

Cultural Engagement to Mitigate Social Isolation

Project Retrospective

August 24, 2020

Michael Peter Edson
Dana Mitroff Silvers
and project participants

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1. Project Overview

At a Glance



- Goal:** Help GLAMs* & performing arts organizations rapidly create new digital experiments to mitigate the effects of social isolation and serve the social, psychological, and educational needs of audience members during COVID-19.
- Rationale:** Across the USA, over 100,000 GLAM and performing arts orgs serve millions of individuals in their local communities, but often the organizations lack know-how and capacity to quickly develop and prototype audience-centered programs, especially when technology is involved.
- Approach:** 11-week project to catalyze product development through workshops, facilitation, coaching, knowledge-transfer, and peer-to-peer support.
- Outcomes:** Among participating organizations and cohort members, the project ...
- Advanced and accelerated the processes of creative development, experimentation, and project development
 - Fostered new and heightened emphasis on social justice and DEAI (Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion) issues and activities
 - Promoted greater confidence and clarity regarding audience needs and impact

* GLAM = Gallery, Library, Archive, Museum

Summary



In this initiative, supported by a rapid grant from the Aspen Tech Policy Hub, a cohort of ten museums, libraries, and performing arts organizations (see list on following slides) joined together to help each other accelerate the development of experimental digital programming to mitigate social isolation caused by the COVID-19 crisis. The scope of the project expanded to include the impact of racism and police violence when, on May 25, the day before our project kickoff meeting, George Floyd was killed by police officers in Minneapolis, Minnesota (home of five of our participants).

Participating organizations were based in eight states across the US and included museums and performing arts organizations, a major public library system, and a small non-profit that uses museum experiences to serve patients of dementia and their caregivers. Together these organizations serve over 4 million people a year.

Facilitators used design thinking and serious play methodologies to help participants understand the changing dynamics of community needs and improve their own thinking, practices, and project designs.

Participating Organizations

- [Arts & Minds, New York, New York](#) (plus [Howes Studio](#)), with [Carolyn Halpin-Healy](#), [Nellie Escalante](#), and [Deborah Howes](#)
- [Akron-Summit County Public Library System](#), Akron, OH, with [Jennifer Stencil](#)
- [Center for Art and Public Exchange](#), an initiative of the Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson, MS, with Monique Davis (Managing Director)
- [Georgia O'Keeffe Museum](#), Santa Fe, NM, with [Liz Neely](#), Shannon Bay (Program Manager, Adult and Community Engagement), and Katrina Latka (Curator of Education and Interpretation)
- [Lux Art Institute](#), Encinitas, CA, with [Andrew Utt](#) and [Claudia Cano](#)
- [Mississippi Museum of Art](#), Jackson, MS, with [McKenzie Drake](#)
- [Newark Museum of Art](#), Newark, NJ, with [Deborah Kasindorf](#) and [Silvia Flippini Fantoni](#)
- [RED EYE Theater](#), Minneapolis, MN, with [Emily Gastineau](#), Jeffrey Wells, and [Rachel Jendrzejewski](#)
- [Weisman Art Museum](#), Minneapolis, MN, with [Katherine Covey](#) and [Susannah Schouweiler](#)

Facilitators

Michael Peter Edson is a digital strategist at the forefront of digital transformation in the cultural sector. He was formerly the Director of Web and New Media Strategy at the Smithsonian Institution, the world's largest museum and research complex, and he was co-founder, associate director, and head of digital for the newly emerging Museum for the United Nations-UN Live, a global institution dedicated to catalyzing bottom-up action towards the Sustainable Development Goals. <https://usingdata.com/about>

Dana Mitroff Silvers is Principal + Founder of Designing Insights LLC, a San Francisco Bay Area-based innovation consultancy that develops, designs, and delivers remote and in-person design sprints, design thinking workshops, and design research for cultural institutions. Dana is a faculty member at the Museum Leadership Institute at Claremont Graduate University, and has coached dozens of workshops for the Stanford d.school. The former Head of Web at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Dana is widely recognized as one of the first people to introduce design thinking into the museum and arts sector. <https://designinginsights.com> and <http://designthinkingformusems.net>

The Challenge



COVID-19 has presented GLAMs* and performing arts organizations with new, urgent demands to create services and programs that mitigate the effects of social isolation.

But while many organizations want to accelerate their digital programming during this time of social distancing and shuttered physical institutions, most are constrained by a lack of basic training, funding, and other forms of technical and creative support to respond at the speed and scale necessitated by COVID-19.

* GLAM = Gallery, Library, Archive, Museum

2. COVID-19 in America (Spring 2020)

The potential role and relevance of GLAMs and performing arts organizations

Thesis: COVID-19 is damaging Americans and their communities, not just medically and economically, but psychologically and emotionally as well.

Cultural organizations reach deeply into thousands of American communities and can ameliorate this harm — *if they choose to act.*



CDC COVID Data Tracker

Explore and understand coronavirus disease (COVID-19)
Maps, charts, and data provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

USA

4,920,369

TOTAL CASES

CDC | Updated: Aug 8 2020 12:15PM

USA

160,220

TOTAL DEATHS

CDC | Updated: Aug 8 2020 12:15PM

USA

1,501

Cases per 100,000 People

CDC | Updated: Aug 8 2020 12:15PM

Total Cases by State/Territory



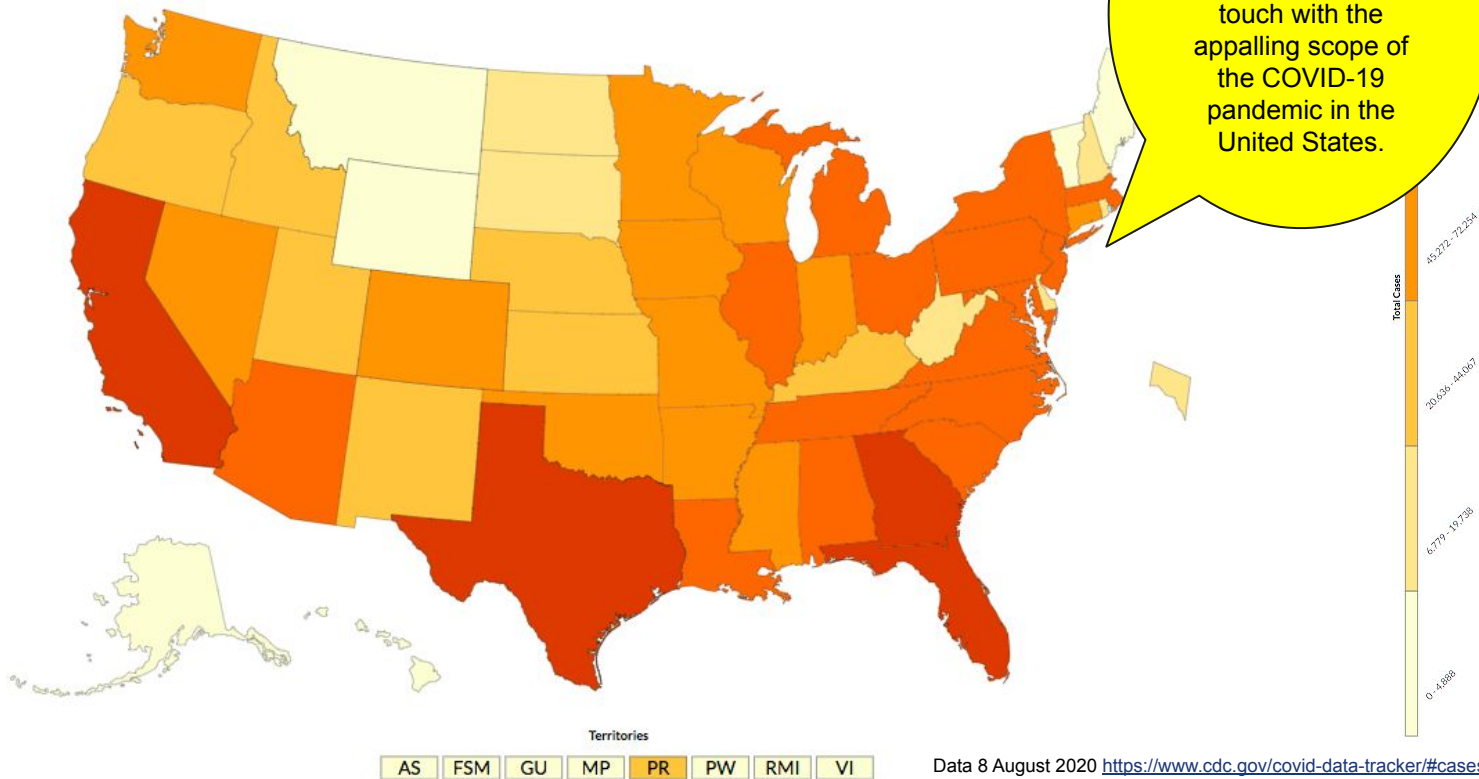
State/Territory	Total Cases	Confirmed	Probable
California	538,416	N/A	N/A
Florida	512,421	N/A	N/A
Texas	474,524	N/A	N/A
New York City*	228,753	224,117	4,636
Georgia	209,004	N/A	N/A
New York*	192,384	N/A	N/A
Illinois	191,808	190,508	1,300
Arizona	185,053	183,791	1,262
New Jersey	184,061	N/A	N/A
North Carolina	132,812	N/A	N/A
Louisiana	128,746	N/A	N/A
Massachusetts	120,291	111,853	8,438
Tennessee	118,782	117,087	1,695

CDC | Updated: Aug 8 2020 12:15PM

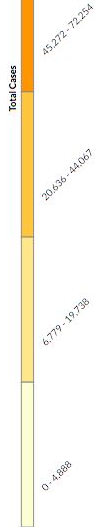
United States COVID-19 Cases and Deaths by State

Reported to the CDC since January 21, 2020

Total Number of COVID-19 Cases in the US Reported to the CDC, by State/Territory



In the day-to-day work of running an organization it can be easy to lose touch with the appalling scope of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States.



