10 Ways to Transform Your Museum for the Future

Our museums are a vital part of the communities in which we serve. Each day, a museum is confronted with things they can and should do to remain relevant -- but where do you start? How do you best use your resources to integrate trending topics? This session will leave you with 10 ideas you can take back to your organization to transform it for the future.

Our Mission: To preserve the history of the Aurora Fire Department and fire service in our region through our collections and exhibits while educating visitors about fire safety and prevention.

1. Marketing your Museum - from a new logo, to marketing materials, and social media.
   - In November 2016, the Museum launched a new logo.
   - First step in rebranding the Museum.
   - Cost $500, utilized a young professional that developed logo concepts, final logo, style guide, letterhead, and business cards.
   - What marketing materials does the museum have?
     - Membership Brochure – Showcases membership options, benefits, and form.
     - Scout Programs – Provides information about the scout programs we offer.
     - Sponsorship Brochure – Marketing piece showcases opportunities to support us.
     - Museum At A Glance - Includes mission, needs, and museum overview.
   - What do we want to create or do next?
     - Update our website
     - Develop a Program Brochure – To include scout programs, group tours, and birthday party options.
     - Develop a Volunteer Brochure – List various volunteer opportunities.

2. Museum as Community Center
   - Your museum is more than just your mission.
   - Exist to serve your mission and the broader community.
   - Listening Sessions, community events, networking events.
   - First Fridays
   - Community Partnerships
     - Summer at the Fire Museum supporting the Aurora Interfaith Food Pantry.
     - Coupons and specials.
     - Aurora Public Library Storytime.

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3. Develop New Programs

- Often times museums struggle to engage with visitors outside of normal operating hours. By thinking outside of the box, museums can develop programming that is mission driven, strengthens community, and does not severely impact staff and volunteers.

- **Aurora Museums After Dark** – Program collaboration with Aurora’s Museums and sponsored by Aurora Downtown. Held three times a year on a Thursday from 5-8pm.

- **Aurora Museum Week** – Co-Marketing collaboration between Aurora Downtown and Aurora Museums, including Blackberry Farm (outside of Downtown).

- **Fire Fascinations** – Quarterly program developed by our museum to teach children about some aspect of firefighting – station, apparatus, technology, fire safety. Held on one Saturday per quarter from 11am-2pm. Includes activity and craft, free with admission.

- **Coffee with the Curator** – Quarterly conversations with staff about a topic related to the museum.

4. Undergo an Assessment - Bring in a peer reviewer to review your engagement, collection, or organization.

- Participated in the American Alliance of Museums’ Museum Assessment Program (MAP)
  - [ww2.aam-us.org/resources/assessment-programs/MAP](http://ww2.aam-us.org/resources/assessment-programs/MAP)

- Offer three different assessments – Organizational, Collections Stewardship, Community Engagement. Usually two deadlines per year. Free for organizations with budget less than $125,000.

- What did we learn?
  - **Short Term Goals**
    - Continue to grow and expand synergies with other attractions and institutions in the region by encouraging more and more collaborative programs and events.
    - Consider adding a Junior Firefighter or Junior Fire Chief membership category for children 12 and under. This category of membership could include a certificate, inexpensive fire helmet and badge and, perhaps, an annual pizza party or other amenity that is “exclusive.”
    - Look for partnership opportunities with local businesses. Conversely, seek out businesses (restaurants, retail shops, etc.) willing to offer museum visitors a discount in their business establishment. A list of businesses offering discounts to ARFM visitors and members could be handed to each visitor upon arrival and distributed via the e-newsletter. Restaurants are potential targets for this promotion. Visitors will perceive the discount (whether used or not) as added value to the purchase of their admission or membership.
    - Consider extending the ARFM’s hours on Thursdays and Fridays from 12 Noon-4 PM to 10 AM to 4PM.
Longer Term Goals
- Discuss and initiate the creation of a short term (5 year) strategic plan.
- Create an integrated co-developed community education program between the Aurora Fire Department and Museum.
- Develop signage for the Museum building and lot. Discuss this with city to further help all Museums.

