider who their audiences are, they must also consider how to enable those publics to access their programming.[3]

Programmes posted online can be accessed by different people at different times (even by the same person at different times) "in perpetuity" (Wilmoth 2020; see also Kirshenblatt-Gimblet 2021). The same programme can also be repackaged, repurposed, or republished by the museum for other uses or contexts (Kirshenblatt-Gimblet 2021), and CHIs can share content among themselves. In this way, digitization is a powerful tool for the democratization of access to culture and knowledge—a way to "turn cultural content (material or immaterial) into a lasting resource for the digital economy" (Gonçalves 2021:95).

Wilmoth expressed feeling overwhelmed-- that there is so much to improve at the museum but limited resources. After all, such vital innovations must occur concurrently with the "pressures and contingencies that museums face every day" (Conn in Araujo et al. 2019:1639). For now, WSHS plans to "focus on where we are going to prioritize," making efforts to innovate and improve practices while also allowing for hiccups and growing pains (Wilmoth 2020).

The pandemic has also "blown open" accessibility at the TAM (Layton 2021). "It forced us to do things like look at captioning everything," which is something TAM could not afford for in-person events but that online platforms make relatively easy and inexpensive (2021). TAM has hosted an annual *Día de Los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) festival for sixteen years. Since they

[3] For more information on the inclusive design of digital interactives for visitors and staff see the September 2020 publication *Inclusive Digital Interactives Best Practices + Research,* produced through collaboration with Access Smithsonian, Institute for Human Centered Design and MuseWeb.

couldn't hold the festival in person in 2020, TAM didn't have the same costs as previous years. So, those funds were diverted to translation, enabling the Day of the Dead website to be published bilingually in English and Spanish. Additionally, Layton worked with the marketing team to caption the videos on the festival website and create alternative text for digital images.

Layton hopes to increase translation efforts across TAM's programmes in the future, but (at the TAM as at WSHS) that issue depends on funding and staffing. Regardless, she is excited about the possibilities: "We've opened this door of accessibility. We can't close it. That's a great thing, to be offering things to so many people in ways that so many people can access" (A Layton, 2021, personal communication, 7 January).

Being a global church serving a global public, the Church History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah) has long hoped to produce more foreign-language programming. Dr. Benjamin C. Pykles, Historic Sites Curator for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, mentioned that some sites always have non-English speaking missionaries on staff. For example, the Mormon Battalion Center in San Diego, California, almost always has Spanish speakers and Mandarin speakers on assignment. "This is a reflection of the people that used to show up in person… The pandemic, I think, is going to change that. We will likely start requesting non-English speaking missionaries at all the sites, even if they're not getting in-person visitors in those languages."

In cases where it is not feasible to offer live tours in a particular language, research from the Church History Department has shown that tours presented in English with a translator on the receiving end of the tour have no negative impact on the visitor experience. Focus group participants valued the opportunity to have a live interaction with tour guides, even if that interaction was moderated by a translator.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has over sixteen million members worldwide. A public this large presents many challenges. The Church History Department hopes to test a series of pre-recorded tours, which could be dubbed or subtitled in multiple languages, in 2021. These pre-recorded tours would be accessible when and where it is most convenient for visitors. Whereas some patrons have been happy to get up at 3 a.m. to take a historic site tour during business hours in the United States, sites are trying to find more convenient ways for international visitors to experience these sites. “Recorded tours are another way to access audiences that we otherwise would not be able to get.”

As of January 2021, with few exceptions, all the Church Historic Sites webpages are only available in English, limiting accessibility for international audiences. Despite feelings that translation of these materials "is an absolute must,” progress has been slow due to cost (Pykles 2021). Pykles, however, is optimistic that the pandemic will change this: “Our executives are nothing but enthusiastic about these virtual tours… they say, ‘this is terrific! This is exactly what we should be doing to reach the global Church!’” With that kind of support, Pykles and his colleagues hope more resources for translating recorded virtual tours and existing webpages are forthcoming.

These steps are just the beginning of a new era in cultural heritage programming for the Church. “Right now,” says Pykles, “the work of 2020 has been truly haphazard… We basically just said to the missionaries, ‘Okay, we’re going to let you do these [tours]. We don’t really know how to do them, but just do it. Just experiment.’” Moving forward, Pykles sees these virtual programmes as “a permanent and ongoing part” of Church Historic Site programming: “I don’t see how we can go back.” There will likely be growing pains when sites eventually reopen to the public post-pandemic, and staff must learn to balance doing in-person and virtual tours at the same

time. Still, Pykles maintains that virtual tours are worth the challenge. Offering virtual tours can change not only the way Church Historic Sites give tours but also implies changes to staffing, programming, scheduling, technology, and management practices. “It is amazing the ripple effect of the pandemic. It’s not just in how we’re accessing people, but it’s affecting all these other parts of our program, which is exciting and challenging at the same time” (Pykles 2021).

Lisa Falk, Head of Community Engagement at The Arizona State Museum, corroborated Pykles’ statement, noting in her survey response that, now that The Arizona State Museum reaches “a broader range of people geographically,” they actively consider those global publics when planning online programmes— keeping time zones in mind for live programmes, for example (Falk, survey response, 2021; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2021).

### Economic Accessibility

One deterrent to in-person museum visitation is cost. Dr. Pinar Durgun of the Alexandria Archive Institute cited the case of prominent museums with admissions prices of as much as $25 USD: “If you’re a family of four, you’re going to pay $100 to go to that museum, so you’d better have a good reason to go” (Durgun 2021a). Online activities, on the other hand, are often freely accessible. Sajet says online programmes have “certainly” made the National Portrait Gallery “more accessible to older audiences who wouldn’t necessarily get on a plane to come to Washington” as well as lower-income individuals who may not have the resources to travel to Washington DC—let alone get a hotel (2021).

Dr. Josephine Mills, Director/Curator and Professor of the University of Lethbridge Art Gallery in Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada, shared in her survey response that one of the major changes the University of Lethbridge Art Gallery has already noticed is that low-cost and free

online gallery programmes are reaching low-income people both locally and further afield: “with our kids summer programming being online, we discovered that the low cost for users meant we reached more low income families locally as well as in a broader local region (not just our city but including all of Southern Alberta and thus reaching the major city of Calgary).” Mills and team have harnessed this opportunity and “are now deliberately promoting our programmes to reach those audiences as a key goal for us is to reach audiences who are not currently well served by art galleries.” Online programmes have noticeably increased engagement from rural areas of the province at TELUS Spark, a science museum in Calgary (Toby Plant, Education Outreach Specialist, survey response, 2021).

### Online Programming Exacerbating Existing Inequalities

Just as online programming during COVID-19 has exposed new audiences to CHIS, other publics are more isolated from cultural programming than ever before. The National Portrait Gallery has noted the outsized impact of the digital divide during the COVID pandemic. Studies conducted by the Smithsonian Institution writ-large revealed a desire among patrons for more Spanish-language materials—in particular, Spanish-language materials in a non-digital format. In response to these findings, the Smithsonian embarked on two initiatives in collaboration with USA Today to print educational inserts in the paper for schoolchildren. Similarly, the National Portrait Gallery has been sending mail-out posters, hoping to reach patrons who were more disconnected than ever before from NPG programming. (Sajet, personal communication, 2021)

Emmer brought up language as another remaining barrier in digital museum spaces. The BYU Museum of Art has been in contact with some museums in France about future exhibitions. As Emmer collaborates with curators via Zoom in French, the exchange highlights the advantage

multi-lingual folks certainly have in an inter-connected world. Emmer sees this as potentially widening inequalities among cultural institutions and patrons, depending on factors like location and size.

The reality of the digital divide has an additional impact on who will respond to online programming best (Merritt & Honeysett 2021). Aware that younger generations generally have more mastery of and interest in online resources, the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum in Chicago, IL, USA, has made conscious efforts to produce more online programming geared toward younger audiences during the pandemic since they are aware that those are often the audiences best served digital programmes. Although, Nik Honeysett, CEO of the San Diego-based Balboa Park Online Collaborative, notes that current research shows sixty-year-olds use ecommerce and digital gaming at similar rates to sixteen-year-olds (in Merritt & Honeysett 2021).

