



Above: 3D Model of Howe Sound accessed using augmented reality
Photo credit: Garry Morrison

COLLABORATION DREAMING

Achieving in a Small Community Museum

Matthew Lovegrove

In small community museums across British Columbia, an age-old story is playing out. Museum workers are dreaming about all of the amazing projects they could accomplish with bigger budgets and a larger staff. However, when the harsh reality of limited resources sets in, dream projects often get left behind.

Fear not, small museum dreamers! Right now in your community, there is a wealth of potential collaborators who would love to partner with your organization. By working with community members as collaborators, we can create meaningful ex-

periences for our project partners while achieving our own ambitious goals. At the heart of these collaborations, it's all about developing partnerships that are open, honest and mutually beneficial. When we dream big and work hand-in-hand with our community members, there is no telling what we might accomplish.

Fixed

In late 2016, staff at the Sunshine Coast Museum & Archives were developing *Fixed* – an exhibit that explores the idea of creating a permanent, driveable connection (fixed link) to the Sunshine Coast. Since the 1950s, many coastal resi-

dents have yearned for a bridge or highway to improve access to Vancouver. The provincial government had recently launched the *Fixed Link Feasibility Study*, so the timing was perfect for an exhibit. However, despite a wealth of archival material and a highly relevant topic, when it came time to create interpretive content to bring the exhibit to life, we fell flat. All of our resources were dedicated to research and text panel development, and we didn't have a budget to hire outside contractors. At this point, we started collaboration dreaming: who could we work with to help us achieve our exhibit goals, and what could we offer them in return?

Meet our Co-Curators

Enter Mary Thomson and Sarah Macey, Grade 10 students of Elphinstone Secondary School in Gibsons, BC. Mary and Sarah began volunteering at the Museum for their leadership class, which required them to volunteer for 20 hours in the community. From very early on, we realized that they were bright, capable and ambitious volunteers, so we asked if they would like to work with us on *Fixed*. They were excited about the idea, so we began brainstorming.

We wanted to tap into the interest and passion in our community on the topic, and if possible - engage local high-school students.

Together, we decided that a great project would be to interview students about their opinions on the fixed link. We reasoned that it would be their generation that was affected if a bridge or road connection was ever built. Based on the quality of their contributions during the project planning phase, we began to refer to Mary and Sarah as our co-curators.

We started the *Fixed Link Interview Project* by drafting a list of questions such as: “Would a bridge or highway connection improve the Sunshine Coast?”, and “How would a fixed link affect your life?”

After the questions were finalized, we trained Mary and Sarah on the use of the digital audio recorder, and developed a workflow for the interview process. Museum staff then created participation consent forms, and after a few trial runs at the Museum, we were ready to start the interviews.

The sessions took place over a one-month period at Elphinstone High School. During this time, Mary and Sarah interviewed eight students ranging in age from 13-16 years old. The resulting interviews showcase a rich



Above: Volunteers Mary Thomson and Sarah Macey. Photo credit: Matthew Lovegrove



Above: Community Dialogue Board in action. Photo credit: Matthew Lovegrove



Above: Elphinstone TV Club student Shelley Paulus. Photo credit: Matthew Lovegrove

collection of student voices, and represent a diversity of opinions on the fixed link issue.

Without all of their hard work and dedication, the student interview project would have never happened. Through the experience, Mary and Sarah were able to meet their volunteer requirements while making a substantial contribution to the *Fixed* exhibit. They also gained valuable work experience that could be added to their resumes. By the end of the project, we all felt as if we had accomplished something meaningful – and done so in a collaboration that was filled with laughter and positive results.

Coast TV & Elphinstone TV Club

At this point, we still had to finalize how the audio interviews would be played in the exhibit. In previous feature exhibits, we had looped oral history recordings using an MP3 player. For *Fixed* we dreamed of something different. If we could create a video that showcased the landscape of the Sunshine Coast, it would provide the perfect visual backdrop for the interviews. Again, we looked to our community for project partners who could help bring this idea to life.