Opinion

We've Hit a Pandemic Wall

New data show that Americans are suffering from record levels of mental distress.



By **Jennifer Senior**
Opinion Columnist

Aug. 5, 2020

Mental wellbeing — already recognized as a global crisis before the pandemic — has taken on a new degree of scale and urgency.

- According to the National Center for Health Statistics...more than one in three American adults report symptoms of an anxiety disorder (up 4x since last year)
- Kaiser Family Foundation released a tracking poll showing that for the first time, a majority of American adults — 53 percent — believes that the pandemic is taking a toll on their mental health.
- This number climbs to 68 percent if you look solely at African-Americans.
- 36 percent of Americans report that coronavirus-related worry is interfering with their sleep. Eighteen percent say they're more easily losing their tempers. Thirty-two percent say it has made them overeat or undereat.

Opinion
Bushfires**Mark O'Connell**

@mrkocnll

Mon 13 Jan 2020 03:00 EST

Pictures of the world on fire won't shock us for much longer

"It's not the melting of the ice-caps or the burning of the forests that seem to be the real apocalyptic scenario, but the slow atrophying of our moral imaginations; not the inferno itself, but the indifference of those of us who are not yet on fire."

COVID-19 is both a medical and cultural phenomenon: it challenges the limits of community cohesion and sense making.

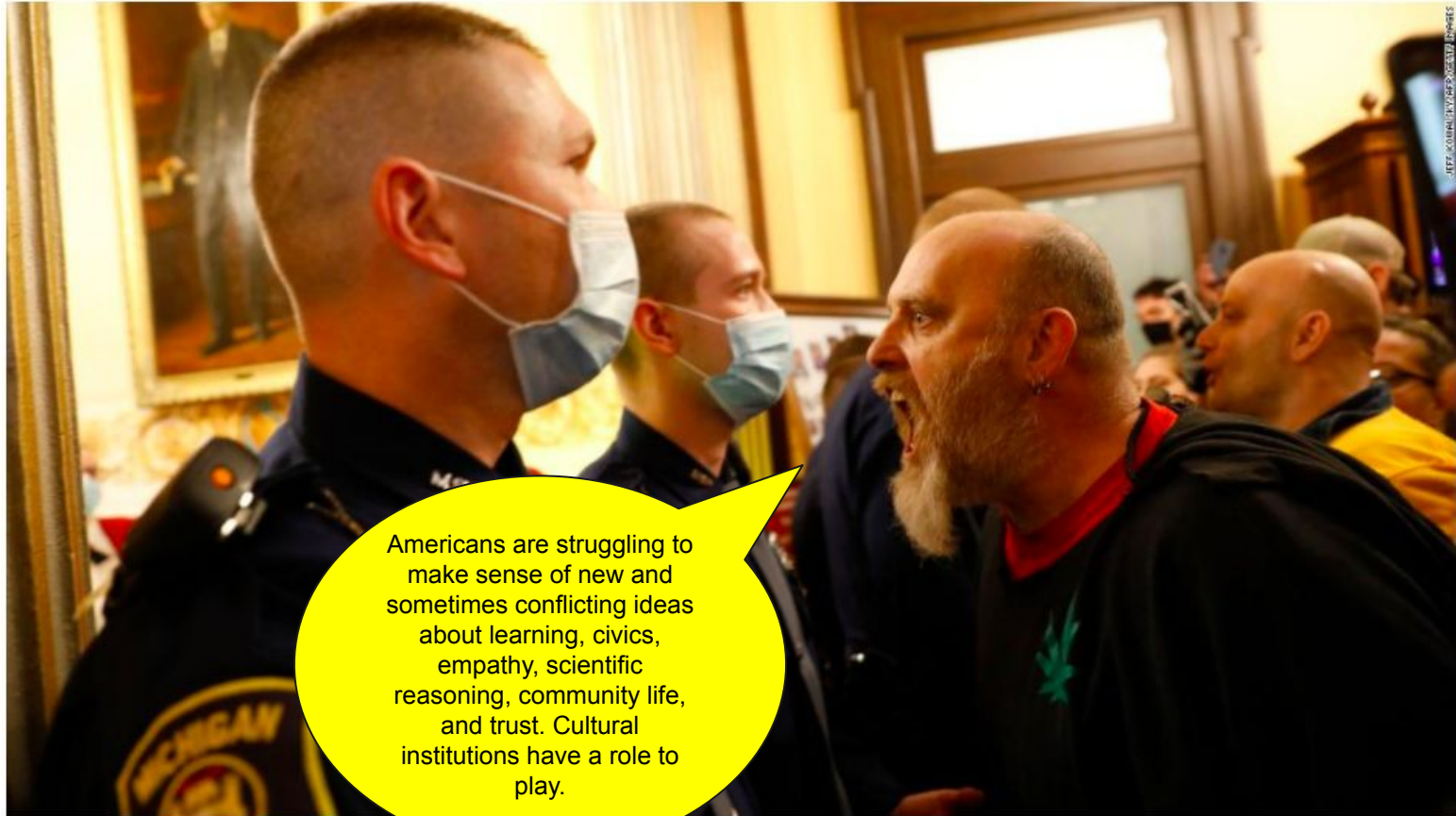


The psychology behind why some people won't wear masks

By Scottie Andrew, CNN

May 6, 2020

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/06/health/why-people-dont-wear-masks-wellness-trnd/index.html> Image use claimed under fair use

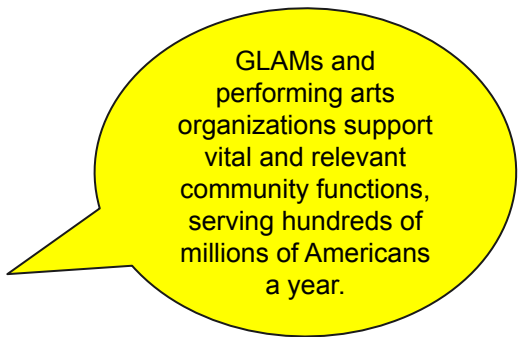


Americans are struggling to make sense of new and sometimes conflicting ideas about learning, civics, empathy, scientific reasoning, community life, and trust. Cultural institutions have a role to play.

Unmasked protesters in Michigan try to enter the state's House of Representatives chamber but are blocked by masked Michigan State Police.



Museum Facts & Data



Museums Are Community Anchors

- In determining America's Best Cities, Bloomberg Business Week placed the greatest weight on "leisure amenities [including density of museums], followed by educational metrics and economic metrics...then crime and air quality."^[7]
- Money Magazine's annual 'Best Places to Live' survey incorporates the concentration of accredited museums.^[8]

People Love Museums

- More people visited an art museum, science center, historic house or site, zoo, or aquarium in 2018 than attended a professional sporting event.^[9]
- Museums receive millions of online visits to their websites each year.^[10]
- Museum websites serve a diverse online community, including teachers, parents, and students (including those students who are home-schooled).
- Museum volunteers contribute a million hours of service every week.^[11]
- Support for museums is robust regardless of political persuasion. 96% of Americans would approve of lawmakers who acted to support museums. The number is consistently high for respondents who consider themselves politically liberal (97%), moderate (95%), or conservative (93%).^[12]

Museums Serve the Public

- Many museums offer programs tailored to veterans and military families. In 2019 more than 2,000 museums in all 50 states participated in the 10th year of the Blue Star Museums program, offering free summer admission to all active-duty and reserve personnel and their families.^[13] In the past five years more than 4 million active duty members and their families have participated in the Blue Star Museums program, which is, on average, more than 800,000 visitors per year, and many other museums offer military discounts or free admission throughout the year.
- Museums also provide many social services, including programs for children on the autism spectrum, English as a Second Language classes, and programs for adults with Alzheimer's or other cognitive impairments.^[14]

Museums Are Trusted

- The American public considers museums the most trustworthy source of information in America, rated higher than local papers, nonprofit researchers, the U.S. government, and academic researchers.^[23]
- Museums preserve and protect more than a billion objects.^[24]
- Museums are considered a more reliable source of historical information than books, teachers or even personal accounts by relatives.^[25]



ALA Fact Sheet (2015 data)

<http://www.ala.org/tools/libfactsheets/alalibranyfactsheet06>

- There were 1.5 billion in-person visits to public libraries across the United States [2012]
- More than 92.6 million people attended the 4.0 million programs at public libraries.
- Over 2.2 billion materials were circulated
- There were 271,146 public access computers in public libraries
- There were 340.5 million use sessions of public access computers



Pew Research Center *Internet & Technology*

Libraries across the US are a trusted and critical resource for community services and recreation.

SEPTEMBER 9, 2016



Libraries 2016

Trends in visiting public libraries have steadied, and many Americans have high expectations for what their local libraries should offer

BY JOHN B. HARRIGAN

<https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2016/09/09/libraries-2016/> Images claimed under fair use

Most Americans view public libraries as important parts of their communities, with a majority reporting that libraries have the resources they need and play at least some role in helping them decide what information they can trust. When asked to think about the things that libraries could do in the future, notable numbers of Americans respond in a way that can be boiled down to one phrase: “Yes, please.”

