

Museum Results

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from Alexander Haas

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First Things First



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from the home office of
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Help, I've Fallen into Zoom and Can't Get Out...

Plenty has been written about the impact of the pandemic on our work lives. One positive surprise has been the success with which our development teams have adapted to remote working, particularly using videoconference tools (Zoom, FaceTime, Teams, GoToMeeting, etc.) to connect with prospects and donors. Many have worked through this medium well, very well in fact. From direct solicitation to special events, several clients and former clients have reported record fundraising years for 2020.

One of our senior partners was an earlier adapter of this technology; his enthusiasm began with Skype long before COVID 19. Perhaps it had to do with reducing travel to some extent. I never shared his passion for this channel—I found it tiring and uncomfortable—but it was easy to avoid back then when others were not as familiar with communicating in this fashion. After a year of zooming he now reports he's finding repeated videoconferencing tiring as well. Further, he reports that he was on a call recently where one of the participants, who displayed a still picture instead of using his camera, fell asleep. The others could hear him snoring. Anecdotal evidence from fellow colleagues and clients alike indicates a similar disdain for working exclusively via videoconferencing. A recent peer-reviewed article in the American Psychological Association's *Technology Mind and Behavioral Journal* articulates why many of us are finding the technology exhausting, and how to mitigate its effects. Here are some take-aways from his article which help to explain our reaction (via the *Washington Post*).

We're not used to so much eye contact.

Constant eye-contact is problematic for our brains as this isn't a normal occurrence in our pre-technology brain. Videoconferencing gives us much more than our recommended daily allowance of intense and up-close facial contact. Without realizing it, we are absorbing and continuously analyzing all the non-verbal feedback that this high definition medium offers. Fatigue, anxiety, and a desire to escape are natural responses to the overstimulation. Limiting the number of hours of

videoconferencing per day, setting meetings for 50 minutes or less (instead of an hour), eliminating evening sessions to provide downtime, are ways to counteract its impact. There's nothing wrong with asking before scheduling each call, "Do we have to see each other and share screens, or would an audio call suffice?"

We're not used to constant self-evaluation.

In our previous pre-pandemic meetings, we might have briefly checked in a mirror before entering a room to ensure our appearance was satisfactory. Now, we're confronted continuously with our own face as part of the video meeting. Except for those among us who have narcissistic tendencies, it's stressful and uncomfortable to judge our appearance unceasingly. And, just as when shown a group photo, your eyes will immediately go to your own face, a videoconference that includes your face, will draw your attention to your image, where you will evaluate and re-evaluate your appearance, facial expressions, clothing, gestures and even background setting. If you are highly critical of your own appearance, this can be detrimental to your self-confidence as well as your ability to pay attention to meeting content. Turning off your own face, using the "hide myself" feature can allow others to see you, but eliminates your face from your screen.

We're stuck in one spot.

The efficiency of videoconferencing is that we can have back-to-back meetings with zero commute times—one can be in eight locations in one day without ever leaving the living room. It's been said that sitting is the new smoking when it comes to unhealthy habits. This technology encourages couch-potato tendencies. I recently guest lectured for a college course, where two of the attendees were seated in their beds. Any accommodation which gets you moving is a healthier option. Just before the pandemic, walking meetings had become popular. When possible, one of my colleagues schedules his daily walk with audio calls, a good strategy to move more during the workday.

We're not used to so much mental effort.

As our brains are wired for in-person meetings, the computer version has a heavier cognitive impact. Remembering to mute, un-mute, to limit gestures, to avoid reacting to distractions in the workspace (animals, children, lawn service activity, etc.) takes a toll on the mental load. There's less in-meeting downtime, where one might have talked about the weather or social activities. The intensity has increased. Again, anything which limits the time connected to others in this fashion can reduce the brain-strain.

Hopefully, the new normal post-pandemic world will help us achieve a better balance between in-person meetings and audio/video connections, making us effective and efficient without sacrificing a healthy lifestyle.

News You Should Know

More Museums Heading Pieces to Auction

This season, seven museums (the **Albright-Knox Art Gallery**, the **Art Institute of Chicago**, the **San Diego Museum of Art**, the **Newark Museum of Art**, the **New York Historical Society**, and the **Brooklyn Museum**), are taking advantage of temporarily loosened deaccessioning regulations, and selling art amid snowballing fallout from the pandemic.

Museums have been granted leeway to use the proceeds from art sales for "direct collection care," an

umbrella term that covers everything from curators' salaries to HVAC systems. (Traditionally, funds from art sales can only be used to acquire more art.) Tens of millions of dollars' worth of art has already been sold under these relaxed rules, which are set to expire on April 10, 2022.

The New York Historical Society hasn't deaccessioned art in 20 years, but has been shuttered for months and has been operating at 25% capacity since September. As revenue fell 30%, it laid off 15% of its staff and furloughed 11% more. And on May 12, an iconic Childe Hassam painting in its collection is going up for auction.

