Rethinking resources: Shifting museums from industry to community with

MUSEUM-UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS

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Shifting funding, shifting focus

Changing times, both in terms of funding and information dissemination, require that museums shift financial and content models to stay relevant and extend. Museums are changing from places where information is stored to places where people voluntarily gather for social and learning experiences. Outdated funding models called for expensive traveling temporary exhibits that strained budgets and limited local creativity.

Supporting local economies

Museums have a responsibility to balance supporting their local economies with supporting the museum industry. By making use of local designers and builders, museums become local economic drivers.

Museum-university relationships

One way that museums can leverage local talent is to form strategic relationships with universities, especially those with strong programs in creative technologies. The Science Museum of Western Virginia and Virginia Tech have formed such a relationship and jointly hired a liaison to facilitate it.

Goals

Virginia Tech and the Science Museum of Western Virginia are both interested in expanding and enhancing community-based science education. The two organizations formed the relationship for mutual benefit.

Benefits for the university

- Access to community audiences
- Improved Broader Impacts = more grants
- Outreach for academic and artistic work
- Authentic science communication experiences
- Liaison for networking, questions, and concerns

Benefits for the museum

- Funding for new exhibits
- Fresh exhibits at cutting edge of research
- Programming content for camps, camp-ins, and expo days
- Access to academic, technical, and design expertise
- Volunteers and interns
- Crowdsourced design solutions
- Stronger community network
- Liaison for networking, questions, and concerns

Challenges for the university

- Understanding realities of the museum in terms of funding, timelines, priorities, and power structures
- Geographical separation
- Translating cutting-edge research to museum audiences

Challenges for the museum

- Understanding realities of the university in terms of funding, timelines, priorities, and power structures
- Navigating academic credit systems

Thrills for the museum

- Local expert involvement in museum programming
- Fresh exhibits at the cutting edge of research
- Outlet and audience for three new Virginia Tech exhibits
- Improved Broader Impacts = more grants
- Strained budgets and limited local creativity
- Museum staff serve on panels and lead workshops for university students
- Improved Broader Impacts = more grants
- Thrilled creative community

Thrills for the university

- Outlet and audience for three new Virginia Tech exhibits
- Four National Science Foundation grants funded
- Experiential learning opportunities for classes and clubs, in terms of volunteering, design problems, and education
- Museum staff serve on panels and lead workshops for university students
- Thrilled creative community