U.S. Trends in Arts Attendance and Literary Reading: 2002-2017

A First Look at Results from the 2017 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts



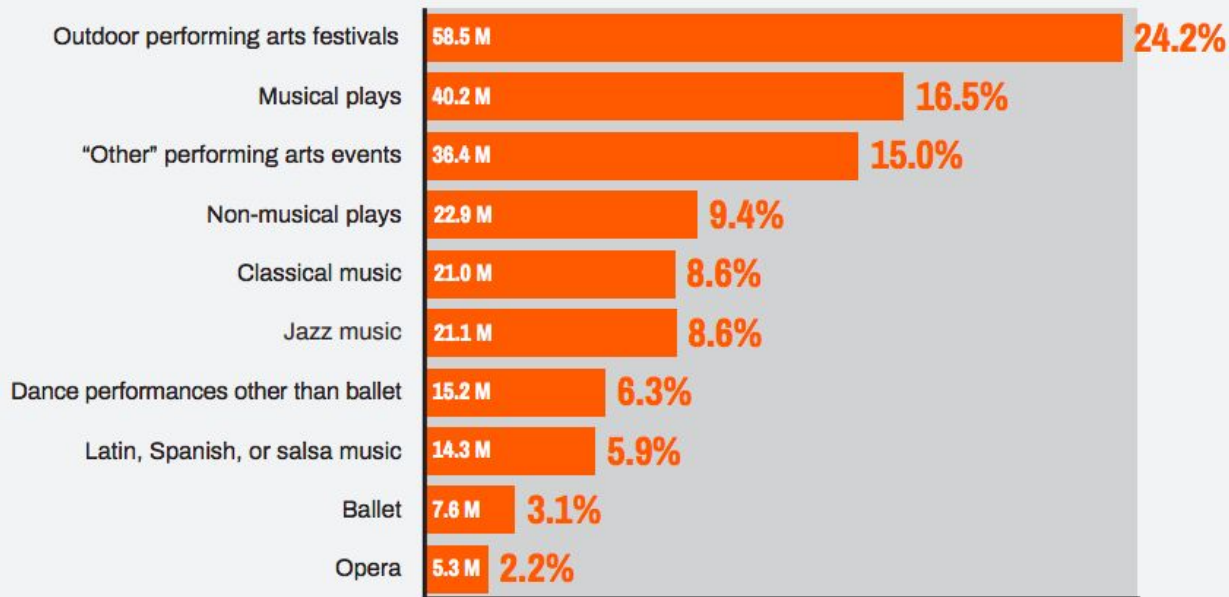
The performing arts are part of community life for more than 100m Americans in a given year.

1) In 2017, **53.8 percent** of U.S. adults (up from **50.2 percent** in 2012), or 132.3 million people, attended a visual or performing arts activity at least once in the past 12 months.ⁱ

Live Performing Arts—**43.4 percent** of U.S. adults (up from **40.2 percent** in 2012), or 106.8 million people, attended at least one of the activities listed directly below.ⁱⁱ

Number and percent of U.S. adults attending performing arts events: 2017

(M = millions of adults)



ⁱⁱ "Other" refers to types of performing arts not listed in other SPPA question-items.

What will our new normal feel like? Hints are beginning to emerge

By MAX FISHER
THE NEW YORK TIMES | APR 22, 2020 AT 10:43 AM



For all the attention to the science and politics of the coronavirus, another factor may be just as important in shaping life under the pandemic: the ways that people will change in response to it.

Changes in how we think, behave and relate to one another — some deliberate but many made unconsciously, some temporary but others potentially permanent — are already coming to define our new normal.


“Culture” (the cultural life of the community) has been absent from political and economic decision-making about the COVID-19 and our progress towards a new normal.

Many Museums Won't Survive the Virus. How Do You Close One Down?

Institutions will face ethical and sometimes legal obligations to transfer their collections elsewhere. The process can be costly and time-consuming, experts say.

By Nina Siegal

April 29, 2020



Most GLAMs and performing arts organizations in the US have been devastated financially, and 30% of US museums could fail outright...just at the moment when they are needed the most.

The gravity of the situation varies by country, depending on how much museums rely on ticket sales and tourism, and how much government funding they receive. Museums in the United States which survive from earned income and philanthropy are more vulnerable than government-subsidized European institutions. **The American Alliance of Museums reported to Congress in March that as many as 30 percent of museums could fail in the crisis, if there was no immediate intervention.**

3. Process and Execution

Hypothesis



GLAM and performing arts institutions can play a crucial role in coping, sense making, developing resilience, and catalyzing dialogue about the “new normal” in communities throughout the USA.

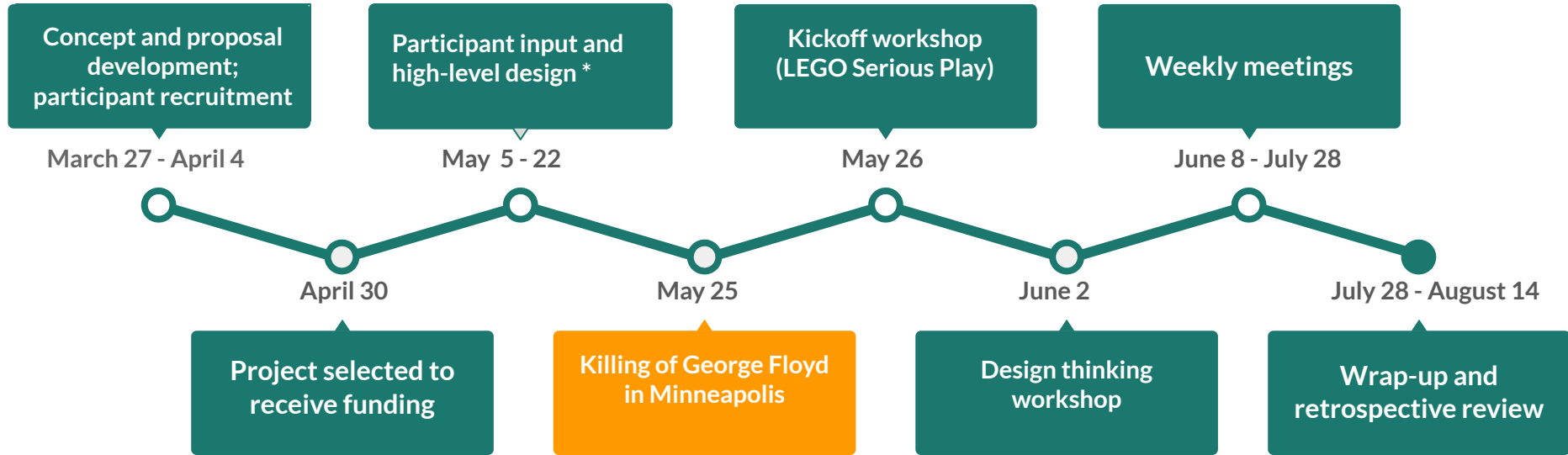
Our working hypothesis, based on our recent pro bono work and advocacy for GLAM institutions since the COVID-19 outbreaks, indicates that **GLAM leaders need short-term facilitation and support to transition** from a current, and highly understandable, "deer in the headlights" stance to positions in which GLAM leaders are confident in their strategic environment and are able to develop and implement novel plans and programs to reduce the effects of social isolation with, by, and for their communities.

Approach



1. Assemble a diverse group of motivated GLAM and performing arts practitioners and leaders.
2. Facilitate a strategic assessment and design process with the group, using as much peer-to-peer interaction as possible so that leaders can learn from each other and gain confidence in what they are seeing, feeling, and thinking.
3. Use the LEGO Serious Play® methodology and design thinking framework to encourage sense-making and an audience-centered mindset among participants.
4. Ease participants from focusing on the here-and-now, to focusing on short-term plans and goals (2-3 weeks in the future), to focusing on medium-term objectives (2-3 months in the future).
5. Help move participants and their partners towards the development of several lightweight (easy and fast to produce, low cost, not much infrastructure) experiments, rather than "heavy" projects with high overhead.
6. Leverage existing know-how and technology through partnerships, collaboration, and pro bono assistance from current community members.

Timeline 2020



* Participant input was gathered through questionnaires and discussions: Questions included such prompts as, “Who are you, what are your needs, what do you want to get out of this?”

Approach and Mindset



Short meetings with low cognitive complexity and hands-on interactions

We tried to keep meetings simple, short, and orderly to avoid putting too many demands on people's time or cognitive processing power, reasoning that participants were likely to be under tremendous stress. Cognitive overload undermines one's ability to engage in creative thinking and problem solving. In addition, we provided structured time for thinking, feeling, and playing.

Facilitation, sense making, and coaching – not “consulting” and “expertise”

We embraced the notion that participants are the experts in their own capabilities, missions, communities, and we are here as coaches and guides, not experts or consultants. *We felt that space was needed for sense making in today's chaotic and unfamiliar environment.*

Think Big, Start Small, Move Fast

This approach and mindset was infused throughout the project, and encouraged learning through experimentation – *with audiences* – in a time of complexity and instability.

Methods and Tools



LEGO Serious Play®

Utilizing the LEGO Serious Play® methodology gave participants a new environment in which they could explore what they know and bring deep, new knowledge to the surface.

Design thinking, applied improv, and storytelling tools

Incorporating methods from human-centered design, the practice of applied improvisation, and storytelling helped participants maintain a user-centered focus and to move quickly from thinking to doing and experimenting.

Google Jam Board

Google Jam Board, a virtual whiteboard tool, supported fluid, almost tactile collaboration and sharing despite the sensory isolation of virtual meetings.

Mindful use of Zoom

Zoom video meetings were kept short and on time, with clearly defined periods for both interaction and private reflection. Liberal use of warm-ups, check-ins, and warm-downs borrowed from improvisational theater helped build connection among participants.



