Guidelines for Moving Your Site Online During COVID-19

Links, suggestions, and resources to help your organization move content, programs, and fundraising online during the COVID-19 pandemic.

BC MUSEUMS ASSOCIATION

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Museums, galleries, and heritage organizations across the province have shown remarkable creativity and agility shifting to online experiences during the COVID-19 closures and re-openings. Until a vaccine or treatment for COVID-19 is developed, it is likely that museums, galleries, and cultural organizations may be required to close and reopen to support public health and safety. In order to find new ways to generate revenue and engage your community, your site may wish to develop new online programs during this period of uncertainty. This document contains links, suggestions, and resources to help your organization move content and programs online.

For reopening suggestions and links, please consult the BCMA's Reopening Guidelines for BC Museums, Galleries, and Cultural Organizations and for guidelines for closing your site, please visit the BCMA's Guidelines for Closing Your Site During COVID-19.

This is a living document that will be updated as our understanding of the COVID-19 virus, best practices, government guidelines, and guidance from medical professionals evolves. While BCMA makes every effort to present accurate and reliable information, the information provided in this document is "as is" without any warranty of accuracy, reliability, or otherwise, either express or implied. Users of this document should not in any manner rely upon or construe the information or resource materials in this Plan as legal, or other.

Social Media

Social media can be a lifeline to stay connected with your volunteers and community during the COVID-19 pandemic. From keeping your community engaged, to sharing news about your site's reopening and closure plans, to creating a fundraising network to support your organization through difficult times, social media can be an extremely powerful tool.

It is important to keep in mind that excelling with social media takes time, energy, and often money. Don't get frustrated if it takes time to build an audience, especially if your organization hasn't invested much energy into social media in the past. Also, while it may be tempting to delegate your organization's social media posting to a volunteer or a summer student, keep in mind that whoever oversees your organization's social media posting is representing your organization. Reckless use of social media can be damaging to your organization's reputation

and even one harmful post (even if well intentioned) can a challenge to recover from. ICOM has developed some example social media policies for museums, take the time to ensure that your social media coordinator knows what is expected and how to handle negative feedback on social media.

The Association of Nova Scotia Museums, BC Museums Association, Museums Association of Saskatchewan, and the Yukon Historical Museums Association have partnered to produce a *Social Media During COVID-19* guidebook for Canadian Museums.

We also recommend reading:

- American Alliance of Museums, 4 Ways Museums Can Successfully Leverage Digital Content and Channels During Coronavirus (COVID-19)
- American Alliance of Museums, How Your Museum Can Use Social Media During COVID-19
- Sprout Social, The Ultimate Social Media for Museums Guide
- International Council of Museums, ICOM Social Media Guidelines

Social Media 101 for Museums

While there are dozens of different social media platform your organization can choose from, in 2020 the four most popular social media platforms in Canada are Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram (source).

While Facebook has the largest overall audience, you may be better served putting your energies into a platform with a smaller, more specific audience. For example, your community may have an active local Twitter hashtag that could be used to promote your online content or someone on your team may be passionate about building an audience on TikTok. If you have limited time and resources, it is probably best to focus your energies on one or two platforms where you feel you can have the most impact.

To get the most out of your time and effort, you should consider using a social media management dashboard like Hootsuite, Buffer, or Sprout Social. While the costs and specifics of these platforms differ slightly, they all have a similar goal, to create a single hub that connects all of your social media accounts, allowing you to schedule posts and share content across multiple platforms. So instead of having to write and share the same post separately on Facebook. Twitter, and LinkedIn, you can write one post and share it across all three platforms.

Next, you will want to decide what to share and how often to share it. Don't be afraid to share the same post more than once on a social media platform. Major platforms like

Facebook and Twitter use algorithms to decide which of your followers will see a given post. For example, you may have 100 followers on your Facebook Page, but unless you pay Facebook money to promote a post, only a small percentage (generally around 10%) of those 100 people will actually see any given post. So just because you have shared a piece of information once, you shouldn't assume that your followers have seen it. If you are going to reshare the same piece of news, consider adding a different photo, or tweaking the wording to make it more engaging for followers who have already seen it once before. Plus, if your news involves another person, group, or organization, it is always a good idea to tag them to increase the likelihood it will be shared.

Many social media companies use algorithms that attempt to magnify the reach of what they deem to be engaging content. For this reason, it is a good idea to try to create and share the most interesting possible content. Photos and videos are a good way to make content more engaging. A good rule of thumb is to share things that you are passionate about yourself – passion and enthusiasm are contagious!