**2020: COVID-19, Racial Justice, & Digital Cultural Heritage Practice**

2020 was truly a "syndemic" year—shaped by multiple calamities, including (but not limited to) a global pandemic, wildfires on the West Coast of the North America that burned over 5.8 million acres, six major hurricanes, and even plagues of locusts and killer bees (Merritt 2021:35). On top of these disasters, the pandemic coincided with "perhaps the biggest social justice movements in the United States ever," as the country confronted past and present racism (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2021). "These were not independent events—they are deeply entangled with each other and stem from forces that will continue to reshape the world in coming decades" (Merritt 2021:35). It comes as no surprise, then, that many participants in this research shared ways in which their pandemic experience, digital programming, and attention to issues of diversity, equity, and institutional transformation came together to generate organized change.

During the six months they were closed to the public, amid a "larger, university-wide discussion" on social justice, BYU Museum of Art administration met with staff to re-write their mission statement and rethink their strategic planning (Emmer 2021). While these were not new conversations, unrest and demands for social justice blazing across the United States in 2020 as well as pandemic-era closures meant the MOA could take the time to consider these issues more fully. In these conditions, BYU MOA staff—indeed, every case study institution featured in this research—amplified efforts to make their museum a more inclusive place by self-reflecting on their own difficult pasts and applying social justice values to their work in 2020 (Merritt 2021: 6; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2021).

This work has been critical at Brigham Young University. The MOA is particularly aware of how BYU and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints "have been part of racism" and that the Church remains "very much a white church" (Emmer 2021). Museums in general may be aptly categorized as white institutional spaces (see Bracey 2016). As such, figures both inside and outside the cultural heritage industry are calling for institutions to account for their role in profiting from and perpetuating inequitable systems (Merritt 2021:6). The past year stressed the urgency of efforts to disrupt these patterns. Museum professionals are ever-more aware that they "have an obligation to help repair the damage of hundreds of years of racial oppression" (Merritt 2021:2).

Emmer and Wilmoth (WSHS) both acknowledged that majority-white donors at the MOA and Washington State Historical Society have resulted in what Emmer characterized as "a very white collection" (Emmer 2021). So, while the museum was closed, BYU MOA staff took time to evaluate their acquisition and exhibition practices. As a museum of American Art, MOA staff hope to diversify their collections to represent the complex cultural makeup of the United States more fully. Echoing Wilmoth (2020), Emmer noted that this goal is unachievable without representative

collections. As such, the MOA has dramatically increased efforts to acquire works by Americans of color. Of particular concern, the MOA has many pieces that *depict* Indigenous Americans but not nearly as many *by* Indigenous American artists. "These are all discussions that most museums are engaging with right now, decolonizing collections, expanding collections… Our staff has been thinking carefully about how we do this going into the future" (Emmer 2021).

The various peri-pandemic challenges and conversations discussed in this section contributed to the Washington State Historical Society's new organizational goals, set in 2020. Those goals include building new audiences locally and state-wide, creating a meaningful impact "in every region of the State," and embracing "inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility in our operations, programs, and collections" (Kilmer 2020). One result of this reaffirmed commitment is an upcoming partnership with the University of Washington School of Public Health. This contemporary collecting (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2021) program enlists Public Health students to collect oral histories and personal artefact of the pandemic. Wilmoth hopes engaging collegiate volunteers to collect community stories will move the WSHS away from traditional accession practices, which have heavily relied on donations from "privileged white men," and toward a more collaborative and equitable collection process (Wilmoth 2020; see also Kilmer 2020:1). Because object-based museums cannot tell diverse stories if they do not have diverse collections, and because so much of cultural 'belonging' is tied up in being able to see oneself reflected in culture (Hall 1999:4), these actions to collect from more representative populations are essential to achieving WSHS's anti-racist goals.

Peter Tush, alternatively, sees COVID, online programming, accessibility, and racial upheaval in 2020 as concurrent but coincidental. Regardless, Tush expressed a hope that this reckoning means "that our programming becomes more inclusive and more diverse, whether it's

done virtually or in person." Emily Kate (2021) is confident that the digital field is particularly well-equipped to assist museums in addressing racial inequalities and the legacy of colonialism "more elegantly" because digital culture is more innately global and less enmeshed with exclusionary traditions. Harnessing online programming to further social justice work in museums can be as rewarding as they are effective. Some respondents to a MuseumNext survey which asked their over 17,000 member museums how they "handled the stress, strain and uncertainty of the last 12 months" identified their museum's involvement in the Black Lives Matter movement and with projects highlighting human rights, racism and LGBTQIA+ issues as their greatest digital successes of 2020 (MuseumNext 2021).

**Humanizing Museums, Welcoming New Publics**

Digital technology can do more than just replicate the built museum. Online programming is "a realm in and of itself," and programmes can be "digital-first… or even digital only" (Merritt 2021:17). Rather than being in competition with, a substitute for, or a "parallel version of" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2021) in-person experiences (Merritt & Honeysett 2021), digital and built museum offerings can be deployed together toward a common purpose (Kate 2021). In fact, "the trick now is to do online what you can't do in the museum and to do in the museum what you can't do online" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2021).

Before the pandemic, many CHPs were resistant to offer too much online programming. Molly Wilmoth noted a reluctance among staff at the Washington State Historical Society to produce online programming pre-pandemic based on a notion that online access to collections might dissuade visitors from coming to the museum. This anxiety is perhaps a holdover from the advent of the digital age. Kim Sajet (personal communication, 2020) remembers a "real fear"

among museum professionals in the seventies that if museums started digitizing their collections, audiences would lose interest (see also Merritt 2021:17). On the contrary, "the opposite happened" (Sajet 2020). Rather than dissuading visitors, online outreach "only whets the appetite for seeing the real thing" via in-person visits to museums (Merritt 2021:17; see also Perin 1992:212).

The greatest barrier to museum attendance is often "that initial jump in" (Kate 2021). The J. Paul Getty Museum and Getty Center for Education in the Arts concluded after a pioneering study of perceptions of visitors (and non-visitors) to museums that "nonvisitors, among other reasons, do not come because they perceive themselves to lack enough knowledge to appreciate the work" (Walsh 1991:1), a sense of being unwelcome in a formal museum space. In a digital landscape that barrier is "nearly non-existent" (Kate 2021). Online programmes are particularly well equipped to combat the image of a museum as lofty and inhospitable, and information online could help visitors who are unsure about an in-person visit do preliminary research and plan. After all, "Museum websites are the main place in which museums draw virtual visitors to their physical collections, events, staff, and programmes, especially for the valuable pre-visit information that comprises the majority of website visits (e.g., directions, hours, tickets, calendar)" (Bautista 2012:351). Online content can also be tailored to match the interests of diverse groups, exponentially increasing the number "ways in" (Kate 2021) or points of contact for new patrons. "My goal," Kate shared, "has always been to find more commonality, find more ways to welcome people in… to make them feel comfortable" (Kate 2021).

Online programming additionally allows CHIs to play with their public image by experimenting with messaging and tone (Merritt & Honeysett 2021). During the pandemic, the Tacoma Art Museum started using a more informal voice in their social media posts than they had before. Amelia Layton noticed many CHIs espoused a more relaxed public image during 2020,

quipping: “We’re all in our pajamas, it’s fine” (2021). She credits this change to frontrunners in museum social media like the Getty and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and to theoretical debates happening in museums and the academy. “Public programmes are a form of interpretation,” Layton says (2021). As MPs critically question industry practices, as they think about “separating from the canon,” these theories manifest in programming (ibid.). Less formal social media strategies have significantly impacted one of the Tacoma Art Museum’s publics: the TAM Teen Arts Council (TAC). Since COVID-19, the TAC has had more independent control of their Instagram and events. They now organize a successful virtual iteration of their monthly programme ‘OPEN’ (where teens used to meet in the galleries for an open mic night, open artmaking, and just ‘hang out’ in the museum). Turnout has been good for this new OPEN, now hosted on streaming platform Discord. “Of course,” said Layton, “teens will lead the way” (2021). Layton hopes that relaxing the image of museums on social media will help people see CHIs as places where they are welcome after the pandemic in the same way they are now welcome in online spaces.