5. Develop Policy
- The American Alliance of Museums requires accredited museums to have the following five policies established:
  - Mission Statement
  - Code of Ethics
  - Collections Policy
  - Disaster Plan
  - Strategic Plan
- Other Policies
  - Bylaws
  - Board Handbook
  - Vacation & Holidays Policy – serve as basis for future employee handbook.
- A new mission
  - Old Mission - The Aurora Regional Fire Museum is a nonprofit, tax exempt educational institution whose purpose is to preserve Aurora's old Central Fire Station for use as a museum. The Aurora Regional Fire Museum will preserve and exhibit the artifacts and history of Aurora and surrounding county(s) fire departments, as well as teach and promote fire safety and prevention.
  - New Mission - To preserve the history of the Aurora Fire Department and fire service in our region through our collections and exhibits while educating visitors about fire safety and prevention.
- All policies should be reviewed as needed, or every 3-5 years.

6. Develop a Membership Program
- Our Museum reestablished our membership program in April 2017. Membership is available in seven levels from $20 to $250 per year.
- Member Benefits Include free admission, 10% discount in Museum Store, e-newsletter.
- Business and sustaining members receive additional discounts, including discounts on rentals and inclusion of name in newsletter.

7. Cultivate relationships with sponsors.
- Ask yourself…
  - Who is invested in your organization?
  - Who are likely partners?
  - Who am I working with already? Are they contributing to the Museum?
- Develop opportunities for giving and incentives.

  Sponsorship Incentives
$500+: Annual Individual/Business Museum Membership, 25 complimentary passes to the Museum, recognition on Donor Wall, Quarterly e-newsletter, and website.

$1,000+: Annual Sustaining Museum Membership, 50 complimentary passes to the Museum, complimentary 3 hour rental of Hayloft ($300 value), enhanced recognition on Donor Wall, Quarterly e-newsletter, and website.

8. Engage Students
- Museums serve as education hubs. Develop initiatives to work with college and graduate students.
- Case Study - Lewis University - Office of Community Engaged Learning
  - Social Media Marketing – Social media plan.
  - Professional Writing – drafts of press releases, marketing documents
  - Strategic Management – Drafted strategic plan.
  - Supervisory Management – Developed strategies for recruiting volunteers.
- Pros & Cons
  - Students are students not staff.
  - Offer both a new perspective but also be aware quality may vary.

9. Be involved in National Organizations
- Many professional organizations exist, however which is the best?
- Find what works for you and meets your needs.
- American Alliance of Museums - https://www.aam-us.org/
- American Association for State and Local History - https://aaslh.org/
- Other Organizations we belong to
  - Kane DuPage Regional Museum Association - http://www.kdrma.org/
  - Fire Museum Network - http://www.firemuseumnetwork.org/

10. Stocking Your Gift Shop
- Make your space inviting and welcoming. Start with the shelving and the walls and move to the items you sell.
- Remember – Uniqueness, Quality, Price
- Fire related toys
  - Aeromax - http://www.aeromaxtoys.com/
  - Fun Express (not super impressed with quality) - https://www.funexpress.com/
  - Rhode Island Novelty - https://www.rinovelty.com/

- Custom Products

10 Ways to Transform Your Museum for the Future
- Marty Gutowski, marty@museumstoreproducts.com, 908-428-9143
  - Sunset Hill Stoneware - https://www.shstoneware.com/
    - Martha Klomberg, martha@shstoneware.com, 920-886-1730
  - Studio Vertu - http://studiovertu.com/
    - Greg Seibert, greg@studiovertu.com, 513-412-3447

EXTRA CREDIT

1. Expand Your Hours
   - Visitors want to visit and experience our museums, however open hours can and are a barrier to museum access.
   - Be open a variety of times – days & time of day.
   - Expanded hours from 12pm-4pm on Thursday and Friday and 10am-4pm on Saturdays to 10am-4pm the three days. Also added Wednesdays from Memorial Day to Labor Day.

2. Pizza, Burgers, and Beer
   - Collaboration is key. View your museum as a community partner and contributor and seek out ways to work with those around you.
   - Luigi’s Pizza – Local restaurant serving a special pizza and donating a percentage of the profit back to a local nonprofit each month.
   - Gillerson’s Grubbery – Local restaurant serving up a special burger in the month of October, November, and December 2018. $2 from each burger sold will be donated back to the Museum.
   - Oswego Brewing Company – Local brewery (located in an old fire station) to develop special collaboration beer and serve in their tap house, with proceeds benefiting the Museum.

3. Paranormal Programs
   - Explore all types of programming, reaching out to otherwise untapped audiences.
   - Looking to bring in more adults and millennials. Provide an experience and non-traditional programming.
   - the Museum.