If sold within the estimated range—\$12 million to \$18 million—the proceeds would amount to a windfall. To put things in perspective, the museum's total revenue was \$42.7 million during the 2018–19 fiscal year, according to its last available tax return.

And herein lies the danger for museums.

"If you view the collection as a revenue source, will you keep managing a nonprofit institution as carefully as you should?" asks said art lawyer **Nicholas O'Donnell**, who argued against the Berkshire Museum's plan to deaccession in 2017. "If, in the back of your mind, you know that if things don't work out, you can make up the difference here and there by selling a painting?" *artnews.com*, 4-19

AAMD Meets to Discuss Deaccessioning Regulations

The **Association of Art Museum Directors** convened two unusual, mandatory sessions in mid-March to gather feedback from members about the rules surrounding a pandemic-spurred policy that allows the sale of art to cover some operating costs.

Some expected a vote on whether to codify the current relaxed regulations. But members were only asked to join in an informal poll that sought guidance on whether the museum association should work to develop a new policy that better defines how money from art sales can be used. Still, the split vote, 91-88 — with 42 members not participating — came down against developing a new policy, suggesting that vigorous debate is likely to continue.

"This was a preliminary discussion among members," said **Christine Anagnos**, the association's director. She said that before April 2022, when the rule expires, she expects her trustees to "evaluate whether any extension of the April 2020 resolutions is warranted."

The intensity of the debate has put a spotlight on the museum association, in existence since 1916, but largely out of public view. Its enforcement powers are limited. In the past, it has told member museums to stop loaning art to, or collaborating on programs with, institutions that have violated its policies.

It's difficult to say what would happen if the association pushed through a policy that was unpopular with half of its membership since issues that have divided museum directors at this level have been rare.

NYT, 3-19

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The More You Know

The **Henry L. Hillman Foundation** awarded grants totaling \$7 million in support to 57 arts and cultural organizations impacted by COVID-19. Recipients include, among others: the **Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh** (\$1 million), which operates the **Carnegie Museum of Art**, the **Carnegie Museum of Natural History**, the **Carnegie Science Center**, and the **Andy Warhol Museum**; **August Wilson African American Cultural Center** (\$125,000); and the **Children's Museum of Pittsburgh** (\$250,000). *PND, 4-19*

Paul Allen, director of major gifts and grants at the **9/11 Memorial and Museum**, has been named vice president for development at the Paley Center for Media. *COP, 4-16*

Lindsay Turley, vice president of museum collections at the **Museum of the City of New York**, has joined the **Shaker Museum** as chief donor-relations officer. *COP, 4-16*

The **National Endowment for the Humanities** awarded 225 new grants, totaling \$24 million. Recipients include, among others, **Children's Museum on Indianapolis**, **Los Angeles County Museum of Art**, **Denver Art Museum**, **Museum of New Mexico Foundation***, and **North Carolina Museum of Art Foundation, Inc.** *NEH press release, 4-16*

The **Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum** received a \$5 million gift from **David M. Rubenstein** in support of the *Wright Brothers & the Invention of the Aerial Age* exhibition. The gift will support the preservation and display of the 1903 Wright Flyer, the centerpiece of the gallery, slated to open in 2022. *PND, 4-5*

The **National Medal of Honor Museum** (Arlington, TX) received a \$20 million gift from Dallas Cowboys owner, president, and general manager **Jerry Jones**. The gift will support construction of the museum, which is slated to get under way sometime in the next year. *PND, 4-3*

Tonya Matthews has been named CEO of the **International African American Museum**, a new museum in Charleston, S.C., scheduled to open early next year. *COP, 3-26*

The **National WWI Museum and Memorial** received a \$10 million gift from the **Sunderland Foundation** to update its main gallery, visitor spaces, and courtyard. *COP, 3-24*

The Smithsonian is in the process of hiring no fewer than six museum directors. The process is in the

final stages for the **National Museum of African Art** (DC), and the **Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum** (NYC). The large number of openings is partially because two new museums were just authorized, the **National Museum of the American Latino** and the **American Women's History Museum**. *Washington Post, 3-24*

A Fifth of Museum Workers Won't Return to the Field After the Pandemic

According to the report from the **Alliance of Museums**, a fifth of museum workers and students surveyed don't expect to remain in the field three years from now. Fifty-seven percent of those surveyed cited burnout, while 59% said low pay will cause them to change careers.

Other Findings

- About a quarter of museum employees surveyed were out of work last year, with 5% still unemployed.
- More than 40% lost income during the pandemic. On average, these respondents made 30% of their normal salaries.
- More than 50% of independent consultants and contractors had contracts canceled or indefinitely postponed.
- BIPOC respondents (about 20% of those surveyed) reported greater financial strain and fewer financial resources than white respondents.
- Women were more likely than men to report increased workload and strain on their wellbeing.

The AAM's report is based on data collected in March from 2,666 responses. *Artnews.com, 4-14*

We Want You to Know

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The **Institute of Texan Cultures** at the University of Texas San Antonio is a new Client Partner.

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