Taking the Pulse of Natural History Collections During COVID-19: Where are we now?

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ADBC Summit, 25 September 2020

Webinar Mini-Series

September 15

Review results of BCON's community & institution surveys (*Barbara Thiers*)

September 16

Collections perspectives (*John Bates, Emily Braker, Brian Atkinson, Mare Nazaire*)

September 17

Moving forward: Communities response and opportunities for the future (*Rob Gropp, Roland Roberts, Scott Miller, Pam Soltis*)

Breakout rooms & discussion: **Challenges**

Breakout rooms & discussion: **Positive Outcomes**

Panel discussion: **What next?**

What are the top three challenges faced by collections since the pandemic started?

Adjusting to remote work, both logistically and mentally

Budget uncertainty, including loss of paid staff

Ability to provide support for research

Maintaining relationships with volunteers

What are the top three challenges faced by collections since the pandemic started?

Adjusting to remote work, both logistically and mentally

- ➢ Lack of necessary equipment and digital infrastructure to work from home
- ➢ Lack of access to collections
- ➢ Access to in-museum resources -- collections, libraries
- ➢ Difficulty of telecommuting (including issues like childcare as well as technology needs)
- ➢ Finding a new normal - changes in focus associated with working from home

What are the top three challenges faced by collections since the pandemic started?

Adjusting to remote work, both logistically and mentally

➢ Imbalance between outside work and inside work developing because fieldwork generation of collections is out-pacing ability of the inside work of labs and curators to keep up.

➢ Long term environmental monitoring; the longer we don't have use and access the bigger the problem and the uncertainty about when we can resume normal operations

What are the top three challenges faced by collections since the pandemic started?

Budget uncertainty, including loss of paid staff

➢ Budget concerns
➢ Budget concerns - furloughs, layoffs, effects on other museums we do business with
➢ Potential of delayed budget cuts in state-funded museums and universities
➢ Lost student workers and part-time people
➢ Lack of visitation = loss of revenue that supports science
➢ Long term staff/knowledge loss

What are the top three challenges faced by collections since the pandemic started?

Ability to provide support for research

➢ Research support - loans, accessions, visitors to collections, volunteer assistance
➢ Reduction of loans
➢ Loans and no visitors or volunteers

What are the top three challenges faced by collections since the pandemic started?

Maintaining relationships with volunteers

➢ Limited volunteer assistance
➢ Lost volunteers
➢ Loss of volunteer corps

What are the top three positive outcomes experienced by collections as we adapt to new COVID-aware workplace guidelines?

Collaboration is more frequent and more accessible

Backburner projects are receiving more attention

Opportunity to reassess existing staff responsibilities and policies

Opportunity to reflect and plan strategically

Increase in digitally accessible data and materials

What are the top three positive outcomes experienced by collections as we adapt to new COVID-aware workplace guidelines?

Collaboration is more frequent and more accessible

- ➢ Collaborative trainings
- ➢ Virtual conferences and meetings increase participation and inclusion
- ➢ Collaboration has continued/improved with Zoom and Slack; establishments of global interaction with working and interest groups
- ➢ Increased connectivity across collections due to the virtual component being made more readily available
- ➢ Collaboration opportunities that may have been unlikely before

What are the top three positive outcomes experienced by collections as we adapt to new COVID-aware workplace guidelines?

Backburner projects are receiving more attention

➢ Rise of the back burner projects
➢ A chance to re-assess "the bus test" in terms of safety responses and who has all the passwords, etc.
➢ Getting Collections Documentation updated

What are the top three positive outcomes experienced by collections as we adapt to new COVID-aware workplace guidelines?

Opportunity to reassess existing staff responsibilities and policies

- ➢ Increased productivity and encouragement to make the virtual realm work. Finding hybrid methods. Learn to deal with and accommodate disruption. Building resilience among staff.
- ➢ Providing additional cross-disciplinary training for existing personnel
- ➢ Flexible policies allowing staff to work from home on collections objects -- photographing, digitizing, cataloguing, prepping...

What are the top three positive outcomes experienced by collections as we adapt to new COVID-aware workplace guidelines?

Opportunity to reflect and plan strategically

➢ Innovation - finding new ways to connect people and students to collections
➢ Opportunity to reflect and gain new perspective on strategic planning (including that related to collections)
➢ Attending virtual conferences has reduced the carbon footprint of the the conference!

What are the top three positive outcomes experienced by collections as we adapt to new COVID-aware workplace guidelines?

Increase in digitally accessible data and materials

➢ Increase in digital loan requests, photograph downloads, etc.
➢ Pandemic lights a fire under digitization because of new priorities for using specimens in teaching and research
➢ Equitable access has extended through remote digital engagement of the public and improvement in data generation and data quality