**Collaboration**

As the world has become more familiar with collaborating online, all case study CHIs are collaborating more with other institutions. Emily Kate (personal communication, 2021) notes that increased digital literacy and digital access have created “25 million times the opportunities.” Whereas videoconferencing technology was certainly available before the pandemic, “people are more willing to do things virtually now” (Wilmoth, personal communication, 2020). Partnerships that the Washington State Historical Society had been trying to build for years are more feasible where online modalities have rendered barriers of distance less relevant.

Even for a national museum like the National Portrait Gallery, online programming has become a "new tool in the toolbox," allowing programmes to reach more people-- whether within the United States and its territories or outside in a more global capacity (Sajet 2021, see Merritt & Honeysett 2021). "It also just makes it easy to get people together-- you can get three speakers together. That would be very, very hard to get together in person, but online it's just super easy" (Sajet 2021). Emily Kate echoed that sentiment, noting that international opportunities "skyrocketed… Being able to talk to you today and have talked to people in Rome yesterday, and then next week I'm speaking to a group in Israel, being able to do that opens you up to an exponentially wider audience." Online exhibitions can also enable collaborative collections featuring works from all over the world which may logistically never have been able to share gallery space (Kate 2021; Merritt 2021: 17).

At the Colorado Snowsports Museum in Vail, they typically host guest speakers in-house during their annual programming series, one of their largest fundraising events of the year. "Since COVID hit, we knew we had to adapt," shared Dana Mathios, curator, director of collections, and social media manager:

> We decided to take advantage of a terrible situation and use our programming series to reach audiences we typically couldn't due to the location of the Colorado Snowsports Museum. We took on our 2020/2021 programming series with high hopes of touching on topics and including people… that typically wouldn't be able to come to the Museum to talk. This greatly increased our audience. (Mathios, survey response, 2021)

At the Dalí, the Education department staff collaborated with the Meadows Museum in Dallas, Texas. "We did a presentation to the docents at the Meadows Museum, and they did a presentation for our docents," said Tush. "We would never have done that [before]. We would never have hooked up with the Meadows unless we were actually doing a full trip to Texas, and that's just not going to be in the cards for a long time." Tush predicts that similar collaborations

will become standard moving forward because of the value they add to the institution, allowing museums to share content and inspire docents, members, and associates with new materials and ideas. Increased media literacy during COVID-19 has changed the impact of these collaborations for museum staff as well. Pre-pandemic, the Dalí often collaborated with other museums on exhibitions by corresponding via email or phone only. The addition of video-chat has allowed collaborators to strengthen their relationships with partner institutions; to "reinforce that interaction in a different way—in a social capacity."

On the other hand, Tush offered a criticism that whereas there is a vague sense that cultural heritage institutions are 'in this together' through the difficulties of the pandemic, practically museum professionals are experiencing considerable isolation. "We've all kind of been in our bunkers doing things independently of each other… I don't think any of us are close enough to, like, call up your colleagues on the phone to see what they are doing in Tampa or Sarasota… you don't know what's happening at other places." Virtual meetings and collaborations are more doable right now, but they aren't being taken full advantage of—likely because of how burnt out on Zoom everyone is and because staff are scrambling simply to keep afloat (Tush 2021; see also Merritt 2021:10). The desire to collaborate and work with colleagues remains, however—and knowledge sharing would be so useful at this time. "I think that's probably going to be the focus of the next year, is just learning how to take advantage of resources by institutions that have really gained a lot of knowledge and have found successful formulas, and then also starting to really figure out where our niche is in terms of using the technology" (Tush 2021).

Marissa Day, Creative Director at The Leonardo in Salt Lake City, Utah, noted that 2020 led The Leonardo to "substantially refocus on partnering with community organizations and expanding our audiences through our partners" (survey response, 2021). Where museum websites

take visitors "farther away with hyperlinks to social media as well as to the websites of community organizations and programmatic partners," museums become decentralized-- "more like a distributed network of spaces and experiences rather than a single, brick and mortar place" (Bautista 2012:351; see also Russo 2012). The content those museums produce becomes open or "non-linear" (Gonçalves 2021:95) as it is presented in and accessed from different locations (Chun, Jenkins, & Stein 2007). Such cultural heritage institutions also integrate other institutions and individuals, both local and global, into their own (often nebulous) community (Bautista 2012:351).

Many CHIs today see fostering empathy, teaching, and modeling skills for imagining others complexly as part of their institutional missions (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2021; Jones 2020; Merritt 2017). Part of that effort is focused on engaging with the broader social justice conversations in which we find ourselves. CHIs can use digital programming to participate in societal conversations both inside and outside of the gallery. Sajet says The National Portrait Gallery has "a leg up on a lot of art museums because we're really about history as much as we are about art."

> We're as much about biography as we are about portraiture. And so, for us, there isn't a subject we can't talk about from the perspective of human activity-- past, present, and future. So, whether it's Confederate monuments or the 'Me Too' movement or [an impeachment], we don't need to be in the museum to have that conversation. We can take it from a perspective of portraiture as a window, but it really is a conversation about history and identity politics. That I think is sort of our superpower. (Sajet 2021)

**Breaking Geographic Boundaries of Patronage**

All these changes have had a dramatic effect on audience makeup for cultural heritage institutions. When asked if they'd noticed an increase in online engagement from publics located

outside of their institution's drivable vicinity, 72.73% (n=26) of respondents to that question responded in the affirmative (Figure 4).

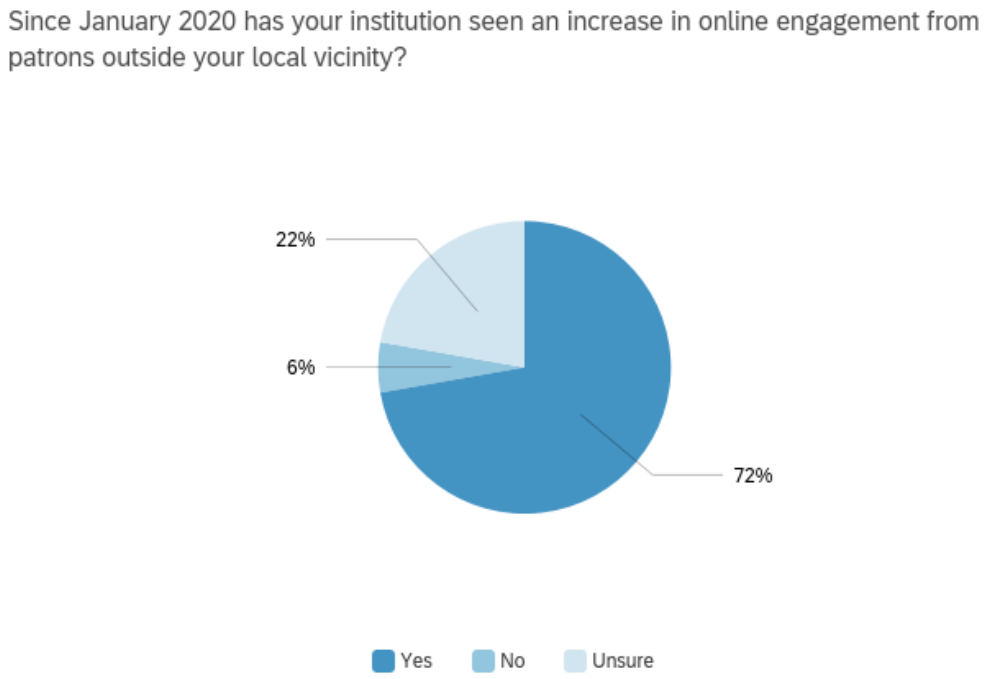


*Figure 4- Percent of CHIs that reported an increase in online engagement from non-local publics in 2020 vs. 2019*

The Colorado Snowsports Museum found that their virtual programme series was able to reach a much wider audience than they had expected: "We used platforms like Vimeo, YouTube, Facebook, and more to get the word out about our virtual series. This was a huge help in our success this season." (Mathios, personal communication, 2021).

Such increases in engagement from global publics have already led CHIs to recognize the utility of producing online programmes with interpretive communities in mind. When asked to identify if their institution had added new publics to their strategic planning during the COVID pandemic, five institutions reported adding a particular community of interest as one of their publics. Kathryn Sinor, Education Director at the Evergreen Aviation & Space Museum in McMinnville, Oregon, shared in her survey response that the Evergreen Aviation & Space

Museum attracts many Boy Scout troops from the Washington/Oregon area. When the Evergreen Aviation & Space Museum implemented online programmes in 2020, staff noticed scout troops from "all across the USA" interacting with their content. This interest has primarily been because the Evergreen Aviation & Space Museum produced content specifically for Scouts—a type of programme which "not a lot of places are offering" and serves an interpretive community that transcends geographic borders (Sinor 2021).