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Killing of George Floyd



From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Coordinates: 44.9343°N 93.2624°W﻿ / ﻿

On May 25, 2020, **George Floyd**, a 46-year-old black American man, was killed in **Minneapolis, Minnesota**, during an arrest for allegedly using a counterfeit bill.^[1] **Derek Chauvin**, a white police officer, knelt on Floyd's neck for almost eight minutes^[note 1] while Floyd was handcuffed and lying face down, begging for his life and repeatedly saying "I can't breathe".^{[4][5]} Officers J. Alexander Kueng and Thomas Lane further restrained Floyd, while officer Tou Thao prevented bystanders from intervening.^{[6][7]:6–24} During the final two minutes,^[8] Floyd was motionless and had no pulse^{[9][10]} while Chauvin ignored onlookers' pleas to remove his knee, which he did not do until medics told him to.^{[11]:7:30}

The following day, after videos made by witnesses and security cameras became public,^{[12][13][14]} all four officers were fired. Two autopsies found Floyd's death to be a **homicide**.^[15] Chauvin was initially charged with **third-degree murder** and **second-degree manslaughter**,^{[16][17]} to which was later added **second-degree murder**. The three other officers were charged with **aiding and abetting** second-degree murder.^{[4][18][10]}

Floyd's death triggered **subsequent protests** against **police brutality**, police racism, and lack of **police accountability**.^[19] In early June, the **Minneapolis City Council** took action to ban chokeholds and require police officers to intervene against the use of excessive force by other officers, and voted an intent to restructure the police department as a "new community-based system of public safety".^{[20][21]} The Minneapolis Police Chief cancelled contract negotiations with the police union and announced plans to bring in outside experts to examine how the union contract can be restructured to provide transparency and "flexibility for true reform".^[22]

Contents [hide]

- People involved
- Arrest and death
 - Initial events
 - Chauvin kneels on Floyd's neck
 - Medical response and death
- Investigations and criminal charges

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Killing_of_George_Floyd

Killing of George Floyd



Frame from witness video, showing Derek Chauvin kneeling on George Floyd's neck

Date	May 25, 2020
Time	ca. 8:01–9:25 pm CDT (UTC−5)
Location	Minneapolis, Minnesota, U.S.
Coordinates	44.9343°N 93.2624°W﻿ / ﻿
Charges	Derek Chauvin: second-degree murder,

The killing of George Floyd, and subsequent change in the consciousness of people around the world, redefined the scope of this project and the perceived potential of *this moment* in the eyes of all participants.

Two of our participating organizations, The Weisman Art Museum and RED EYE Theater, are based in Minneapolis, where George Floyd was killed.

High-Level Design



- Begin with LEGO Serious Play® workshop to get to know each other and the big picture
- Move to design thinking as a transition from reflection to action
- Hold weekly sessions (alternating between small groups and full-group sessions) with facilitated activities and mini-workshops to provide support, encourage reflection, foster collaboration, deepen thinking, and move participants towards launch
- Pass approx. \$600 in granted funds to each participating org as an honorarium, and to support small experiments
- Host final presentations to stimulate reflection and self-awareness, share knowledge, and celebrate!

Scenes from small groups sessions + workshops



Laughter and play helped to support a flexible and bold mindset within the group. Playful and courageous thinking were an integral part of the overall project goals.


Check-in's

- "I'm ___ and I'm checking in."
- "I'm feeling _____" + a physical gesture that we all copy
- Call on someone else (hand on head to indicate who has spoken)




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Home Explore



Think big, start small, move fast


Digital Strategy in a Changing World



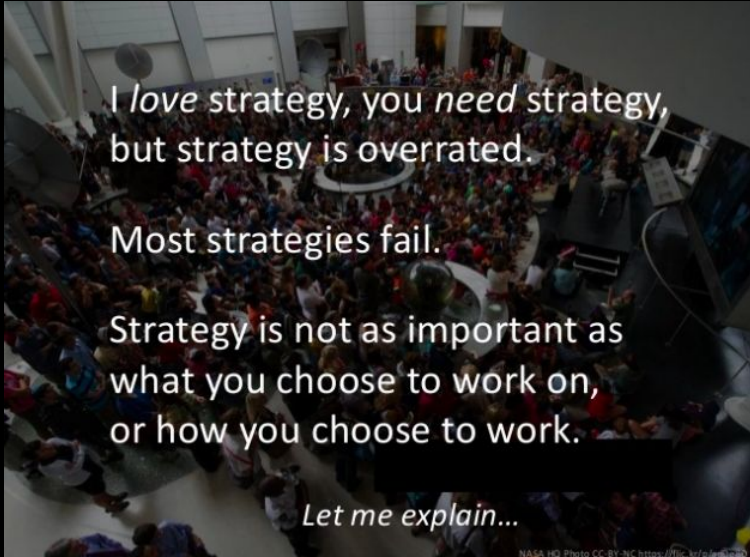
1 of 177

Think Big, Start Small, Move Fast: Digital Strategy in a Changing World 10,990 views

Share Like Download ...

 Michael Edson, Web and New Media Strategist
+ Follow

The *think big, start small, move fast approach* came from Mike's experience as a digital strategist. *Strategy is the wrong way to solve most problems.*



I love strategy, you need strategy, but strategy is overrated.

Most strategies fail.

Strategy is not as important as what you choose to work on, or how you choose to work.

Let me explain...

NASA HQ Photo CC-BY-NC <https://bit.ly/2m1m1m1>

<https://www.slideshare.net/edsonm/think-big-start-small-move-fast>

The design thinking framework came from Dana's experience as a design thinking strategist who has worked with museums across the US.

Mindsets



Bias to Action



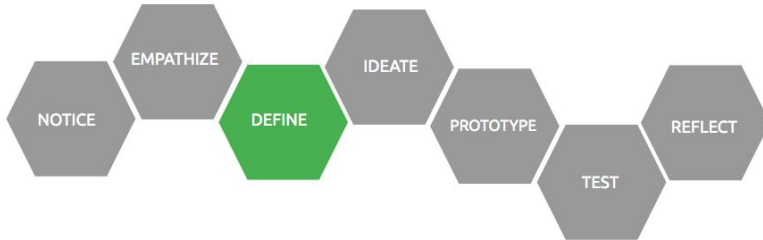
Iterate + Experiment



Embrace uncertainty



Define



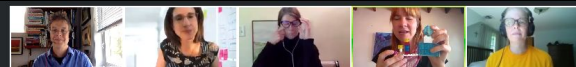
How Might We activity

- Write HMW's (solo, 5 minutes)
- Share and discuss (5 minutes)
- Pick 2 that you want to brainstorm against (5 minutes)
- **Note: use a timer on your phone**

10 minutes in break-out room

Participants were shipped a set of LEGO Serious Play bricks if they couldn't scrounge their own.

LEGO Serious Play was used to explore complex changes in community needs and delve deeply into the concepts of institutional identity, purpose, and relevance



An on-screen timer was used throughout the process to ensure everyone had time to speak and everyone could compose their thoughts according to the time available.

With so much going on in people's lives we felt it was important to keep meetings short, predictable, and orderly.



Team 1

3 / 6

Background Clear frame

GREEN dot = small, fast, easy

BLUE DOT = most likely to meet needs of audience members like X

PINK DOT = most aligned to instructional values

BRAINSTORM: 5 min x 2 DOT VOTING: 5 min

Brainstorming + Dot Voting Activities

Connect Dona Carmen with other Spanish speakers who love art?

HMW help Carmen experience art?

send out art postcards to our participants and ask them to talk about the work of art pictured and send to her

send someone to talk to her through the window

have teaching artists take turns calling her and talk her through a work of art

send her an art packet

send her a postcard with an image and art making prompts.

have teaching artists take turns calling her and talk her through a work of art

virtual tours of contemporary Colombian art by artist who live here and there.

Send her caregiver pdfs or art cards (like MOMA) with art and prompts for art making

invite Hispanic society to give virtual tour of new galleries

Sabado Gigante con el arte (Big Saturday with Art) for spanish-speaking seniors

Send her a tablet

send links to museum tours online

connect for Arts & Minds en Espanol on zoom

wheelchair movement lessons on Zoom

spanish comic books to share

Connect Carmen with young art students of Colombian descent to talk about art

engage Spanish learners to practice their language in conversations about art

Make sure her wi fi works

send adaptive supplies, such as brush grip

Send her caregiver pdfs or art cards (like MOMA) with art and prompts for art making

send her fun and unfamiliar art materials to experiment with

Google Jam Boards provided an important, almost tactile link between design thinking concepts and hands-on collaboration within the group.



4. Observations and Outcomes

Project facilitators' perspectives

1. Individual experience of participants



1. Participants and facilitators had originally imagined transactional teaching and learning activities for this project, such as imparting technical tips and best practices. However, it quickly became evident that because of the complexity of the environment and issues involved, a softer, deeper, and more broadly exploratory process was required.
2. A limited amount of time and energy was available for new things and “innovation” as participants and communities were likely to be under stress, juggling many simultaneous challenges, including:
 - BLM, political climate, financial crisis, layoffs and furloughs, school closings, family care challenges, new tools to learn and navigate, communication challenges
 - Widespread financial stress: one participant’s organization furloughed 90% of staff during the project, others had large layoffs
 - Minneapolis participants experienced riots and tragedy in their community after the killing of George Floyd
 - Digital fatigue was felt to be rampant, both among participants and their communities

2. Facilitation and leadership



1. Because of the background hum of stress and cognitive strain in everyone's lives, it was important to keep communication, meetings, and homework as simple, *light*, and predictable as possible. We tried to keep the cognitive complexity of our meetings to a minimum (or, more accurately, we chose to be very careful about where we chose to invest participants' cognitive resources).
2. Because there was so much change happening in everyone's lives, every week, it was important for us, the facilitators, to stay flexible and not over-design the project. Generally, we met weekly to discuss progress and adjust course within the overarching goals of the project, based on what we heard and observed from participants.

2. Facilitation and leadership (continued)



3. LEGO Serious Play® and design thinking complemented each other well and provided a valuable framework for thinking, sense-making, and creating in the current period of uncertainty. \

The strength of LEGO Serious Play® lay in its ability to expose and develop a broad landscape of ideas – even those that were not well understood by the participants. The strength of design thinking lay in its ability to guide participants towards creating usable products through a process of observation, empathy, and experimentation. Together, both methodologies gave us a way to understand problems (and systems) more deeply and move that understanding towards things that can be used and experienced by people to create value.