We contacted Steve Sleep and Brittany Broderson of Coast TV, our local cable television network. We had worked with Steve and Britta-

ny many times over the years, and thought they would be a natural fit for collaboration. Along with creating great local programming, they were involved with the Elphinstone TV Club, a group of high-school students who were learning television production skills. We pitched the idea of collaborating on a video that could be looped in the *Fixed* exhibit, and both Steve and Brittany were receptive. They mentioned that it would be a great project for the TV Club as it would give them an opportunity to work with a client in a real-world setting. We agreed that Coast TV would be mentioned in all exhibit promotion, and their logo would be mounted on a text panel to honour their project contribution.

Brittany took the idea to the TV Club, and they were enthusiastic about working on an official exhibit video. Soon, Brittany and the students were out in the community, capturing footage of BC Ferries, tourists walking along the seawall and seagulls gliding on the wind. Within a few sessions, they had enough footage to begin editing. The student interviews were overlaid as audio, with the end product being a beautifully rendered video of the Sunshine Coast.

Through the collaboration, Steve and Brittany were able to offer the students an engaging project to work on, allowing them to hone their skills on a video that would be enjoyed by museum visitors. At the same time, Coast TV would benefit

from community recognition for their contribution, and the Museum would receive a high-quality exhibit video. Mutually beneficial for everyone involved, the collaboration was a great success.

To view the *Fixed Link* exhibit video, visit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JFUctGHaags>

Are you Ready to get Augmented?

The final piece of our exhibit interpretation puzzle fell into place with an email sent to Matthew Talbot Kelly. Matthew is a Gibsons, BC based artist, well-known for his experimental forays into virtual reality and digital design for film. Familiar with his innovative work, we reached out to ask about the feasibility of using virtual reality technology in the exhibit. Our hope was to develop an exhibit interactive where visitors could experience a simulation of the proposed fixed link routes. This would help visitors understand the geography of Howe Sound, and the specific terrain challenges of building the proposed routes.

Our collaboration with Matthew evolved naturally as we shared a common interest in using new technologies in an exhibit setting. He suggested that augmented reality (AR) technology would be a better fit for our exhibit goals. Through a productive dialogue, it was decided that Matthew would create a digi-

tally-rendered 3D model of Howe Sound that visitors could view with AR enabled iPads. Matthew was keen on the project as it would give him practical experience using the Unity design program and the Vufo-ria AR app. Through much problem solving, perseverance and beta-testing over a three-month period, Matthew accomplished his goal of under-promising and over-delivering.

Picture this: As you walk into the Fixed exhibit, you come to a floor mounted map of Howe Sound. Resting on the map are iPads with the directions “Point an iPad here”. When you hold it towards the map, a digital 3D model of Howe Sound appears on the screen. Visitors can use the iPad to explore the depth of the terrain, the geographic features of Howe Sound and the proposed fixed link routes.



Above: 3D Model of Howe Sound accessed using augmented reality
Photo credit: Matthew Lovegrove

Working with Matthew allowed us to achieve an exhibit interactive that most small museums can only dream of. For Matthew, the *Fixed* interactive became his medium for experimentation, offering him an opportunity to apply AR technology in an exhibit setting. Again, collaboration dreaming had paid off – thanks to the wealth of talent found in the Sunshine Coast community.

All Together Now

When I walk through the *Fixed* exhibit, it is amazing to think about what we accomplished with our community collaborators.

Each of these partnerships evolved naturally, born from an ambition to deliver high-quality exhibit content while offering meaningful experiences for our project partners.

But what really stands out in my mind is the strength of the relationships that we have developed through the process. As a final gesture of community collaboration, we mounted a whiteboard in the exhibit and asked visitors to have their say about the fixed link. Visitors recorded their thoughts and opinions, often responding to other visitor comments in what became a dynamic community dialogue.

Think of your museum as a canvas, and your community members as artists who can contribute their own unique splash of creativity to your projects. Instead of being defined by our limitations, we have learned that our community holds the key to help us realize our dream projects.



Matthew Lovegrove lives in the traditional territory of the Skwx-wú7mesh (Squamish) Nation, and works as the Manager/Curator of the Sunshine Coast Museum & Archives. If he is not collaboration-dreaming, you will find him backpacking in the Coast Mountains or swimming at Secret Beach in Gibsons, BC.