A community of interest that the Colorado Snowsports Museum has "heavily relied on in the past" is the 10th Mountain Division community. Dana Mathios, curator, director of collections, and social media manager, shared in her survey response that online programming during the pandemic has allowed the Colorado Snowsports Museum to reach the 10th Mountain Division community "on less of a local level and on more of an international level. This has been a great modification to this public and has been a beneficial reach for us" (Mathios, survey response, 2021). Similarly, the museum's connection to the ski racing community has expanded from local to international—reaching other areas in Colorado, California, Canada, and beyond.

At the Washington State Historical Society, a video about women's fashion throughout time was "picked up all over the world—because fashion and women's fashion is of interest to everyone. There is no geographic boundary there." (Wilmoth 2020) As Nederveen Pieterse wrote, "the principle of a separation between 'their' history and 'our' history is no longer tenable" (Nederveen Pieterse 1996:7).

The Tacoma Art Museum is also reaching a broader audience in the peri-pandemic era. Layton has noticed that guest speakers for online lectures bring their personal and professional networks from across the globe to the audience—individuals who might not be able to fly to Tacoma to hear a speech but will tune-in in significant numbers when possible. "I think that's an interesting idea.

There's no borders anymore," she said, echoing Alder (2017) and Gómez- Peña (1992). "The only border is, really, do you speak the language that's being offered? And even then, if we're doing a musical or dance performance, you don't even need to speak that language" (Layton 2021). Another factor contributing to their increased reach is that online materials aren't constrained by time: "If you want to watch [a video] at midnight, you can watch it at midnight. If you have a time constraint, you can still participate. You could break up the offering into fifteen-minute sections. On many levels, that has been incredible" (ibid.). Online educational programming is also comparatively inexpensive. It does not take a big budget to record a curator standing in front of a painting and talking about the piece. Content like this can even be recorded on a cell phone-- no expensive camera equipment necessary. This factor allows for a higher volume of programming, which can be more specifically targeted.

Layton sees such interactions with patrons from outside of the Puget Sound area as "hugely" valuable for TAM. "We want to be relevant to Tacoma," Layton says, but TAM is also a Northwestern Art museum and focuses on collecting from the entire Pacific Northwest region of the United States (for their purposes defined as from Alaska, South to Oregon, and East to Montana). Interest in art from the Pacific Northwest is not limited to people who live there. TAM's "weird but wonderful Western Art collection, the Haub Collection, attracts people from all over. There are just a handful of Western Art museums in the country, and Western Art fans are ferocious. So, when we're engaging with that collection, we do reach out farther and through those networks" (Layton 2021).

Where these online programmes are available, interest transcends geographic boundaries. By adapting their existing programming to online formats, the Dalí Museum was able to continue all of their regular monthly programmes during their closure while adding accessibility for patrons

outside of the St. Petersburg area. The overall number of people who registered for Dalí Summer camps in 2020 was lower than in 2019, but digital camps also attracted students from other parts of Florida and from as far afield as California. Tush thinks this is the perfect example of the impact of online programming on audience makeup: "we would not have had those students had our summer camps been in person." For Summer 2021, The Dalí plans to host two in-house camps and two distance-learning programmes "so people can choose which one they would prefer," a tangible example of how adaptations the Dalí made to COVID-era restrictions impacts whom they consider their public for these summer camps.

The Dalí does three student shows per year, with about 100 students selected to participate. The reception for that event draws ~400 people because students will bring their families and art teachers to attend. When these receptions were made impossible during COVID the Dalí adapted by filming an address that was shared with a link. "What's really nice about that is then then link can be shared with anyone, and it lives for at least a year until the next year when we do the next show." They also made an online gallery of the show—which they had never done before. "So, now, if any of the students, especially if they're seniors and they're going to college, they can include that link and show that their work is part of The Dali Museum's website."

In other cases, the Dalí made deliberate efforts to engage patrons from outside the St. Petersburg area. After noting interest in their junior docent programme from patrons on the other side of the continent in California, the Dalí created a Virtual Junior Docent programme. Staff put together the same packets they would provide to local docents and mailed them to participants. This simple change showed the potential of remote patronage: "It was really no different than somebody who was just up the block. They were doing exactly the same thing, at the same time, using the same technology. There was no perception of distance."

Tush sees the potential for online programming to help the Dalí better reach their international audience; but notes the museum hasn't taken any deliberate steps to do so yet. The Dalí's international audience is already quite active. For now, Tush is focusing on reaching audiences on a national scale. "But ultimately, if it's a success, [these efforts] will become global… I think that our… administration are recognizing the value in connecting with people over distance—that there are revenue streams and revenue sources that could be tapped into" (Tush 2021; see Merritt 2021:14).

In some cases, the impact of global publics on CHIs has been so striking that staff have added new key publics to their institutional plans. Kristi McMillan, Director of Learning & Engagement at the Asheville Art Museum, Asheville, NC, USA, actually cites flexibility with key publics as a benefit of online programming: "We're able to engage our key publics more often, since they don't need to physically come to our location. We can serve people in our surrounding areas who don't come downtown often, as well as those segments of our Membership and visitorship who are partial year residents" (survey response, 2021). Whereas before the pandemic the Leonardo in Salt Lake City defined its key publics as "Downtown Salt Lake City, Utah families," they now also have "a much larger range of virtual offerings that we promote across the state rather than within driving distance only" (Marissa Day, survey response, 2021).

The majority of surveyed institutions reported that they had taken active steps to engage global publics since January 2020 (see Figure 5).

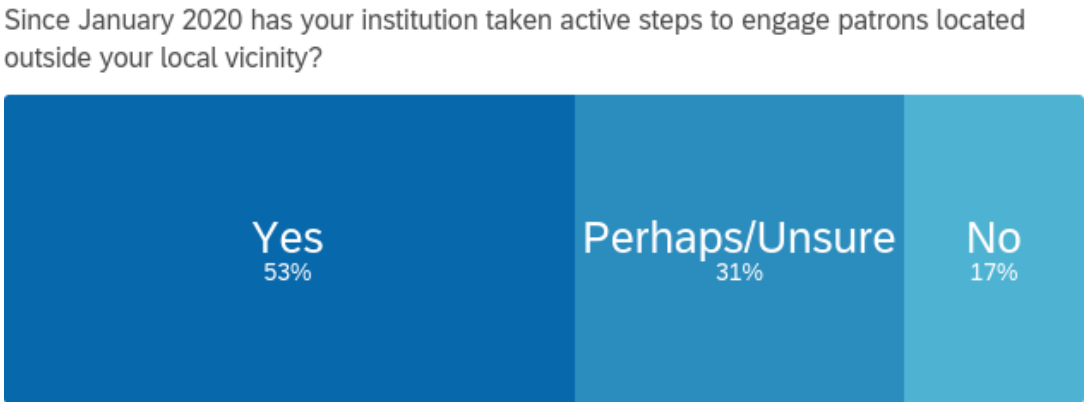


*Figure 5- Has your institution taken active steps to engage patrons located outside your local vicinity?*

That shift has altered the balance of programme planning. In 2020, 30% (n=9) of CHIs reported targeting 80-100% of programming toward regional publics—whereas only 60-80% of programs were regionally targeted in the previous year. Programming targeted toward national publics, as represented in Figure 6, spread into higher frequency brackets in 2020 as well. Whereas in 2019 43% (n=15) of respondents targeted national audiences less than 10% of the time (Figure 6), in 2020 that bracket represented only 19% of respondents (n=6).

