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Permanent Pivot?

Exploring the Role of Virtual Events in Stewardship Portfolios



Scott Tews

Donor Relations Manager for Major and Planned Giving
The Field Museum of Natural History



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The Field Museum of Natural History



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Museum History

- Established after 1893 World's Fair
- 50,000 objects acquired as founding Collection
- First home: Palace of Fine Arts Building (Museum of Science and Industry today)
- Name honors retail innovator and first major benefactor Marshall Field I
- First scientific research expedition in 1894
- Grant Park location opened in 1921



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Today

- 150 active scientists working around the world
- Traditional strengths: Anthropology, Botany, Geology, and Zoology
- Conservation program formally adopted in 1994 (Keller Science Action Center)
- Nearly 40 million specimens and cultural items in the Collection
- Less than 2% on display in exhibit galleries



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Native Truths: Our Voices, Our Stories

- New permanent exhibit co-curated with Native communities
- Opened May 20, 2022
- Replaces and reimagines the previous Native North America Hall
- 4 year project
- 130 Native American collaborators (advisors, artists, storytellers, and scholars)
- 105 different Native American tribes



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Mission Statement and Strategic Plan

- **Mission:** The Field Museum connects all of us to the natural world and the human story
- Strategic Plan (2022-2028) Core Initiatives
 - Africa and Ancient Egypt Galleries
 - K-12 and Community Engagement
 - Digital Field Museum
 - Research and Environmental Conservation



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COVID Timeline

- March 14, 2020 Closed
- July 24, 2020 Reopened at 25% capacity
- November 20, 2020 Second closure
- January 21, 2021 Reopened at limited capacity
- June 11, 2021 Phase Five full reopening
- January 3, 2022 Vaccinate mandate
- March 1, 2022 All restrictions lifted



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Presentation Outline

- Overview of Virtual Programs and Events (2020-2022)
- Trends and Takeaways
- Hybrid and Looking Forward
- Questions and Discussion



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Virtual Programs and Events

1. Weekly/Monthly “Meet a Scientist” Webinars
2. Field Forward Symposium
3. Science Conversations
4. Members’ Nights
5. Women’s Board Gala



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Weekly/Monthly “Meet a Scientist” Webinars



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Weekly/Monthly “Meet a Scientist” Webinars

- **Goal:** Keep members, donors engaged
- First extended closure in 125-year history of the museum
- “All in” on stewardship
- Uncharted territory/unprecedented moment
- Crash course in Zoom
- First event April 9, 2020
- Bill Simpson, Fossil Vertebrates Collections Manager on History of *SUE the T.rex*



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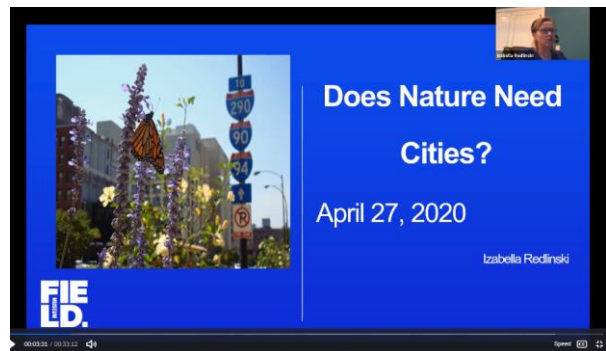


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Weekly/Monthly “Meet a Scientist” Webinars

- Zoom webinar format
- 45 minute presentation, 15 minute Q&A
- Communicated in weekly donor e-news and through stand-alone emails
- Registration through Wufoo, program link emailed in advance
- 5 Staff
 - Featured scientist/curator
 - Zoom tech and email monitor (Advancement)
 - Welcome and closing remarks (Advancement)
 - Program facilitator (Learning Center)
 - Backup (Advancement)
- Edited recording in Adobe Premier Pro, shared link through Vimeo



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Weekly/Monthly “Meet a Scientist” Webinars

