



2020 Impact Report

and Strategic Plan Retrospective



American
Alliance of
Museums

Letter from the President & CEO

None of us have ever faced a year like 2020. In a matter of just a few months, we were confronted by the global COVID-19 pandemic that shuttered our planet.

As people everywhere quarantined, museums closed their doors and faced the worst financial crisis in generations. Many institutions are still closed, some permanently, and others face years of recovery. On top of a global pandemic, 2020 piled on additional challenges in the form of an election cycle that sharply divided the United States and a national conversation about the systemic racism that has plagued us for centuries. Our mettle was tested far beyond what we ever imagined, but we also saw the good in people, society, and institutions.

Throughout the prolonged crisis, we saw how much museums mean to our country and our communities—and how much stronger museums are together, through the American Alliance of Museums.

As museums across the country stepped up to fill critical gaps—whether that meant donating Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), offering their outdoor spaces to quarantined neighbors, or providing engaging, accessible educational content to students learning at home—AAM was fighting for museums. Billions of dollars in relief funding were made available to our field, thanks to thousands of hours we committed to museum advocacy efforts. Hundreds of free resources were assembled to help museums navigate an unprecedented crisis. As we advanced transformational initiatives such as Facing Change: Advancing Museum Board Diversity & Inclusion—we opened our diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI) resources to museum professionals everywhere to help them grapple together with the urgent issues of racial equity and catalyze the structural changes needed for our collective future. In 2020, we leveraged the strength of the Alliance to help museums everywhere not only survive, but emerge stronger.

Despite the devastating blow, the work we accomplished together fills me with hope—and it will prepare us for even bolder strides in the years ahead. The disruptions of this past year are also an opportunity to address the structures that have not served us well, from precarious business models to inequities embedded in our work. We need new ideas, new voices, and new models to remain successful and relevant in the future. We are ready to evolve, innovate, and grow in whole new ways in the years ahead.

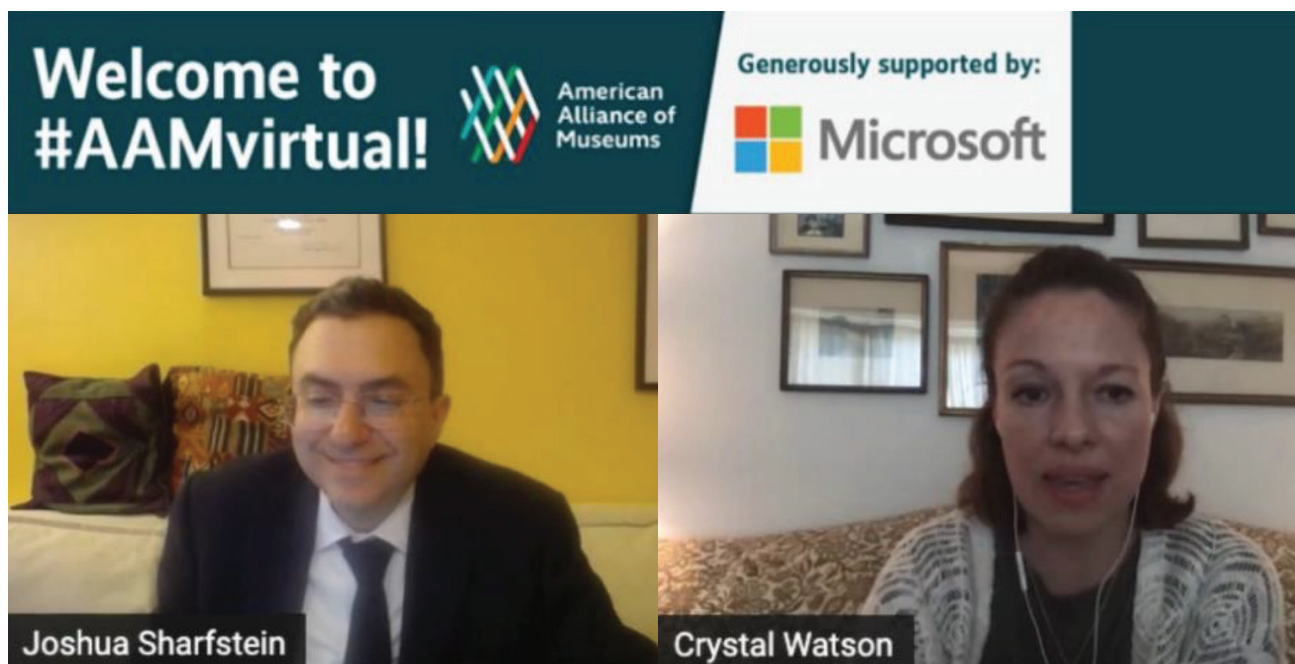
In this impact report, we look back not only on an unprecedented year, but also on the preceding five years of growth, innovation, and transformation that made it possible for us to emerge from 2020 ready to build. One hundred and fifteen years after AAM's founding and fifty years after AAM began accrediting museums, our field is more relevant and diverse than ever, our Alliance is bolder and stronger, our future is brighter—and our communities need museums like never before. Let's continue to move our field and our communities forward together.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura L. Lott".