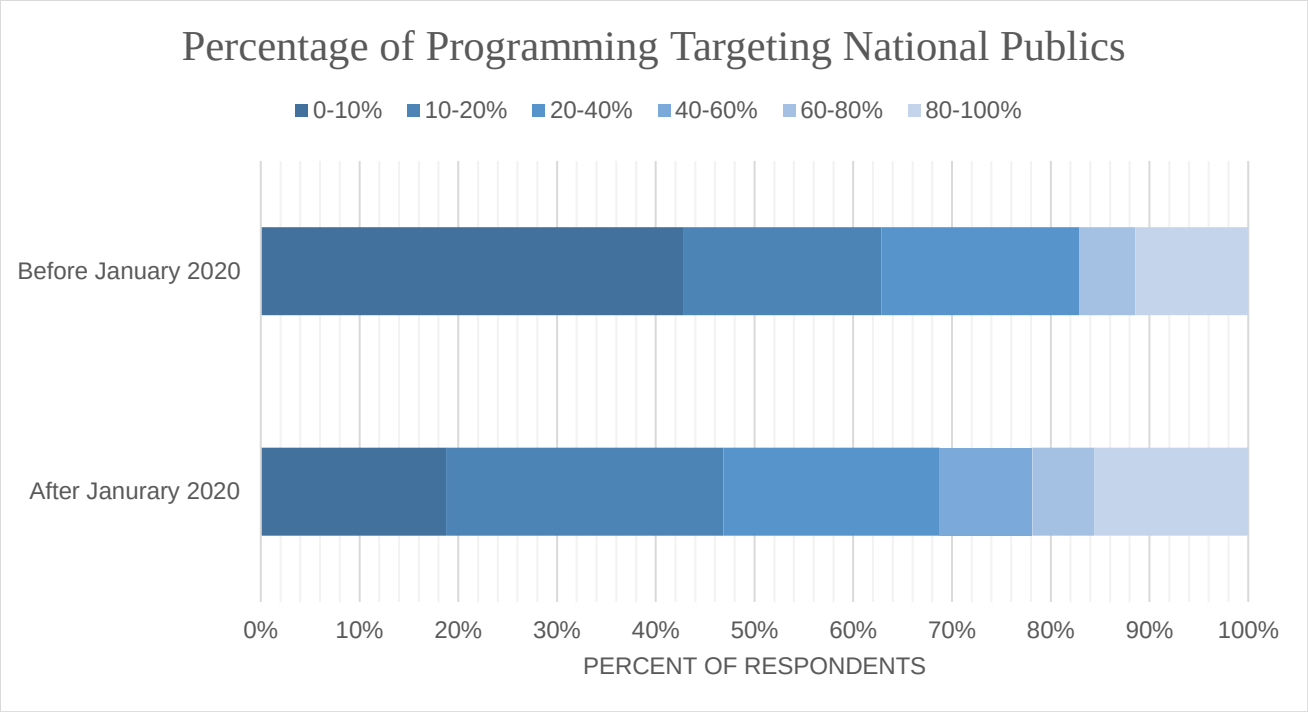


*Figure 6- Percentage of programming targeted toward national publics in 2019 vs. 2020*

This shift is even more dramatic for international audiences (see Figure 7). Whereas the majority of CHIs surveyed (53%) still target the minority of their programming toward international publics in 2020, the 0-10% bracket does not hold the staggering majority that it did in 2019, when that bracket represented the rate at which 76% (n=26) of CHIs targeted international publics.

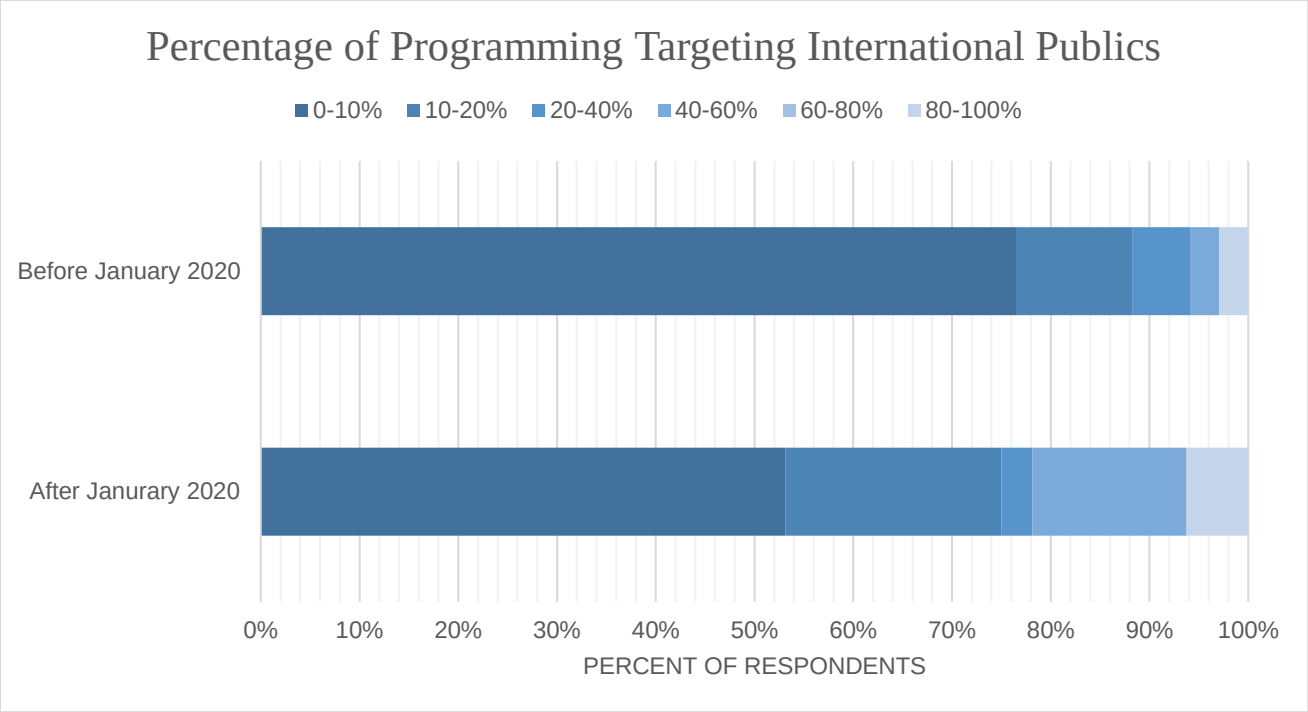


*Figure 7- percentage of programming targeted toward international publics in 2019 vs. 2020*

Does serving global publics via online programming impede work with local publics? Survey data indicates that local publics are being served at the same rate as before. In both 2019 and 2020 40% (n=13) of respondents targeted 80% or more of their programming to local publics. This value remaining consistent shows how expanding museums' reach via digital programing does not detract from reaching 'core' local publics. Rather than removing programming for local patrons, cultural heritage institutions added additional consideration for global publics in 2020. One of the significant assets of online programming is that local and global publics can all interact with the same programme. Wilmoth summarized the balance the Washington State Historical Society hopes to strike between serving key publics and a global community: "We are still creating programming that has a specific audience in mind," but perhaps "it can be a little bit more open-ended" (Wilmoth 2020).

## APPLICATIONS TO OTHER INDUSTRIES

The conversations addressed in these case studies are unique to the peri-pandemic era—but not entirely limited to it. Nor are these conversations exclusive to museums. Universities, for example, responded to COVID-19 by shifting learning to online modalities in a similar way, and the theoretical considerations above are likewise appropriate for educational institutions to consider as they also expand their reach to global publics (Friedman 2016).

Pre-pandemic, academia's approach to online programming mirrored that of museums: schools were *planning* to develop more online programmes (because of the appeal of lower overhead costs and the potential to reach students regardless of geographic location). However, like museums, many university administrations failed to prioritize implementing those programmes— some taking years to execute the smallest of baby steps. Nonetheless, when COVID-19 closed campuses, even those professors who avoided learning how to grade assignments online for decades suddenly learned to teach entire courses online. After over a year of online learning, universities, like museums, have built up an online infrastructure that isn't going anywhere now that it's in place.

Online museum programmes have themselves played a role in the digital academy (Merritt 2021:14). Many museums have programmes targeted toward students and educators designed to be both accessed and used online (Kirshenblatt-Gimblet 2021). The BYU MOA collaborated with university faculty during 2020 to continue serving their campus community with virtual "Take Five" talks designed to connect MOA exhibitions with class curricula. Remote internship programmes—nearly unheard of before the pandemic—allow students and early-career professionals to glean the benefits of an internship at a world-class institution like the National Portrait Gallery, for example, without incurring the cost of relocation to Washington DC. Such a change opens internship opportunities to individuals who are currently underrepresented in the

museum field and gives them the opportunity to build their resumes with continuing education opportunities so often reserved for their wealthier counterparts (Merritt 2021:10).