- Prior to March 2020
 - N/A
- 2020
 - Weekly programs (including after museum reopening)
 - Targeted individual donor groups
 - Strong engagement
 - Everyone “along for the ride”



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Weekly/Monthly “Meet a Scientist” Webinars

- 2021
 - Switched to monthly programs
 - Zoom fatigue
 - Still tuning in, but to lesser degree
 - Attendance rate of 10 “biggest fans”
 - 85% in 2020
 - 49% in 2021
- 2022
 - Monthly programs coordinated by membership team, all donor groups invited



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Weekly/Monthly “Meet a Scientist” Webinars

Takeaways

- Great chance to showcase wide variety of scientists and projects
- Recordings are valuable stewardship assets
- Dress rehearsals important
- Use facilitators to pull content experts out of the weeds
- Appetite for virtual noticeably faded after 2020



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Field Forward Symposium

- **Goal:** High-level major donor stewardship event
- Exclusive tours, experiences, and behind-the-scenes access
- Thought-provoking conversations with science, arts, and community leaders from Chicago and around the globe



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Field Forward Symposium



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Field Forward Symposium

2019

- Launched as one-day, in-person event for national trustees and major donors
- Celebrating museum's 125th anniversary
- Scheduled in tandem with quarterly Board meeting
- Similar schedule to today's ADRP workshop
 - Morning program
 - Breakout sessions/tours
 - Lunch
 - Afternoon session
 - Cocktail reception
- Exhibition previews, tours, panel discussions
- About 50 attendees



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Field Forward Symposium

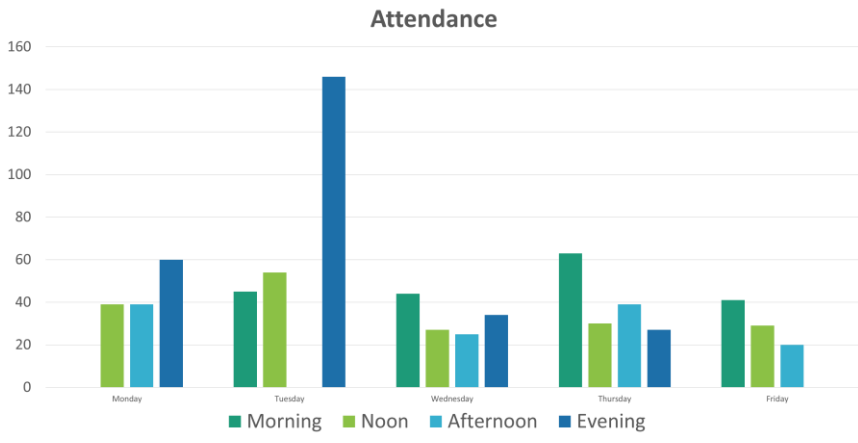
2020

- Planned for week of in-person programming
- Included highest level of annual fund donors
- Pivoted to 100% virtual
- 17 programs over 5 days (16 live, one recorded)
- 222 unique registrants, 762 session attendees
- Welcoming new President and CEO
- When it is safe, would you attend an in-person event?
 - 65%: YES
 - 33%: MAYBE
 - 2%: NO



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Field Forward Symposium (2020)



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Field Forward Symposium

2021

- Planned for mix of in-person and virtual sessions over the course of one week
- Delta surge in August: Proceeded with virtual programs, postponed in-person
- Added private dinner/cocktail reception for major donors at in-person events
- Introduction to hybrid



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Field Forward Symposium

The Role of Museums in Public Dialogue

- February 8, 2022
- Panel discussion
- First hybrid event
 - 60 in-person attendees
 - 80 watching live Zoom feed
- Zoom Rooms technology



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Field Forward Symposium

2022

- Goal: Focus on reviving one-day, in-person, major donor event
- Utilize Symposium brand for additional virtual and hybrid programs
- Continued emphasis on collaboration