Both methodologies also provided a welcome departure from the tedium of standard Zoom meetings and business processes for all involved.

3. Organizations and change



1. Because of cognitive overload and uncertainty in general, this was not a great time for sweeping strategic change. Organizations are more likely to be adjusting priorities within existing strategy than re-thinking scope or tactics entirely.
2. While we encouraged experimentation and simplicity, some participants reported that “nimble” (though not a term we used) and “fast” aren’t any easier than the old ways of working if you haven’t practiced them before: nimble and fast are a skillset in-and-of themselves.
3. Organizational culture doesn’t magically change (for the better) in a crisis; we found that several participants encountered painfully familiar bureaucratic roadblocks, obstacles, and risk-averse mindsets despite the general acknowledgement that change and risk-taking were necessary at the current time.

3. Organizations and change (continued)

4. Most cultural practitioners don't have the agency and decision/budgetary authority to implement new programs or drive change on their own. However, during the course of the project several participants realized that they could move ideas quickly forward by "hacking" programs that already had managerial approval. (This is the classic "work within your sphere of influence" advice from management science.)
5. "Think big, start small, move fast" seems to be a valuable framework for creating value in collaboration with audiences during periods of uncertainty and change. This approach emphasizes tactical experimentation – short term experiments aligned with long-term goals, and a healthy balance of planning and doing. See *Think Big, Start Small, Move Fast* by co-facilitator Michael Peter Edson ([slides](#), [lecture](#))

4. DEAI and social justice



Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, Inclusion and social justice issues were paramount in the thinking of project participants even before the killing of George Floyd, but the killing of Mr. Floyd brought the urgency of those concerns — and the desire to address them through our institutions and organizations — to the forefront.

Working with communities on DEAI and social justice issues does not come naturally to most GLAM, cultural, and performing arts organizations, though many organizations wish to be relevant and the need for them to take action is urgent and real.

The GLAM and performing arts professional community will need to work very hard to support and sustain DEAI and social justice work over the long haul as the learning curve will be long and mistakes and missteps will be inevitable.

New initiatives and thinking at 8 organizations



These are described in greater detail in the following section, Participant Presentations

- **Arts & Minds** — home service programming for patients with dementia and their caregivers; increased capacity and transition to online/at home; new line of service for Spanish-speaking community
- **Akron-Summit County Public Library System** — prototyping ways to move to collaborative programming across the system branches and with the teen community
- **Center for Art and Public Exchange / Mississippi Museum of Art** — navigating uncertainty and finding opportunities to hack existing programs to elevate discourse on social justice.
- **Georgia O'Keeffe Museum** — pivot to Spanish-language videos for local audiences (community and schools)

New initiatives and thinking (continued)



- **Lux Art Institute** — deeper thinking about access and agility/speed while launching Augmented Reality tour; garden/grounds tour (under development); at-home summer camps
- **Newark Museum of Art** — pivot to digital and outdoor experiences, social justice, local/community programs
- **RED EYE Theater** — focus on core identity and responsiveness during/after the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis (where RED EYE is based, along with the Weisman Art Museum); strategic direction and vision/service models
- **Weisman Art Museum** — charting a new course after George Floyd was killed; emphasis on DEAI; exploration of online models to empower student and local activists; co-creation of upcoming exhibitions with community leaders

Personal outcomes for participants



- Widespread adoption of audience-focused design thinking and serious play methodologies
- Increased individual and organizational confidence
- Faster processes for creative development, experimentation, and project development
- Fostered new and heightened emphasis on social justice and DEAI issues and activities
- Promoted greater confidence and clarity regarding audience needs and impact

5. Participant Presentations

- Arts & Minds
- Akron-Summit County Public Library System,
- Center for Art and Public Exchange / Mississippi Museum of Art
- Georgia O'Keeffe Museum
- Lux Art Institute
- Newark Museum of Art
- RED EYE Theater
- Weisman Art Museum

This section features short, final presentations from each participating organization.

The presentations were developed with design thinking, serious play, and storytelling* methodologies.

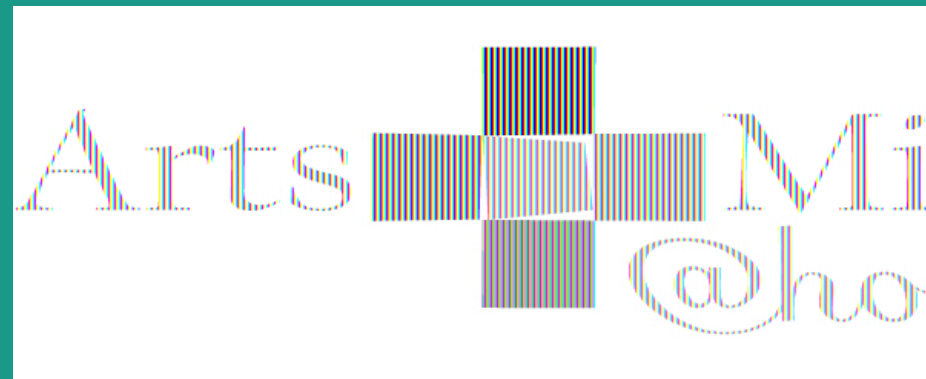
* The Story Spine was developed by Kenn Adams, playwright and artistic director of the Synergy Theater.

Arts & Minds

Carolyn Halpin-Healy
Co-Founder and Executive Director

Nellie Escalante
Senior Program Coordinator and Teaching Artist

Deborah Howes
President, Howes Studio



Your assumptions going into the project



- Dementia caregiving is "high touch." Familiarity and frequent contact are important.
- Art is intellectually and emotionally stimulating, thought provoking, elevating and inspiring – Arts & Minds can deliver this every day at 2pm.
- Regular participation reduces apathy, agitation and depression – Arts & Minds can help maintain familiar routine and provide an outlet for expression and creativity.
- This crisis will end – Arts & Minds will resume in museums *if* we can retain our teaching artists and participants through this crisis.
- We assumed that an Aspen Tech Hub project would be a place to discover concrete technical tools and solutions - we discovered much more...

Your biggest challenges

- Maintaining communication with our participants
- Continuing supportive registration process
- Supporting team of displaced museum workers
- Prioritizing projects
- Finding new and efficient ways of working with core team - reshaping communications



Your biggest learnings or surprises

- We are uniting families globally!
- Older adult participants were able to transition to an online platform
- Our amazing teaching team of talented, diverse, compassionate educators need paying jobs and we have the right and responsibility to advocate for them.
- It is appropriate to ask for significant funding as we grow and change.



Your current thinking

- Dementia is a social justice issue.
- Our long-standing commitment to diversity, equity, access and inclusion is well placed.
- Online programming has increased access for people unable to visit museums, whether because of geography distance, physical disability or other barriers.
- What started as an emergency response will become central to what we do from now on and Arts & Minds will maintain programs online even after museums reopen.
- Online training is the key to sharing the work.



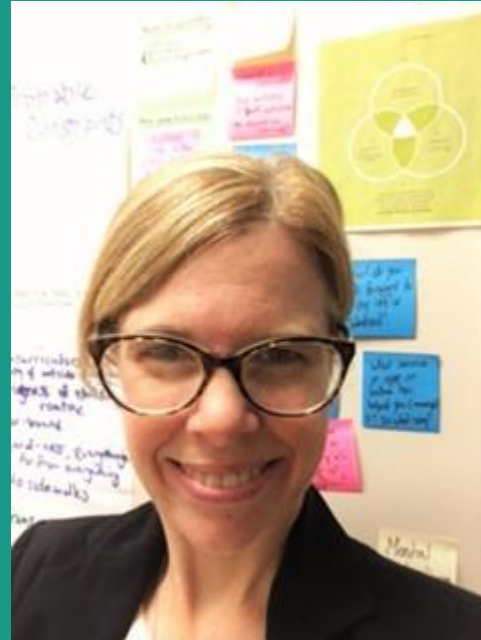
Arts & Minds participants with Give Us a Poem,
by Glenn Ligon, Studio Museum in Harlem

Story Spine...



Our organization iscommitted to improving well-being for people with dementia and their care partners.
When we started this project, we thoughtthe COVID-19 crisis would be temporary and we would soon return to museums. We were prioritizing a short-term response.
But thenwe met like minded colleagues, all struggling to process our national crises and invent a new way forward.
And because of that we realized that we are in a major transition that will have long-term ramifications for our work. Most immediately, we would have to focus attention to the digital learning platform while simultaneously reaching participants by phone and mail.
Until finallyconditions continue to evolve and change.
And now we thinkthat right now is a great time to move forward with our plan to develop online training to support existing museum programs for people with dementia and their care partners, plant new ones and embed them more firmly in their communities.

Akron-Summit County Public Library System



Jennifer
Stencel

Richfield
Library Branch
Manager and
Teen Librarian

Your assumptions going into the project

I assumed that our service population, our audience, would be hungry for virtual programming.

I feared that our silence would be devastating, that we would not be “top-of-mind,” we would lose our footing on being a well- thought- of Third Place of Richfield.

#Placemaking

Akron-Summit County Public Library System



Your biggest challenges

Akron-Summit County
Public Library System

Many feel uncomfortable with this new normal.. There is no “How-to” for this disruption. However, others- mostly front line staff, are more curious and open to unexplored possibilities the changes are causing. The disruption isn’t frightening but exciting. #HeretherebeDragons

Communication slowed at a time when staff actually needed more. #RadioSilenceScary

We are a system dispersed in 20 locations across a county. How a community “uses” their local library differs from place to place. It was obvious before, now even more so. #PatronPriorities #StaffingLevels

ASCPL just finished a Strategic Plan and Marketing Plan. Is Strategic Plan still relevant to follow right now?

Levy is in near future (close to end of levy cycle). PLF (Public Library Fund) is down.