We also recommend reading:

- Museum Hack, The Art of the Pin: A Look at 3 Museums' Pinterest Accounts
- Museum Hack, How to Use Instagram to Engage Audiences
- American Association for State and Local History, 16 Tips for Creating a Small Museum YouTube Series
- Hootsuite, How to Create a Social Media Posting Schedule
- MuseumNext, Should Your Museum Be on the Latest Social Media Craze TikTok?
- MuseumNext, Tips to Get Your Museum Started with Social Media

Online Lectures/Programs/Livestreams

By now you have likely heard of the popular Zoom platform for hosting live-streams and online lectures, but in addition to Zoom there are dozens of options for streaming live and pre-recorded video online, each with unique pros and cons. As a piece of general advice, use the platform that you feel most comfortable with and best suits your budget. Zoom can be expensive and there are many free online video options out there.

Popular Live-streaming Platforms

- **Zoom**
  - Cost
    - Free option available, paid plans start at $20 per month
  - Pros

- Users do not require a Zoom account to participate
- Designed specifically for hosting webinars and online programs
- Can simultaneously broadcast to Facebook and YouTube
- Users can call in using a telephone
- Cons
  - 40-minute meeting limit on free accounts
  - Limit of 100 interactive video participants
  - Expert opinion on Zoom security, encryption, and management of user data is mixed

- **Microsoft Teams**
  - Cost
    - Free option available, paid option available through Microsoft 365 subscriptions
  - Pros
    - Integrated into Microsoft services like Outlook, Word, Excel, etc.
    - Up to 250 people can join virtual meetings and up to 10,000 people can watch live
    - Strong privacy and encryption standards
    - Supports live captions
  - Cons
    - More complicated to use than other options

- **Skype**
  - Cost
    - Free for up to 100 hours per month (maximum 10 hours per day and 4 hours per individual video call)
  - Pros
    - Available on most major platforms and devices
    - Live subtitle options
    - Users do not require an account to participate
  - Cons
    - Limit of 50 users
    - Designed more for meetings than for webinars/programs

- **Facetime**
  - Cost
    - Free
  - Pros
    - Strong encryption standards
    - Free for Apple users

- o Cons
  - ▪ Limit of 32 users
  - ▪ *Only* available on Apple products
  - ▪ Better for meetings than for webinars/programs
- **Google Meet**
  - o Cost
    - ▪ Free (through the Google for Non-Profits program)
  - o Pros
    - ▪ No time limits
    - ▪ Can be used across a variety of devices and platforms
    - ▪ Real-time captioning
    - ▪ Up to 250 meeting participants
    - ▪ Integrates with other Google services like Gmail, Google Drive, Google Calendar, etc.
    - ▪ Can record meetings
  - o Cons
    - ▪ Google has a bad track record with respecting user privacy
- **Jitsi**
  - o Cost
    - ▪ Free
  - o Pros
    - ▪ Strong, end-to-end encryption
    - ▪ Open source
    - ▪ Completely free
  - o Cons
    - ▪ Livestreams and recordings are limited to 3 hours
    - ▪ While meetings can accommodate up to 200 people, larger groups lead to reduced quality
- **GoToMeeting**
  - o Cost
    - ▪ Free plan available
  - o Pros
    - ▪ Works across most major devices and platforms
    - ▪ Option to create custom meeting URLs
    - ▪ Ability to host up to 250 participants
  - o Cons
    - ▪ Paid plans begin at $19 (USD) per month
    - ▪ Require more bandwidth than other options

- **Cisco Webex Meetings**
  - Cost
    - Plans start at $13.50 per month
  - Pros
    - No time limit
    - Up to 1000 users
    - Robust suite of tools for webinars (i.e. screen sharing, virtual whiteboard, background noise detection, etc.)
  - Cons
    - Base plan only allows 50 users
- **Facebook Live**
  - Cost
    - Free
  - Pros
    - No limit to the number of viewers
    - Can directly reach your Facebook audience
    - Saves the video directly to your Facebook Page
    - Allows viewers to share the stream/video with their networks
  - Cons
    - Only suitable for livestreams, not for video meetings
    - Requires a Facebook account
- **Instagram Live**
  - Cost
    - Free
  - Pros
    - No limit to the number of viewers
    - Can directly reach your Instagram audience
    - Saves the video directly to your Instagram account
    - Allows viewers to share the stream/video with their networks
  - Cons
    - Only suitable for livestreams, not for video meetings
    - Requires an Instagram account
- **Twitter Live**
  - Cost
    - Free
  - Pros
    - No limit to the number of viewers
    - Can directly reach your Twitter audience

- - - Saves the video directly to your Twitter account
      - Allows viewers to share the stream/video with their networks
    - Cons
      - Only suitable for livestreams, not for video meetings
      - Requires a Twitter account
- **YouTube Live**
  - Cost
    - Free
  - Pros
    - No limit to the number of viewers
    - Saves the video directly to your YouTube account
  - Cons
    - Only suitable for livestreams, not for video meetings
    - Requires a YouTube account
- **Twitch**
  - Cost
    - Free
  - Pros
    - No limit to the number of viewers
    - Large audience of users
  - Cons
    - Twitch is primarily associated with video games, so people may not expect to see museum streams
    - Only suitable for livestreams, not for video meetings

We also recommend reading:

- Cuseum, Video Livestreams as an Engagement Tool for Museums
- National Museums of Scotland, Museum Experiments with Facebook Live Video

Virtual Tours and Exhibits

To share their collections and programs online during COVID-19, many museums are creating virtual tours and exhibits. We have collected some examples of how sites around Canada and across the world are creating virtual experiences during COVID-19.