Because they were similarly forced online, academic conferences underwent major changes during COVID-19. Dr. Allen J. Christenson, Professor of Comparative Arts & Letters at Brigham Young University, cited his experience at the 3rd Warsaw Maya Conference as an example of how a digital programme altered the experience and demographics of conference audience. “I would much rather have been in Warsaw,” he said, “but I have to say that the 3-hour workshop had many more participants than if they had had to pay their way to be there in person. We had people from all over the world and the exchange of ideas was wonderful… participants are more free to go beyond their formal talks to have interesting conversations” (Christenson, personal communication, 20 July 2021). Moreover, because costs to host online conferences are “so much less” than in-person events, there have been more of them, which means more opportunities for researchers to network, collaborate, and learn.

Even after the pandemic is recedes, online education of all kinds will continue increasing in relevance (Merritt 2021:19). Universities and museums alike will continue to refine methods for online education in terms of pedagogy and accessibility. In turn, education will be more accessible to certain groups—though certainly not all. The internet (often considered the great equalizer) only amplifies disparities between the connected and the disconnected when access to that technology is imbalanced (Domestic Data Streamers 2020; Merritt 2021).

## FROM GLOBAL TO LOCAL

Some museums were globally focused before the pandemic because most of their patrons were international tourists (Merritt & Honeysett 2021). For them, 2020 has inspired a different change to how they define their publics— quite the opposite of the trend discussed thus far—from global to local. Amid travel restrictions, many museums "have had to forge a stronger connection with a smaller network" (Tissen 2021). One conversation staff at the Metropolitan Museum in New York City were having "once everything was closed down" was that, when the museum did begin reopening, and so long as travel restrictions were in effect, the audience who *would* be available to physically go to the museum would no longer consist primarily of tourists or people coming from outside of New York (Durgun 2021). Rather, CHIs in NYC would have to focus on appealing to and serving local New Yorkers.

In the Netherlands, a small country with a high museum density (Amsterdam has the highest number of museums per capita in the world), tourism, and "global outreach" are particularly essential to cultural heritage, even compared to other European countries (Tissen 2021). At the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, for example, 85% of visitors are from a foreign country (Verhoeven 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, "whilst Dutch museums have greater engagement with global audiences, they have witnessed an increase in local participation" and have demonstrated an "increased focus [on] connecting with local visitors" (see Tissen 2021).. Cities like Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague saw a 40% increase in their cultural engagement with locals during 2020 (Baarspul 2020). In these circumstances, it became "of pivotal importance" that Dutch museums "shift their focus to more small scale, personal and local experiences (Pontzen 2020). Instead of hosting blockbuster exhibitions, museums should organize smaller… more profound… and recognizable exhibitions and events, which will satisfy the public's growing desire for a personal connection with Dutch collections" (Tissen 2021).

Museums all over the world have realized that such blockbuster exhibitions, which require extensive loans and depend on income generated by massive attendance are—at least for the moment—not feasible. “Rather, working locally and creating local partnerships, *that* is in the cards. That is to say… finding ways to make do” with a local audiences and local partners working on a smaller scale within in the region and using a museum’s own collection (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2021; Merritt & Honeysett 2021). Whereas not every cultural heritage institution’s pandemic experience has been the same, COVID has disrupted the status quo in every case, and thereby altered the way CHIs define their publics.

**Changes**

The effects of global publics on CHIs will continue to manifest in yet unforeseen ways, but these data do reveal some of the ways global publics are already changing cultural heritage programming (Sandahl 2005). As the pandemic forced museums online, other events of 2020 (e.g., racial unrest [Callihan 2020], climate concerns, political turmoil) also inspired staff to step back, separate from old routines, consider their institutional goals, develop new engagement strategies, and divert resources to new programmes. COVID-induced closures at all seven case study institutions facilitated renewed efforts to engage some oft-excluded publics online: youth, people of color, the disabled, the poor, and those simply too busy to visit a museum during regular hours (Cecilia 2021; Durgun 2021a).

Another positive change will be that materials that may only have been available to local publics (or those with resources to travel) before the pandemic will become increasingly accessible to global patrons and researchers (Barrett 2016: 38; Durgun 2021a; Tush 2021). This shift in accessibility should not be understated. Robust online programming means providing access to patrons "independent of where they are, what time they need to access things, how much money they have, or how much education they have. The idea that these four barriers are not an issue in the digital sphere is huge. …We can start to break down information silos" (Kate 2021). Digital offerings have also assisted in academic research, for students and professors alike. Christenson noted that online exhibits have been a "terrific" resource for his research: "I was able to 'see' the Pre-Raphaelite drawing exhibit at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford whereas this wouldn't have been possible for me this year. Other exhibits at the Tate Britain and Royal Academy have been filmed and posted online which has been very helpful for my work. Again, I likely would never

have seen the shows other than through catalogues which are not the same" (personal communication, 20 July 2021).

Online exhibitions make accessibility goals so much more realizable. Now that these programmes have been established, museums have a responsibility to "ensure that new embodied and digital practices become long-term opportunities to enhance accessibility and inclusion" (Cecilia 2021). As online resources improve (Kate 2021) and these conversations continue, exciting opportunities for accessibility and intercultural dialogue will continue to emerge.

Opening access to cultural heritage will undoubtedly enhance "research value and impact," particularly by facilitating collaboration with source communities and other researchers (Barrett 2016; see also Nyen 2021). Research in the digital age is, Kate argues, "more of a meritocracy at this point. It's much more about 'what do you know? What can you find?" (2021). Online programing may also attract first-time patrons or patrons who would never have considered attending a special event like an exhibition opening.

For those who consider conservation/preservation the primary role of museums, it is significant to note that digital access to collections maximizes the number of people able to see an artifact while limiting time on display, exposed to environmental hazards (Merritt, 2021: 17). Such methods that foster sustainability and flexibility should be maintained after the pandemic ends (NEMO 2020:1).

Global publics themselves should not be discounted as a benefit of these pandemic-era changes. Online programmes allow patrons to stay invested in museums even after leaving the area, as at the BYU MOA. By facilitating direct communication with potentially nervous first-time visitors (as at the Tacoma Museum of Art), well-executed social media on the part of CHIs can help non-visitors see CHIs as more approachable and will them more likely to visit after

restrictions lift (Layton 2021; Walsh 1991:1). Should he visit Tacoma, The Washington State History Museum will almost certainly get a visit from their new member from Tennessee because of the relationship he developed with the museum during the pandemic. Some benefits of considering global publics in planning, per Tush, include "…diverse opinions and responses to the things that you're doing that will lead you to grow and change some of the assumptions you've always had about the programmes you do" (2021).

Cultural heritage professionals who harness digital programming receive feedback from audiences they perhaps wouldn't have engaged with otherwise (Tush 2021; Jung & Vakharia 2019). Access to that feedback is key to understanding how best to serve any public—local or remote (Douglas in Nyen et al. 2021). As patrons interact with CHPs and with each other, that participation will make those institutions "—whether national, regional, or local— more inclusive, diverse, and democratic, and therefore more relevant to the communities in which they are embedded, and thus more conducive to mutual understanding among peoples on a global scale" (Conklin in Araujo et al. 2019:1650). "You get different cultures, different voices, different perspectives, sharing ideas" (Sajet 2021). Creative responses to the limitations of the pandemic do make CHIs today "more accessible than ever" (Callihan 2020). The question now is: What next? How can CHIs sustain these programmes when they reopen?

**Digital Programming Post-Pandemic**

As NEMO stated in their report, "There is no fast track back to normal - rather than making a return to normal our goal, we must learn from this crisis in order to effectively respond, mitigate, adapt and integrate" (2020:1). Digital programmes have "become the most important opportunity for museums under these circumstances [of the pandemic]. There is no reason why they should go

away. The interesting question is: how will these online services function when museums reopen?" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2021). Additionally, how can CHIs develop digital strategies that better integrate online and on-site activities to create a cohesive museum experience across digital and in-gallery contexts?