Being closed, we were not seeing and hearing the public to know what has changed, what they needed. #ethnography #UX #trends

My challenge: to create virtual experiences that are creative/different, needed, engaging, participatory and, as a Teen librarian, #GoBeyondVirtualStoryTime

Your biggest learnings or surprises

Akron-Summit County
Public Library System

COVID created a disconnect between frontline and behind closed doors/working from home staff. There has been a change in patron needs, and how they “use” and need us. One has got to experience it to believe it. Also, two mindsets, two camps: Great Reset vs. Back to Normal.

“Just program like you normally do, only virtually.” Not understanding skills & equipment needed to do virtual programs. #Zoom #Youtube #Twitch #Discord #FBLive #IGTV #TicTok #lightring #tripod #microphone #script #Hoursofediting

Our population is in crisis mode and is worried about other things- mostly: school, employment, and rent/mortgage. They were (and still are) not looking for online storytimes (a staple), crafts, or anything else... They needed, and still do, other things from us, but not these things.

#BottomofMaslowHeirarchy #ToxicStress #FilingUnemployment #NoDeviceorInternet #BehindinLearning

Teen and Senior population are lonely. Miss face to face interactions with others.

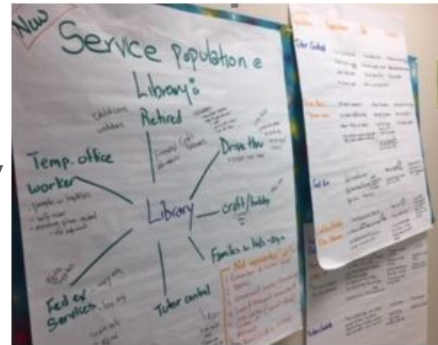
Your current thinking

Akron-Summit County
Public Library System

Who is even our service population right now and what do they need? And will our “before” Service Population return? #AspenStudyReimaginingLibrary

We are to do virtual programming and public is still in crisis mode. What is best use of time, energy and resources? Is this right?

How to launch my “vision” of new teen *virtual* services/ programs when learning curve of technology needed is steep, we’re open to public and short staffed, with normal job duties/ expectations?



Story Spine...

Akron-Summit County
Public Library System

Our organization is ..

The Richfield Branch Library is made up of Jen Stencel (manager and teen librarian) and 6 staff who love to challenge assumptions and redefine what libraries (and the library profession) could be and do for the community.

When we started this project, we thought ...

Since we at the Richfield Library were embracing the Great Reset, we thought others in the org. were too. We thought we could take advantage of the pause (the closed doors), and use the opportunity to really focus, uninterrupted, on creating really good, new work. We hoped that the organization would prioritize what is/was essential and look at what services we are/were running that were only “running’ us thin.

By working with Aspen and the selected group of creative org/individuals, that we would surely learn from, be inspired by and STEAL great ideas. By August, I would be ready to launch new initiatives because of.

But then ...

Something like 90% of the entire ASCPL staff was furloughed. Further, because many of the innovative and creative librarians* who had the same Great Reset mindset were gone, steam for such new/forward thinking/different work stopped. I was left to represent the branch.

Story Spine...

And because of that we ...

..the organization followed a “go back to normal”- plan, especially with programming. Managers needed to communicate “what was happening” with administrators*. *Managers, and half the staff, returned to work in preparation to open, while all administration continued to work from home. In preparation to open, many managers monitored what was happening in other library systems that had been open (limited) to the public. We gathered that those libraries were hearing new and different needs from public, and adjusted accordingly..

We (at all levels) may know about social media, but the many who do not work with it are not aware of the the amount of skill needed to create successful and engaging virtual programming. We were learning that it is very time consuming to do virtual programs. #iMovieCrashCourses

Until finally ...

All frontline staff came back and normal hours returned. Some Managers, who are also teen librarians, realized that we must do work together.. We hear and feel that the communities NEEDs something different and has nothing to do with “before”. #Obsolete #NoTimetoWasteAnymore

We also realized that we are not trained or prepared to transfer programs to online. We may have the ideas, but the execution is actually quite difficult. This requires new skills that many of us do NOT have.

And now we think ...

if we must program, “collaborative programming” over individual-location programming has to be the way. With full-force of the creatives back, we are pushing for experimenting . How? Pull our limited resources (skills, funds, time, staffing) to create a few GREAT programs , over the quota expected by ea librarian, per quarter. Especially if we are all learning the technology.

Center for Art and Public Exchange / Mississippi Museum of Art



Our assumptions going into the project



Art has the power to change people.

Covid-19 halted in-person programs that promote social engagement

Technology can help mitigate feelings of isolation caused by Covid-19

A
coordinated
and prompt
response to
the brutal
murder of
George Floyd

Becoming
digital
program
leaders

Changes institutionally: Four new hires since March (all in leadership), Monique's role expanding, a rebranding launch, changes to the budget

Our biggest challenges

EDUCATION
TAKEOVER

MISSISSIPPI MUSEUM *of* ART

DAY #1:
DISTANCE DRAWING

P.S. We're saving all of our stories,
week by week, in our highlights!

Distance Drawing
Adapted from our Museum App activity. Back to back!

STEP 1
Assign one person as the " describer" and others as "artists/drawers!"

I'll be the "describer!"

I'll be the "artist/drawer!"

STEP 2
The "describer" will pick a secret object in the house (art or otherwise) to be the focus of the activity.

+2

Biggest learnings or surprises

Changing our thinking habits

Believe that when you put good into the world, good will come out.

Human-centered design through empathy as a starting place for true change.



Staff and network appreciation!

We've found so much joy in working with each other and finding great networks in fellow thought-partners. We appreciate y'all!

WASH YOUR HANDS FOR 20 SECONDS

1 MISSISSIPPI 11 MISSISSIPPI
2 MISSISSIPPI 12 MISSISSIPPI
3 MISSISSIPPI 13 MISSISSIPPI
4 MISSISSIPPI 14 MISSISSIPPI
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What does courage mean?

Recognizing social patterns in the mundane as a starting place for conversation.

Inspiration can come from the ordinary!

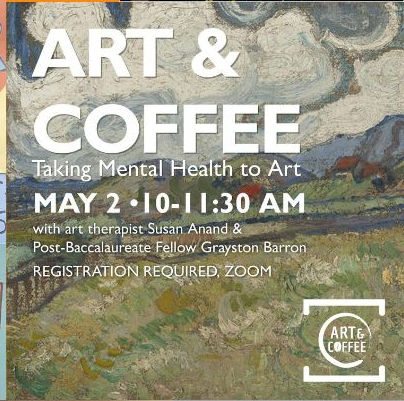
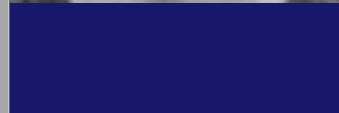


Our current thinking

Art has the power to change people.

Courage has the power to question perceptions of what is 'normal.'

Think big, start small, move FAST!



Story Spine - MMA + CAPE

Our organization is...

Committed to deep engagement with art, artists, and visitors

When we started this project, we thought...

We would learn tips and tricks to mitigate social isolation through technological innovation

But then...

Adapted to new institutional changes, coordinated a response to the murder of George Floyd, and gave space for protestors

And because of that we...

Identified what it means to be courageous as Museum leaders, questioned our habits, and worked smarter as colleagues

Until finally...

We know that inspiration can come from the ordinary and can challenge our ideas of what is 'normal.'

Now we think...

That art has the power to change lives, and to be most effective, we need to meet people where they are and grow with them.

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum



Tony Vaccaro
Georgia O'Keeffe with the Cheese, 1960 Gelatin silver print, 14 5/8 x 18 3/8 inches Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Museum Purchase, 2007.3.27



Georgia O'Keeffe, *Pelvis IV*, 1944
Oil on masonite, 36 1/16 x 40 3/8 inches
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Gift of the Burnett Foundation, 1997.6.1

Liz Neely, Curator of Digital Experience

Katrina Latka, Curator of Education and Interpretation

Shannon Bay, Program Manager, Adult and Community Engagement

Your assumptions going into the project

As our museum was quickly adapting to assess and meet the needs of our community and audiences without our physical galleries, this project seemed like an excellent place to learn from and discuss strategies from a wide range of organization types and talented individuals. This played out more than we could have imagined!

Maria Chabot
Georgia O'Keeffe Writing
Daily Letter to Alfred Stieglitz,
Ghost Ranch House Patio, 1944

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum



Your biggest challenges

Though the cohort's process wrestled with operating in times of uncertainty, it was difficult to select a productive way forward within the multiple layers of issues: the health crisis, the financial crisis, the wreckoning of white supremacist culture, staff layoffs, personal struggles, etc. Uncertainties surrounding the upcoming school year has been a particular challenge surrounding our project choice.

Navigating these large issues became an important topic of the cohort and lead facilitators in a valuable way.

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum



A first LEGO® Serious Play build thinking through how our museum's offerings can help people see through unexpected lenses.

Your biggest learnings or surprises

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum

- Working with an outside person during these difficult times takes longer than usual with the inability to meet in person.
- Our museum has more work to do with engaging with Spanish-speaking artists and teachers and growing this network.
- It was interesting to hear the different challenges from the cohort — how they are coping with responses so distinct from state to state.



A team at the O'Keeffe shows their sketches from a brainstorm session surrounding ideas for how to assess and meet the needs of local audiences. Since the start of this grant, we have incorporated some of these techniques into our meetings regularly.

Your current thinking

- Developing relationships across the GLAM field helps build context, support each other, and learn something
- Flexibility and adaptability keep us going
- Design Thinking framework has been incorporated into regular work process
- Mike's 'Think big. Start small. Move Fast.' is helpful for adaptability
- Looking forward to learning how our project is received and how we can build upon these effort through this learning

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum



Alicia Sandoval will do four Spanish language artist videos

Story Spine...



