

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 extant. 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 Outdated funding models called for expensive traveling temporary exhibits that strained budgets and limited local creativity.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.



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BENEFITS FOR THE UNIVERSITY
 Access to community audiences
 Access to information about those community audiences
 Improved Broader Impacts = more grants
 Internship, volunteer, and service opportunities for students
 Authentic science communication experiences
 Outlet for academic and artistic work
 Authentic problems to solve for class projects
 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

THRILLS FOR THE MUSEUM
 Locally sourced exhibit design and fabrication
 Three new Virginia Tech exhibits
 Four additional exhibits in the funded pipeline
 A new app for the Pollinator Garden
 Local experts involved in museum programming
 Increased recognition for museum staff
 Strengthened creative community

BENEFITS FOR THE MUSEUM
 Funding for new exhibits
 Fresh exhibits at cutting edge of research
 Programming content for camps, camp-ins, and expo days
 Speakers for STEM Tavern series
 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 MUSEUM
 Understanding realities of the university in terms of funding, timelines, priorities, and power structures
 Geographical separation
 Navigating academic credit systems

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
 Strengthened creative community