Laura L. Lott





During AAM's first-ever virtual Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo, we invited Dr. Josh Sharfstein and Dr. Crystal Watson of Johns Hopkins University to discuss public health implications as museums plan for safe reopenings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2020: An Unprecedented Year

Amidst health, economic, and racial justice crises that defined 2020, our Alliance came together and stepped up to support museums and museum professionals like never before in navigating an unprecedented situation, raising our voices on issues that matter to the field and our communities, and building for a stronger, more equitable future. Even as our long-term, strategic initiatives and established programs continued to move forward, we leveraged the Alliance in new ways—and met the moment nimbly, responsively, and for the benefit of all.





FEBRUARY:

375 museum advocates make 425 visits to Congressional offices on Museums Advocacy Day, extending years of relationships and advocacy efforts that would prove to be critical in the months ahead.

MARCH:

AAM's free COVID-19 Guide for Museums is launched, providing guidance to nearly 200,000 people on managing closures, reopenings, and safety.

APRIL–MAY:

Advocacy efforts result in nearly 60,000 messages and stories to Congress. Museums are included in Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) funding, receiving an essential financial lifeline that was far from a given (museums were nearly excluded, and zoos and aquaria were excluded, from 2009 stimulus funding).

MAY–JUNE:

AAM's first-ever virtual Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo brings nearly 4,000 museum professionals—half of whom were first-time attendees—together to discuss the urgent issues we face.

JULY:

AAM releases a survey revealing that one in three museums may permanently close due to COVID-19—changing public perception around the permanency of museums through 900 media placements and 16 billion media impressions.

AUGUST–SEPTEMBER:

AAM creates a resource guide and starter kit to help museums navigate all aspects of reopening—from cleaning, training, and communicating about COVID-19 to new practices in digital and community engagement for pandemic times.

NOVEMBER:

AAM releases a second COVID-19 survey revealing that the average museum lost \$850,000 and anticipates losing 35% of annual operating income.

DECEMBER:

Continued advocacy efforts result in a second financial lifeline as museums' inclusion in Shuttered Venue Operators Grant (SVOG) and additional PPP funding ensures billions have been made available to museums during the pandemic.

2016–2020: Envisioning a Bold Future

Navigating the challenges and demands of 2020—as a field and as an Alliance—was only possible because of the growth and transformation that preceded it.

Following five years in which we strengthened our finances and expanded our Alliance—giving us both the stability and the scale to drive major change—AAM embarked upon an extensive 18-month strategic planning effort beginning in 2014. The result was a bold vision to lead the museum field forward—one that prepared us for both 2020 and many years to come. The five-year strategic plan:

Committed to three new goals to advance our mission: expanding access to content through enhanced user experience, promoting thought leadership that influences and inspires action, and connecting US museums to the international community through a practice of global thinking

Recommitted AAM to grow and evolve our advocacy work and our focus on museum excellence

Identified three focus areas vital to the future of museums to guide AAM's work: diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI); expanding museums' role in P-12 education; and changing business models for financial sustainability

Initiated field-changing programs, including Facing Change: Advancing Museum Board Diversity & Inclusion

“Laura is a powerful changemaker, but she does it in an incredibly quiet and inclusive way... We might not have survived this pandemic had it not been for Laura and what she did for our field's stability. She has made it so we can continue to do our work and not have to put important projects on pause... She reaches broadly and thoughtfully across the field to put in place all those building blocks for change, and she's not afraid to tackle topics considered immune from criticism, she's not afraid to not have all the answers, and she's willing to try new things.”



Kelly McKinley
Chief Executive Officer at Bay Area Discovery Museum

Photo courtesy of
The Corning Museum of Glass



OVER
16 mil.

unique visitors to the AAM
website since 2018

NEARLY
2,000

visits to Congressional offices
and 111,000 online messages
sent to Congress since 2016

22%

funding increase for the
Office of Museum Services
(OMS) since 2016

98%

museum staff surveyed planned to try
something new from the 2017-2019
Building Audiences Watch and Talks
supported by The Wallace Foundation



Following the Black Lives Matter protests in response to the murder of George Floyd, AAM quickly adjusted our Annual Meeting programming to include a conversation that would allow the field to collectively process and explore the role museums can play in the fight for racial equity. *Racism, Unrest, and the Role of the Museum Field* was facilitated by AAM's Senior Director of Equity and Culture, Andrew Plumley, and speaking on the panel were leaders Lori Fogarty, Dr. Johnnetta B. Cole, and Smithsonian Secretary Lonnie Bunch.