Georgia O'Keeffe Museum

Our organization is Committed to help using the art and life of Georgia O'Keeffe to inspire.
When we started this project, we thought ...	It would be really valuable to have conversations with professionals from a diverse set of organizations across the country with highly skilled facilitators so that we could get better at serving our community.
But then ...	Liz brought a persona to the cohort that the O'Keeffe Museum already knew how to serve - instead of moving forward with content for that person (since we have that content!), a staff team (#teampivot!) imagined and designed solutions for 4 local community personas.
And because of that we ...	The staff team voted on our favorite idea, which was Spanish-language video. This not only helps us pilot how to serve the needs of Spanish speakers, but helps inform a more comprehensive Spanish-language offering. Alicia Sandoval was commissioned to make 4 artist-led Spanish videos. Alicia is from Santa Fe, was a participant in the museum's signature Arts and Leadership program for 3 years and then was a college intern in that same program.
Until finally ...	We began work on 4 Spanish-language video that will be part of our 4th-grade curriculum to be used in the local school system and accessible across the country!
And now we think ...	We hope teachers and families will find this useful and see this a pilot to learn from our efforts for a more comprehensive Spanish offering. Think big. Start small. Move fast.

Lux Art Institute



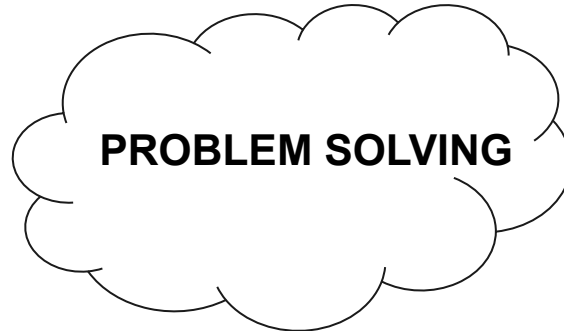
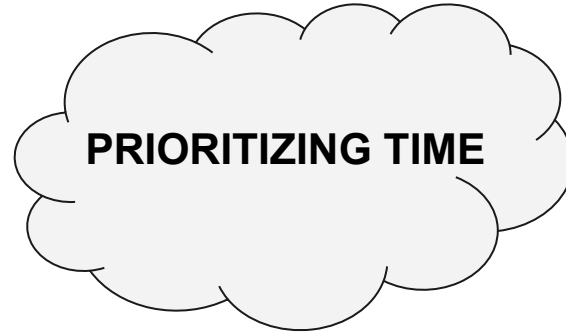
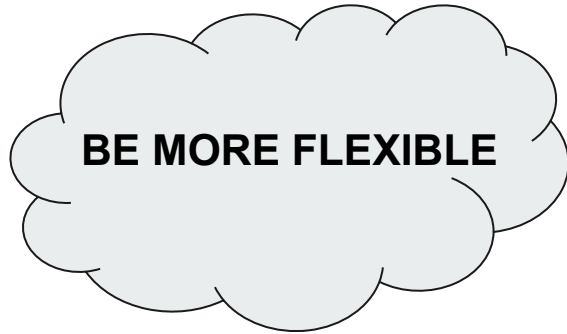
Your assumptions going into the project

Lux Art Institute

- Create systems for mitigating effects of COVID
- Develop a process that would help our team better experiment or prepare for changes
- Create a process to reach out to our audience during COVID



Your biggest challenges



Your biggest learnings or surprises

Lux Art Institute

- Need to be *-even more-* Flexible
- Physical and Virtual Audiences are different
- Collaborating to solve common problems
- Access is a Top Priority
- Shifting to New Audiences opens up New needs (Spanish programs)



Virtual Summer Camps

Your current thinking



MENU



CURRENT EXHIBITIONS



NEWSLETTER SIGN-UP



DONATE TODAY



LUX ART INSTITUTE

Lux App

Quick and Simple = Difficult and Complicated

Think big. Start small. Move Fast.

Keep projects small with goals broad

Mission driven is essential

Access for all – Reduce Barriers

Story Spine...



Lux Art Institute

Our organization is ...	Lux Art Institute. (Our mission is to engage people in the creative process.)
When we started this project, we thought ...	We needed advice and tools to communicate with and serve our current audience. We thought we'd be able to respond to new issues that COVID is creating with our audience.
But then ...	The world came to a reckoning (and still is) and we recognized that 1. Our audience was changing and 2. We needed to address marginalized communities. We also discovered that prioritization of projects was incredibly complicated across teams.
And because of that we adjusted our priorities to respond to the new audience. ... created a new system for prioritizing -experimental- project management.
Until finally we decided that we would use our organizational priorities to drive our focus areas, making adjustments to respond to our changing audience.
And now we think that while complicated, we can still achieve our goals through persistence, prioritization, and adaptation (flexibility).

The Newark Museum of Art



Deborah Kasindorf
Vice President/Deputy Director
External Affairs

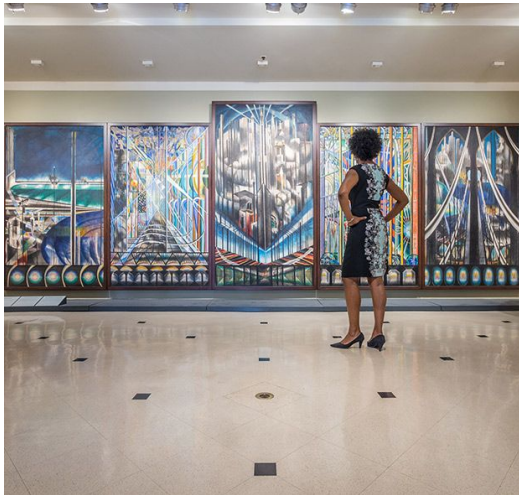


Silvia Filippini Fantoni,
Deputy Director Learning and
Engagement

Your assumptions going into the project

Newark Museum of Art

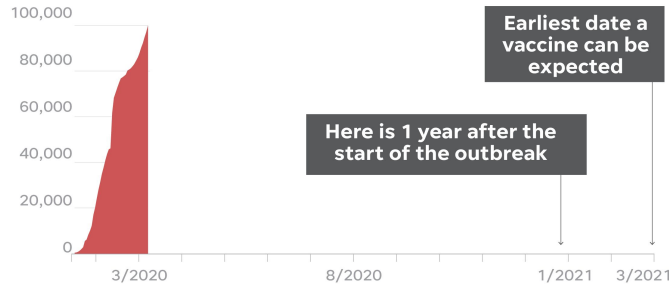
Focus on defining the
post- COVID-19
onsite experience



Your biggest challenges

Reality keeps on changing (COVID-19 response slow, social justice issues, etc.)

As COVID-19 cases rise, vaccine likely not ready until 2021



Newark Museum of Art



Your biggest learnings or surprises

Newark Museum of Art

- Short-term plans
- Need to be agile
- Less diverse and older audience
- How to account for FB and IG audiences?



**Community Day:
Celebrating Pride**
Saturday, July 18, 10am-8pm

Featuring:



Wafia



Calvin Arsenia



DJ Kenneth Kyrell



Designs by
Marco Hall



Citi Medina,
Founder of =SPACE.



MJ Rodriguez
(Pose, FX)



SUN, JUL 12 AT 4:00 PM - 5:00 PM

**Ras Baraka and Linda Harrison: Newark,
The Progressive City**

Online Event



SUN, JUL 12 AT 2:00 PM - 3:00 PM

Inequality in Art

Online Event

Your current thinking

- Focus on our digital and outdoor experiences
- Change our approach to digital programs
- Consider how to monetize certain experiences

Newark Museum of Art



Story Spine...



Newark Museum of Art

Our organization is ...	The Newark Museum of Art
When we started this project, we thought ...	that the main focus was going to be on defining the post- COVID-19 onsite experience
But then ...	The pandemic continued to spread and other issues related to social justice emerged
And because of that we ...	We turned away from the need of redefining the onsite experience
Until finally ...	and focused on developing programs that were relevant to what was going on (Juneteenth event, 2 Community Days)
And now we think ...	That in the next 6 months we need to focus on outdoor and digital programs and think of ways in which we can attract a younger a more diverse audience through these programs while continuing to explore revenue opportunities in this new world

RED EYE Theater



Your assumptions going into the project



RED EYE Theater

We weren't sure what to expect. We we were surprised and honored to be asked to join this cohort as what felt like perhaps a little “step-sibling” as a small performing arts org. We had an assumption that this was going to be an opportunity to develop some new ideas around creating programming as the global pandemic made it nearly impossible for performance makers to rehearse and perform in the usual ways. In April, we thought we might develop and launch a new digital program series by the end of the summer...

Your biggest challenges



RED EYE Theater

- The impact of the intense, necessary, and rapidly evolving response to the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police on our priorities as individuals and as a small arts org.
- The nature of our relatively young collaborative leadership structure on our ability to make decisions and develop thoughtful responses in timely ways.
- Funding; balancing cost risks of new programming against a very uncertain fundraising (individual, foundation, government, corporate) landscape.
- The impact on artistic practice: Most artists we know are struggling to produce new work right now, not only because of the lack of platforms/opportunities but because this new situation is confusing, and creative process takes time to adapt!

Your biggest learnings or surprises



RED EYE Theater

How clear it became that we are really an artist centered organization, almost an “artist service” org, rather than audience being our main focus and constituency. Or perhaps another way to look at this is that artists are our audience.

The idea that we can be nimble because we are small is not so true. Collaborative leadership creates its own type of slow downs and inefficiencies (which are not inherently negative). We don't deal with a lot of bureaucracy and red tape, but we do have work to do in aligning our perspectives and clarifying our decision-making structures.

Your current thinking



RED EYE Theater

This really opened a door for some critical thinking and conversations in our leadership team around how we create new programming, how we agree on an organizational perspective or programmatic framing, and our assumptions about what performance makers need at this time. The pace at which we work has also become a central topic for our org—how fast do we want to work? How quick must our response time be? When are we choosing our pace and when is it dictated by external forces, the market, funders, etc? How are our relationships to time and work symptoms of whiteness, capitalism, individualism, and sexism?