Over a year of digital immersion for work, school, and recreation "may create a pan-digital version of 'Zoom fatigue,' resulting in a sharp drop in the demand for digital content and experiences when people feel safe to venture out again" (Merritt 2021:19). Long periods of isolation have left many "hungry for in-person, place-based social experiences" (Merritt 202:19) and less interested in digital programming.

Still, each individual interviewed for this research agreed that CHIs are past the point of no return for virtual programming, particularly because of their stronger relationships to global publics. "We have these new audiences that we've built up, and there's no going back now," Wilmoth said of the Washington State Historical Society (2020). Emily Kate went so far as to say that in this moment it is "negligent to not develop your digital strategy… it's our job right now to rise to the occasion, meet people where they are, speak the language they're speaking, and still meet our mission[s]" (2021).

Since TAM started using Matterport to produce online exhibitions, Layton does not see going back to in-person-only exhibitions as an option. Patrons, local and remote, now expect online offerings from TAM. "I can't personally go back to excluding those folks… We might not do it for every exhibition, but now that the door has been opened, we can't not do it ever again" (Layton 2021). Peri-pandemic changes in "the way we do programs has pushed us to think about continuing virtual programing - even once the world opens again. This will allow us to continue to engage communities and audiences we have not yet reached" (Mathios, personal communication, 2021).

The National Portrait Gallery plans to maintain their virtual programming, but Sajet is careful to add that they intend to do so "judiciously," as they re-focus their attention back to in-gallery experiences. Emily Kate stated unequivocally that everything cultural institutions do online "can't be technology for technology's sake. It can't just be advertisement. It has to meet the mission" (2021). The next challenge will be "a curious and ongoing balancing act" (Lowry in Nyen e. al. 2021) between online and in-person programming (Merritt 2021:19; Pykles 2021; Tush 2021). Layton anticipates challenges integrating online and in-person programmes when TAM reopens, saying, "That's going to be a reckoning with workflow," but "we can't stop now" (2021).

The MOA had been posting content on Facebook and Instagram live before the pandemic, and those videos were already popular, but since COVID-19, the MOA has produced and posted more frequently (Emmer, 2021). Emmer predicts those social media programs "are permanently going to be part of museum programing in the future," adding that, "We are still in the process of figuring out what works best for our audiences" (Emmer 2020).

Whatever the conditions of the future, what is left for the cultural heritage industry to do is what it has been doing: "make connections—and to do so in every way possible… in whatever form that might take" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2021). No doubt pandemic-era innovation and change will have a lasting impact on the digital behavior of museums, and on museums' perceptions of their publics.

**Morals**

Can CHIs effectively serve publics on a world scale? Some in and outside of the arts are concerned by the globalization of cultural heritage. They fear whitewashing and appropriation of arts or the erasure of individual cultures altogether. To this fear, Nederveen Pieterse (1996) asks: "Is there no middle ground then between cultural apartheid and global standardization" (pp. 5-6)?

Sajet (personal communication, 2021) draws a critical distinction between art and objects being global versus *ideas* being disseminated globally (see also Benjamin 1936), noting that this anxiety is part of a long tradition—dating back to the printing press (and arguably before) (see also Friedman 2016:438-9). Whereas Sajet finds the idea of objects "being global" problematic, "every time a new technology has come on, it has amplified the distribution of knowledge" (Sajet, personal communication, 2021). The question for CHPs becomes, "how do you curate that knowledge? How do you compare that knowledge? How do you share that knowledge" (Sajet 2021)? In those interactions is where cultural heritage work becomes genuinely global.

A museum may rightly consider its local communities their primary public (Adler, 2017). However, "a multicultural society is emerging hand in hand with [an] information society" (Macdonald 1992:176). Knowledge and accountability are no longer national or regional, but global (Nederveen Pieterse 1996:17).

Serving global publics necessitates a balancing act on the part of CHIs. No single entity can tell all stories or respond to all social needs with equal efficacy. "[F]or this reason alone we must have a variety of museums and museum styles, serving different purposes or tackling challenges from different approaches" (Macdonald 1992:159). In this ecosystem, each museum becomes a link in "the chain of cultural reproduction" (Nederveen Pieterse 1996:12), producing new forms for CHIs to interact with and understand their audiences (and each other) on a global scale.

Unquestionably, museums must still curate their programing to closely fit their mission and collections. Current conversations among CHPs acknowledge that all museums, even those considered world culture museums (Shelton 2013b), are inextricable from their local context (Nyen et al. 2021), and it's important for all CHIs to preserve their own unique context, so that

they “don’t all become a generic copy of each other,” displaying the same artists in the same ways and addressing the same issues (Sajet, personal communication, 2021).

Cultural heritage institutions in the digital age will have the best outcomes if they apply sound theoretical understanding to negotiate “a simultaneous particularity and universality” (Adler 2017:52; Lavine 1992:147) and tell stories relevant to their distinct disciplines in accessible ways (Kate 2021). “The trick is figuring out, depending on the context and institutional aims, what stories a museum is best positioned to tell, and how to do so impactfully” (Redman in Araujo et al. 2019:1647).

To produce programs for global publics, CHIs need to embrace ambiguity, disrupt pretended historical narratives (Bennett 1995:162), and “cut” assumed knowledge (Foucault 1980:154). By considering how their programing will be ‘read’ by local, national, and international publics, they can build programs that acknowledge multiple voices, encourage interconnectivity, and introduce alternative ways of experiencing the world (Adler 2017:51). Suffice it to say, CHIs can avoid pitfalls by refocusing attention away from corporate globalism or “glib multiculturalism” and onto an exploration of intercultural relationships (Shelton 2013b:18; Friedman 2016).

By situating cultural heritage practice in local contexts *and* keeping global publics in mind (Bautista 2012:18; Lowry in Nyen et al. 2021), CHPs are better prepared to interface cross-culturally (Gómez- Peña 1992:72). This work requires a “hybridity which can apply itself to what happens when objects and materials cross boundaries; that will enable us to trace the effects when the boundaries themselves are distorted, disappear, or are redrawn” as they have been during the COVID-19 pandemic (Shelton 2001:15). Practical work toward achieving that balance will require

transparency, honesty, willingness to listen to communities, and awareness that CHIs "operate locally and globally in different contexts, and that that is okay" (Nyen 2021).

Museums have great potential to be platforms for intercultural and interpersonal encounters and exchange on a global level (Shelton 2016:24). The internet is already such a platform, and CHIs only need to continue using it to harness that capacity (Kate 2021). As important as developing digital tools, this research highlights the importance of developing digital literacy among cultural heritage professionals, especially senior leadership (Merritt 2021:19). This is not to say that leaders need to become experts in computer science; but that they would benefit from being savvy enough about digital offerings to incorporate them knowledgeably in museum development (Merritt 2021:19). Senior leadership will have to be technologically literate to serve global publics, and it's apparent that many have much to learn in a short amount of time. Almost a quarter (23%) of respondents to MuseumNext's 2020 survey of member museums suggested that a lack of digital skills would continue to be their biggest challenge in 2021, citing a "lack of appreciation by senior and middle management" regarding the importance of digital knowledge, as well as "leadership not understanding the role digital plays" (MuseumNext 2021).

Institutions expanding their reach to different publics may seek to localize their content to ensure relevance to different worldviews. Doing so takes time and resources, but this work is more feasible now than ever before.[4] Doing so is also more imperative than ever before because as this research has shown, people all over the world are already accessing museum collections online whether MPs planned for them or not. Cultural heritage institutions will benefit from being prepared to engage with those global publics.

[4] Many resources for museums hoping to reach expanded publics through digital programming are available through the American Alliance of Museums website.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a harrowing time for museums, as it has been for most everyone. Still, this research presents some silver linings to go with our clouds. “Whatever we lost in in-person visits we have made up for in our ability to reach a wide international audience on a scale that was unimaginable before” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2021). As CHIs continue to build upon work started in 2020, the upheavals COVID-19 brought to the cultural heritage community can lift theory and practice to higher standards of excellence. Then, as they are designed to do, those institutions will raise their publics with them, both local and global.