The BC Museums Association has hosted several webinars during the COVID-19 pandemic with advice and resources for creating virtual tours. We recommend viewing the following webinars:

- Exploring Digital Outreach – An Introduction to Livestream Site Tours
- Using Your Phone to Create Video – Tips & Tricks from Videographers
- Virtual Exhibits – Engagement & Accessibility

If you are interested in funding to create virtual experiences, consider applying to Virtual Museums of Canada. VMC offers small, medium, and large investments to help museums and heritage organizations build digital capacity and share unique stories of Canada's history, culture, and heritage. While the VMC application process takes time and will not be able to help you create a virtual tour or exhibit immediately, this funding is an excellent opportunity to expand your site's digital capacity and build something that allows you to connect with new audiences.

Another way to share your organization's collection with a large online audience is through Google's Arts & Culture program. Google Arts & Culture is an initiative that works with cultural institutions and artists around the world to preserve and bring the world's art and culture online and accessible to anyone, anywhere. Museums, galleries, and cultural organizations can apply to become a partner and upload online art and collections through Google's massive network of online museums and galleries. Be warned, however, Google has a reputation for abruptly ending projects that it feels does not provide a sufficient return on investment – so before spending time uploading images to Google Arts & Culture, remember that Google could pull the plug without warning (see the Google Cemetery for examples of terminated projects and initiatives).

We also recommend reading:

- MuseumNext, Virtually There – How to Create Effective 360 Virtual Tours
- BC Museums Association, Exploring Digital Outreach: An Introduction to Livestream Site Tours (blog post)
- Artsteps, Make Your Own Virtual Exhibitions

Online Fundraising

During the COVID-19 pandemic the Friends of the Old Hastings Mill Store Museum launched a public GoFundMe campaign to help support the operating costs of the site and raised more than $40,000 in community contributions.

While this example shows how an engaged heritage organization can use online fundraising in times of crisis, creating a successful online fundraising campaign requires time, planning, an engaged community, and often, involves a considerable amount of luck. With COVID-19

creating economic pressure for nearly ever organization and individual, it is likely that finding success with online fundraising will become increasingly difficult but planning and determination can put your organization on the path to success.

Successful online fundraising is often an exercise in successful storytelling. Some questions to ask yourself when crafting a story include:

- Why tell this story?
    - In other words, by telling a story, what are you trying to accomplish? If your goal is raising money, how do the elements of your story reinforce that goal? For example, if your organization has been part of your community for a long time, talking about your founding date might help to reinforce the idea that the funding campaign may help save a piece of community history. However, if your organization was founded, in say, 2013, that information doesn't do much to reinforce your goal.
- Whom am I telling the story for?
    - Who is the audience of your fundraising campaign? Are you trying to get the media's attention? The attention of your volunteers and supporters? The attention of government officials? The internet as a whole? You might need to create different stories for different audiences. For example, if you're trying to engage your volunteers and supporters, sharing photos and anecdotes from your museum community might be very successful, while telling the story of your museum's economic impact might be a more successful way to reach local politicians.
- Who can help me tell the story?
    - Assess who might be able to tell your story and enhance the reach and impact of your fundraising campaign. Do you have strong connections with local media? Do your board members have connections you can draw upon? Are there local social media influencers who might help promote your story through their networks? If a media outlet or person with a large social media following shares your story, your fundraising campaign can receive a big boost in exposure.

Online Fundraising Platforms

Canada Helps

- Canada Helps is a major fundraising and donation platform for Canada charities. Any registered charity can create a free Canada Helps donation page. Canada Helps takes a processing fee of between 2-4% depending on the type of donation and donors receive a tax receipt for 100% of their contribution.

[GoFundMe](#)

- GoFundMe is a popular online crowdfunding platform and allows anyone (you don't need to be a registered charity or not-for-profit) to create an online fundraising campaign. There is a flat 2.9% processing fee charged on each transition plus a $0.30 charge per donation.

[Facebook Fundraisers and Donations](#)

- Facebook allows individuals and organizations to create fundraisers. If your organization has an engaged Facebook community, this could be an effective way to raise money online. Facebook does not charge fees on donations made to not-for-profit organizations.

We also recommend reading:

- Charity Village, [Storytelling for Fundraising Success](#)
- Canada Helps, [Crowdfunding Tips Everyone Can Use](#)
- Museums Association, [Grassroots Fundraising Efforts Take Off Amid COVID-19 Crisis](#)