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Field Forward Symposium

Takeaways

- Virtual events are prime opportunities for unique collaborations
- Strategic scheduling/built-in audience
- Hybrid events are a good option, ensure respectable in-person attendance to account for no-shows
- Extra draw to entice in-person attendance
- Consider professional video production in certain cases
- Donors as potential moderators/hosts



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Members' Nights

- **Goal:** Continue tradition of signature member stewardship event
- 70th edition in 2021
- Members often mention it's the primary reason they renew each year
- 47% of 2020 attendees had been members for 10+ years



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Members' Nights



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Members' Nights

Pre-2020

- 100% in-person
- Two-night event in May
- 5,000+ visitors per night in typical year
- Interactions with scientists and curators behind-the-scenes in storage areas and labs



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Members' Nights

2020

- Postponed from May to November
- All virtual
- 26 Museum scholars
- Live 20-minute sessions from behind-the-scenes
- One Zoom link per night
- Trivia breaks facilitated by Learning Center staff
- 847 unique viewers
- Membership and Advancement team as camera operators



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Members' Nights

2021

- May 19-21
- All virtual
- 27 Museum scholars
- 20-minute sessions from behind-the-scenes
- Trivia breaks facilitated by Learning Center staff
- 947 registrants



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Members' Nights

2022

- 100% in-person
- 40 stations staffed by scientists and curators in public areas of the museum
- No behind-the-scenes access for safety reasons
- 1,700 attendees over two nights
- Members were happy to be back



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Members' Nights

Takeaways

- “The more unique and behind the scenes the better. Lots of Zoom fatigue here.”
- Important to keep the tradition alive
- Amateur production value worked well for authentic experience
- Tight spaces behind-the-scenes may continue to present challenges



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Science Conversations

- **Goal:** Major donor stewardship tailored to specific areas of interest
- (Loose) holiday theme for 2020 year-end stewardship
 - “Unwrapping” a fossil jacket from 1922
 - Antler Room tour
 - Secrets of the Sun, Revealed by Meteorites
- Zoom meetings vs. webinars (capped at 12)
- Limited audience size to encourage interaction
- Scientists streaming live from the lab
- 1 Advancement staff member operating camera iPad, 1 monitoring program from laptop remotely



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Science Conversations



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Science Conversations

Takeaways

- More personal than webinars
- Presenters and attendees can see each other
- Face time with advancement staff
- Thread the needle: Ensure intimate, small group setting while accounting for drop off
- No recording to share
- Could be easy to replicate, possibly in winter again when travel is more difficult



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Women's Board Gala

- Signature fundraising event
- Typically accounts for 20% of annual unrestricted giving
- Black-tie party for 500 in Stanley Field Hall
- Pivoted to virtual in 2020 and 2021



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Gala



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Gala

Takeaways

- Fundraising did not see a drop off
- Invested in production value
- Recorded vs. live
- Difficult to pair in-person sponsor benefits and auction prizes with virtual event
- Feature students, interns if you can
- Tough to get virtual audience on weekends



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Overall Trends

- **2020:** Everyone on board as we adapted in real time
- **2021:** Zoom fatigue, visitors looking for unique experiences
- **2022:** Demand for in-person is back, despite COVID surges



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Lessons Learned

- Cross-train multiple staff/volunteers on Zoom technology
- Dress rehearsals are important
- Virtual events expand audience reach, but not as much as anticipated/hoped
- Recordings are great assets
- Nothing wrong with amateur production in most cases
- Higher attrition rate/more no-shows
- Nothing replaces the in-person experience



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Hybrid Formats

- Primarily utilized for meetings so far
- Great to have the option
- Balancing in-person vs. virtual crowd
- Enticing people to come out (don't make it too easy to stay home last-minute)
- Biggest fans will participate regardless of format



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Looking Forward

- Focus on in-person stewardship
- Continuing to clear “backlog” of in-person events in 2022
- Offer one monthly Meet-a-Scientist program, invite all donor groups
- Continue to experiment with hybrid events



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Questions and Discussion



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