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## APPENDIX A: Survey

### Revisiting Publics during COVID-19

### Survey Flow (17 Questions)

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Q1 **Western Washington University Department of Anthropology**
**Informed Consent to Participate in Research Survey**
**Researcher: Madeline Duffy**

INTRODUCTION
You are being invited to participate in a research project conducted by Madeline Duffy, a student at Western Washington University (WWU). Participation is voluntary. Please read this form carefully. This form will give you the information needed to help you decide whether to participate. Please ask questions about anything that is unclear. When we have answered your questions, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." You are eligible to participate in this survey if you have been employed at a museum or similar cultural heritage institution during the year 2020.

STUDY PURPOSE
This study seeks to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the way museums define their publics.

TASKS
Participation includes completing an online survey (<10 minutes). The survey will ask about online programs your museum has launched during the year 2020, your museum's key publics, and how those key publics may have changed over the past year. You are free to decline to answer any question you do not wish to answer for any reason.

RISKS & BENEFITS
There are no foreseeable risks. You will receive no direct benefits or compensation from participating in this research study. However, your responses may help us learn more about how museums have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and the theoretical implications of those responses.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Your data will be stored on a secure server. The museum affiliation of all participants will be published in the WWU CEDAR database, which is publicly available. All other identifying information will be kept private and deleted at the end of the study. Your data, with identifiers removed, may be used or distributed for future research without your additional informed consent.

WITHDRAWAL
You can exit the survey at any time without penalty. You may withdraw your data from the study up until publication by emailing the researcher.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher at duffym7@wwu.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you can contact the Western Washington University Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (RSP) at compliance@wwu.edu or (360) 650-2146. ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below. You may print a copy of this consent form for your records. Clicking on the "Agree" button indicates that

- You are 19 years of age or older
- You have read the above information
- You understand the tasks involved with participation
- You voluntarily consent to participate

○ Agree

○ Disagree

Q2 Please provide the following information:

- ○ Title _____
- ○ Name (first and last) * _____
- ○ Job Title * _____
- ○ Institution/Museum * _____
- ○ Location (city, state/province, country) *_____

Q3 Please list your institution's key publics. _____

Q4 By what percentage has your institution seen an increase in Online Activity (i.e. traffic to your website/s) in 2020 compared to 2019?

- ○ 0-10%
- ○ 10-20%
- ○ 20-40%
- ○ 40-60%
- ○ 60-80%
- ○ 80-100%
- ○ 100-500%
- ○ Over 500%

---

Q5 What online services does your museum provide? Describe the frequency with which your institution has provided these services in 2020 compared to 2019.

| | Frequency |
|---|---|

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Same as before | Increased | Started Planning | Considering implementing in future | Decreased | Not currently facilitating & no plans to implement in the future |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Online exhibitons | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Virtual tours | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Social media | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Online learning programs | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Museum podcasts | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Youtube programs | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Special Newsletters | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Live content (such as a live museum tour) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Adding objects to the museum collection online | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Guest Speakers (available online either live or recorded) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Panels and Conferences (available online either live or recorded) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Featuring individual objects to the online audience | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Quizzes, games, and contests | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Resource guides for educators | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Links to other museum's programs and resources | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Other (please specify): | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

*Display This Question:*

*If Q5#3 = Social media [ Increased ]*

Q6 Has your institution put increased resources (increase in staff hours, new staff appointment, funding, etc.) into Social Media engagement since January 2020?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Unsure

Q7 Since January 2020 has your institution seen an increase in online engagement from patrons located outside your local vicinity?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Unsure

Q8 Since January 2020 has your institution taken active steps to engage patrons located outside your local vicinity?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Perhaps/Unsure

Q9 **Before** January 2020 what percentage of your programming targeted local, regional, national, and international publics?

| | 0-10% | 10-20% | 20-40% | 40-60% | 60-80% | 80-100% |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Local Publics | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Regional Publics | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| National Publics | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| International Publics | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q10 **Since** January 2020 what percentage of your programming has targeted local, regional, national, and international publics?

| | 0-10% | 10-20% | 20-40% | 40-60% | 60-80% | 80-100% |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Local Publics | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Regional Publics | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| National Publics | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| International Publics | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q11 Has your institution added any new communities to your key publics in 2020 compared to 2019?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Perhaps/Unsure

*Display This Question:*

*If Q11 = Yes*

Q12 Please list these new/modified publics.

_____

Q13 Please describe how your institution's conceptions of its key publics have changed, if at all, since January 2020. If there has been no change you may skip this question.

_____

Q14 The researchers are interested in interviewing a select group of museum professionals about the ways in which they are integrating global members into their museum community. Information gleaned in these interviews may be published as part of the final paper. Please indicate below whether you are interested in participating in a 30-60 minute interview via phone or video call.

- ○ Yes, I would like to be contacted to schedule an interview/ would like more information.
- ○ No, I would not like to be interviewed.

---

*Display This Question:*

*If Q14 = Yes, I would like to be contacted to schedule an interview/ would like more information.*

Q15 Please enter the following contact information so that we may reach you to schedule your interview:

- ○ email address _____
- ○ phone number _____

---

Q16 If you would like to be notified when the results of this study are published, you may enter your email below. Your email will be connected to your responses, and will be stored on a secure server. Your email will not be used for any other purpose.

- ○ email address _____

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Q17 Do you have any additional comments, observations, or questions? If so, please include them here. If you would like a response, please include your contact information.

_____

**APPENDIX B: Directory of Participant Institutions**

| Institution/Museum | Location (city, state/province, country) | Survey (S)/ Interview (I) Participant |
|---|---|---|
| **Arizona State Museum** | Tucson, AZ, USA | S |
| **Arkansas State University Museum** | Jonesboro, AR, USA | S |
| **Asheville Art Museum** | Asheville, NC, USA | S |
| **Battleship New Jersey** | Camden, New Jersey, USA | S |
| **Bean Life Science Museum** | Provo, UT, USA | S |
| **Berkeley County Museum** | Moncks Corner, SC, USA | S |
| **Brigham Young University Museum of Art** | Provo, Utah, USA | SI |
| **Brigham Young University Museum of Peoples and Cultures** | Provo, UT, USA | S |
| **Bulkley Valley Museum** | Smithers, British Columbia, CA | S |
| **Central Washington University Museum of Culture and Environment** | Ellensburg, WA, USA | S |
| **Colorado Snowsports Museum and Hall of Fame** | Vail, Colorado, USA | S |
| **Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum** | New York, NY, USA | S |
| **Evergreen Aviation & Space Museum** | McMinnville, OR, USA | S |
| **Georgia Museum of Art** | Athens, GA, USA | S |
| **Global Art Access Corporation** | Beverly Hills, CA, USA | I |
| **Hammer Museum** | Los Angeles, CA, USA | S |
| **Harvard Museum of the Ancient Near East, Harvard** | Cambridge, MA, USA | S |
| **Hill Aerospace Museum** | Hill AFB, Utah, USA | S |
| **Illinois Holocaust Museum** | Skokie, IL, USA | S |
| **Jane Addams Hull-House Museum** | Chicago, IL, USA | S |
| **Kings Landing Corporation** | Prince William, New Brunswick, CA | S |
| **Log Cabin Village** | Fort Worth, Texas, USA | S |
| **Meeteetse Museums** | Meeteetse, WY, USA | S |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Museum of Anthropology at UBC** | Vancouver, BC, Canada | S |
| **Naper Settlement** | Naperville, IL, USA | S |
| **Smithsonian Institution National Portrait Gallery** | Washington, DC, USA | SI |
| **Portland Chinatown Museum** | Portland, Oregon, USA | S |
| **Springville Museum of Art** | Springville, UT, USA | S |
| **Steffen Thomas Museum of Art** | Buckhead, Georgia, USA | S |
| **TELUS Spark** | Calgary, Alberta, Canada | S |
| **Tacoma Art Museum** | Tacoma, WA, USA | SI |
| **Tang Teaching Museum at Skidmore College** | Saratoga Springs, NY | S |
| **Texas Woman's University** | Denton, Texas, USA | S |
| **The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Church History Department** | Salt Lake City, Utah, USA | SI |
| **The Dali Museum** | St. Petersburg, Florida, USA | SI |
| **The Leonardo** | Salt Lake City, UT, USA | S |
| **UVU Museum of Art** | Orem, Utah, USA | S |
| **University of Lethbridge Art Gallery** | Lethbridge, Alberta, CA | S |
| **Washington State Historical Society** | Tacoma, WA, USA | SI |