

COVID-19: The Financial Implications on Museums

Grace Beehler

The pandemic took its toll on many public and private institutions, including museums. While they were affected in many ways, economically, museums were hit very hard. According to the International Council of Museums (ICOM), about 70% of museums surveyed lost 50% or more visitors because of the pandemic and about one in five museums lost an upwards of 90% of their visitors.¹ Also, according to Dr. Feuerbach, there was a nearly 77% drop in attendance in the world's top 100 art museums.²

Because of the immense loss in visitors and the eventual lockdown countries experienced, museums suffered financial instability. In fact, many museums throughout the world lost almost 50% of their revenue due to the closures and changes made because of COVID-19.³ Due to these losses, measures were put in place to mitigate the effects. To continue to transmit the museums' knowledge despite these revenue setbacks, museums needed to come up with creative low-cost options.

Pandemic's Impact

Surprisingly, majority of museums did not come up with other ways to generate income to make up for these losses. While it also depends on the size of the museum and its popularity, many museums experienced negative impacts due to the pandemic. This holds true especially for smaller museums who suffered the greatest impacts.⁴ ICOM conducted surveys, asking museums what they thought were potential ways of making up lost revenue. These surveys found that using digital tools such as virtual tours and online fundraising could be beneficial in

generating income. They also completed other surveys that asked a variety of museums what they think will be the long-term effects economically overtime due to the setbacks in revenue. In the future, if another pandemic was to occur, programs may have to be canceled/reduced, staff may need to be downsized, and private/public funding may be decreased.⁵ The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, also described the need to rely on each other to overcome the difficulties museums have faced. This may entail finding refuge in public authorities or inhabitants of the areas the museums are in and strengthening relationships between other museums to come up with solutions.⁶



Source: Canva Stock Graphic

Low Cost Alternatives

To continue to transmit knowledge despite these revenue setbacks, museums needed to come up with creative low-cost options. Dr. Feuerbach discussed in her presentation that although some aspects of museums suffered, there are also parts that flourished.⁷ Along with the many changes

made due to the pandemic, there were a plethora of lower cost options that were implemented. These options included podcasts, online newsletters, videos, Zoom conferences, use of social media, and even QR codes. These new changes also offered the option of earning revenue through online subscriptions and even donations. Another positive of these methods is that they help connect to the younger populations. Especially utilizing social media, platforms such as TikTok can be an effective means to communicate and outreach to younger generations who are already on these platforms. While these methods inhibit the ability to see first-hand the many artifacts and exhibits available, these methods give the opportunity to reach a wider audience and create an immersive experience while following pandemic guidelines and maintaining low costs.

Looking to the Future

Moving forward, these methods will create positive changes to improve museums in the future. As mentioned before, museums now have platforms to reach a variety of different ages through these online methods. They can also bring up revenue because they are spending less to transmit and share the information in the museums. Finally, by utilizing online platforms, new jobs in technology sectors will open in the museum industry, inviting new people with different skill sets to work in these museum industries.⁸ While it may be easy to assume that only negative effects occurred because of the pandemic, this is not the only case. Positive outcome can and have occurred because of the pandemic.



Source: Canva Stock Graphic

Notes

[1] "Museums, museum professionals and Covid-19: third survey," International Council of Museums, July, 2021, https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Museums-and-Covid-19_third-ICOM-report.pdf.

[2] Dr. Anne Feuerbach, "Visiting Scholar Series with Anne Feuerbach," filmed February 22, 2022 at Purdue Honors College, West Lafayette, IN, YouTube Video, 1:05, <https://youtu.be/VXGQtaEo8AU>.

[3] "Museums, museum professionals and Covid-19: third survey." International Council of Museums.

[4] "Museums, museum professionals and Covid-19: third survey." International Council of Museums.

[5] "Museums, museum professionals and Covid-19: third survey." International Council of Museums.

[6] "UNESCO report: museums around the world in the face of COVID-19," UNESCO Digital Library, UNESCO, 2021, https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000376729_eng.

[7] Dr. Anne Feuerbach, "Visiting Scholar Series with Anne Feuerbach," YouTube Video.

[8] Dr. Anne Feuerbach, "Visiting Scholar Series with Anne Feuerbach," YouTube Video.