Story Spine...



RED EYE Theater

Our organization is ...	The Red Eye Theater, a multidisciplinary performance incubator led by a horizontal collective of seven artists.
When we started this project, we thought ...	We would develop some ideas for new programming built around the challenges and parameters of pandemic life, and hopefully emerge as a thought leader in new forms of programming and ethical relationships with artists.
But then ...	George Floyd was murdered by Minneapolis police on the corner of 38th and Chicago Ave and we moved into an intensive period of especially deep grief, protest, fear, and rage at the deeply racist systems embedded into the fabric of our city and culture.
And because of that we ...	Turned our attention to more pressing needs in our city and did Red Eye work in the cracks as our individual energies and schedules would allow. Organizationally we prioritized time-sensitive and administrative tasks of submitting grants, finishing our new strategic plan, furthering our EDI process, and moving toward finalizing the lease terms of our new space. We noticed a waning in our group energy and ability to show up fully.

Story Spine...



RED EYE Theater

Until finally ...

We had a meeting devoted to reflecting on the past year, our desires and capacity for the upcoming year, and looking at what is working/not working in the functioning of our leadership model. We decided to take the first week of August off from all Red Eye duties, communication, and non-urgent responsibilities, and have shorter and fewer meetings for the remainder of the summer. We did this with the idea that the Red Eye will not end if we take care of ourselves, and trusting that a scaling down for the rest of summer will allow us to return in the fall with new perspective and renewed energy.

And now we think ...

That the pandemic, the uprising around racial equality, and the hyper-partisan political environment we exist in have and will continue to change all of the structures we exist within and rely upon in dramatic and unpredictable ways, and therefore our usual tools and ways of doing will not suffice. A big question and challenge for Red Eye moving forward is how we navigate the sometimes conflicting tasks of slowing down and being thoughtful, intentional, and sustainable while also taking action, pushing forward, and continuing to program, fund, and produce new performance.

Weisman Art Museum



WAM

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
Driven to DiscoverSM

Participants: Katherine Covey,
Director of Programs and Student
Engagement and Susannah
Schouweiler, Director of
Marketing and Communications

Building design by Frank Gehry, situated on the
University of Minnesota Twin Cities campus.
Photo courtesy of the Weisman.

Your assumptions going into the project

Weisman Art Museum

When we began this project, our biggest concerns were COVID (and the accompanying push to transform a season of live programs into engaging digital content) and the retirement of the Weisman's director of 40 years. We assumed we would be getting our ducks in a row for this new chapter in the museum's life.



Your biggest challenges

Weisman Art Museum

While we all know the work of DEAI* is vital to the ongoing relevance and service of our institutions, none of us anticipated the acceleration of that work required given the murder of George Floyd this summer. As a result of the pandemic, the Weisman's team has also needed to move quickly to chart a new course -- and find requisite funding for that new direction.



George Floyd, as illustrated by MN artist Andres Guzman.

* Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, Inclusion

Your biggest learnings or surprises

We knew we'd need to think creatively to move the museum experience online; we didn't anticipate the widespread digital fatigue - for both visitors and staff - under a reality where all our interactions are happening online. Happily, we also discovered we, as a team, are more nimble than we'd thought - we **can** move quickly to change course and rise to the challenge of changing circumstances.

Weisman Art Museum



The image shows a Facebook post from the Weisman Art Museum. At the top left is the museum's logo, a circle with 'WAM' and 'Weisman Art Museum' text. To its right is the name 'Weisman Art Museum' and the date 'April 24 at 11:03 AM'. A quote follows: '"A reaction, to be pleasant, must be simple." -Marsden Hartley'. Below the quote is a paragraph: 'The Weisman's tour guides are knocking it out of the park with recreations of favorite works from the WAM collection!... See More'. The main content consists of two side-by-side images. The left image is a reproduction of Marsden Hartley's painting 'Self-Portrait with Flower', depicting a man with dark hair and a mustache, wearing a white shirt and tie, with a small white flower in his hair. The right image is a photograph of a man with a beard and mustache, wearing a white shirt, with a large pink flower in his hair, mimicking the painting. At the bottom left of the post is the text 'Weisman Art Museum Art Gallery' and at the bottom right is a 'Learn More' button.

Weisman Art Museum
April 24 at 11:03 AM

"A reaction, to be pleasant, must be simple."
-Marsden Hartley

The Weisman's tour guides are knocking it out of the park with recreations of favorite works from the WAM collection!... [See More](#)

Weisman Art Museum
Art Gallery

[Learn More](#)

Your current thinking



Weisman Art Museum

The work of the museum needs to be in service of our communities. We are, first, about taking care of people, rather than objects. We're analyzing our current operations and programs with an active ear and eye to what our community expresses they need from us right now. The museum's programs will be effective insofar as they are created with, rather than for, the people for whom they're intended. Transparency is the only way forward. We have heavy work ahead of us, but this need not be joyless. The museum experience doesn't need to be spinach. We need a moment's respite and relief as much or more than we do education and edification right now.

Story Spine...



Weisman Art Museum

Our organization is ...	Weisman Art Museum, a teaching museum on the University of Minnesota Twin Cities campus and an integral part of life on college for students and faculty, as well as a cultural destination serving the surrounding community.
When we started this project, we thought ...	Our biggest concerns were COVID (and the accompanying push to transform a season of live programs into engaging digital content) and the retirement of the Weisman's director of 40 years. We assumed we would be getting our ducks in a row for this new chapter in the museum's life.
But then ...	George Floyd was murdered at a Minneapolis corner store by police, and our communities erupted in protest. Museums have been accountable for their racist histories and practices in a more public, more uncompromising way by individuals than we have experienced before. Money is also tighter than ever for our programs and partnerships. And digital fatigue is rampant. Digital content isn't going to be the solution to the problem of museum irrelevance.

Story Spine...



Weisman Art Museum

And because of that we ...	Put the work of DEAL in the foreground of our planning. We prioritized the creation of concrete action steps that will allow our communities to hold us accountable. We reallocated resources to those initiatives, and moved more quickly to change course than we would have thought possible before. We're prioritizing the creation of digital content that truly fills a need, rather than merely putting a bunch of stuff online.
Until finally ...	We committed to the idea that the work of the museum needs to be rooted in service to our communities. We must, first, be about taking care of people, rather than objects. We're analyzing our current operations and programs with an active ear and eye to what our community expresses they need from us right now, recognizing that our programs will be only effective insofar as they are created with, rather than for, the people for whom they're intended.
And now we think ...	Transparency is the only way forward. We have heavy work ahead of us, but this need not be joyless. The museum experience doesn't need to be spinach. We need a moment's respite and relief as much or more than we do education and edification right now.

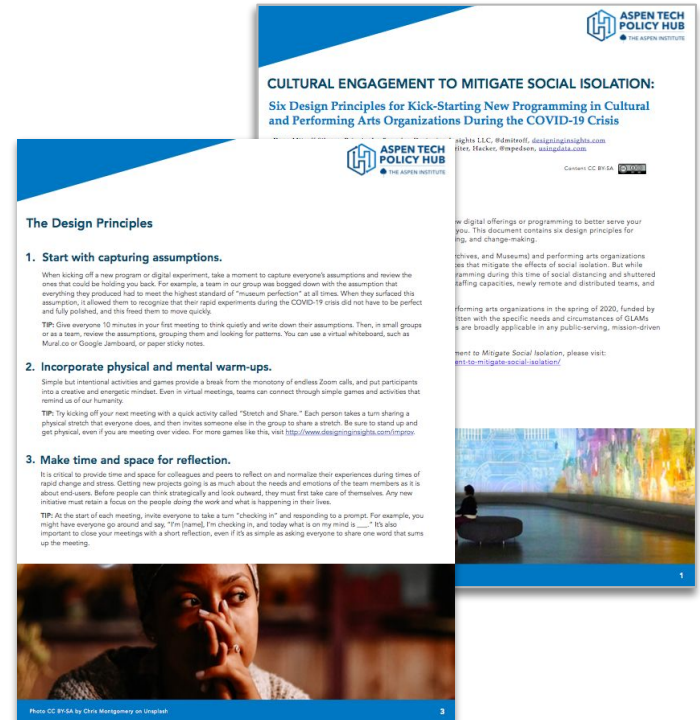
6. Moving Forward

Design Principles PDF

Download at: <https://tinyurl.com/aspentech-cultural>

Drawing from what we learned in this project and our own work guiding teams through strategy and design processes, we have created a free PDF guidebook that highlights six easy design principles you can use to help your team think and work with greater clarity and confidence in a time of rapid change.

1. Start with capturing assumptions
2. Incorporate physical and mental warm-ups
3. Make time and space for reflection
4. Don't try to serve "everyone," especially in a time of crisis
5. Foster collegiality, connection, and a sense of community
6. Build to think





Moving Forward

This project was conceived as a rapid-response initiative, but long-term work, with greater intensity and at greater scale, is necessary to help GLAMs and performing arts organizations create significant change and impact in American communities.

We look forward to developing the techniques and methodologies used in this project further, and to working with funders and partners to scale up participation to include more, and more diverse, participants and communities in the United States and globally.

Michael Peter Edson and Dana Mitroff Silvers

August 21, 2020

“ ... My deepest thanks for your creativity, discipline and abiding support over these last few months. The structure you created provided an excellent framework for Arts & Minds to develop our idea for sharing our work more broadly. You put together a cohort of wonderful people, all working in earnest to serve their communities, and it was very moving for us to be part of this project during the time of social isolation. Our thinking has advanced, and we've made some wonderful connections thanks to you. ”

— Project participant Carolyn Halpin Healy, Co-Founder
and Executive Director, Arts & Minds