Bringing Museums Together

Our field is at its strongest when we all come together and benefit from one another's experience, expertise, and insights.

Guided by this understanding and our strategic plan's emphasis on access and thought leadership, AAM has evolved our role as a convener of a larger, and more diverse, number of voices and insights across the museum field. Whether through expert information on our website, our Annual Meeting, or our award-winning bimonthly magazine, AAM is where museum professionals of all backgrounds and levels discuss issues, raise questions, and share ideas as we collectively tackle the major challenges and opportunities that exist in the museum field.

And in 2020, we brought the strength of our Alliance to bear as museums confronted incredible challenges—from community relevance to new approaches to DEAI to evolving business models—together.

10,000 views
of the seminal 2020 Annual Meeting general session, *Racism, Unrest, and the Role of the Museum Field*

NEARLY

450

free pandemic response resources created and collected in 2020

196

blog posts published in 2020 on the AAM website from 130 authors addressing issues affecting the field

75

webinars hosted by AAM's Professional Networks in 2020 that provided community and connection during quarantine



Facing Change Together

Addressing issues of racial equity and helping museums make the structural changes that allow for substantive transformation are imperatives—and years of work have prepared our field to act on the scale and with the depth these urgent demands require.

After identifying diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI) as a field-wide priority in our 2016 strategic plan and making DEAI the focus of our 2017 Annual Meeting, we launched Facing Change: Advancing Museum Board Diversity & Inclusion in 2019. Among the most ambitious DEAI initiatives in the entire nonprofit sector, Facing Change was launched with the support of the largest philanthropic gifts AAM has ever received – a \$4 million grant spread over three years from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Alice L. Walton Foundation, and Ford Foundation.

And in 2020, amid a global pandemic and nation wide museum closures, more than 50 museums and thousands of board members participated in intensive racial equity trainings and developed inclusion plans. AAM launched a new board matching program catalyzing more diverse museum leadership. And an eminent task force of museum leaders worked to embed DEAI into our Continuum of Excellence programs. Facing Change has raised diversity and inclusion to more than fleeting commitments for museums; it has made them the basis for urgent, field-wide action and a core component of museum excellence.

“Facing Change bolstered our efforts, giving us a common language that empowered us to use the right words in the right way. It also gave us a framework to operationally define what DEAI work meant for the Zoo.”



Dr. Megan Ross
Zoo Director, Lincoln Park Zoo

OVER
1,800

directors and trustees from over 50 museums in Facing Change DEAI trainings in 2019 and 2020

OVER
5,000

hours worked by Facing Change Fellows in 2019 and 2020 to advance the DEAI efforts of individual museums, staff, and their boards

1,326

IDI assessments administered in 2019 and 2020 to museum directors and trustees



Advocating for Museums

Communities are stronger when museums are stronger—and museums are stronger when they have a powerful unified voice.

Over the past five years, AAM has strategically grown the advocacy efforts of the museum field and strengthened the data we use to make the case that museums are economic engines and community anchors. AAM published the museum field's first economic impact study illuminating the \$50 billion per year museums contribute to the nation's GDP, including employing over 726,000 people. AAM also conducted the first public opinion poll demonstrating Americans overwhelmingly appreciate and support museums. Year-round, AAM empowers thousands of museum professionals to effectively advocate for museums at the local, state, and federal levels with training, resources, and advocacy alerts—while bringing forward the full voice of the field annually on Museums Advocacy Day.

In 2020, we built on years of dedicated advocacy for museums, steady relationship-building; and recent funding increases to avoid the same threats of the 2008-09 financial crisis, when museums were nearly excluded, and zoos and aquaria were excluded, from stimulus funding. We secured museums' access to billions of dollars of Federal relief funding, including PPP and SVOG funds—financial lifelines enabling many museums to survive and saving thousands of museum professionals' jobs.

375

museum advocates made visits to 425 Congressional offices in 2020

OVER
900

media placements and 16 billion media impressions in 2020 on the possibility of museum closures due to the pandemic

3,000

AAM staff hours spent March-December 2020 to include museums in federal relief efforts



Leading Museums Into the Future

In a time of rapid and unprecedented change, museums must continually adapt, evolve, and innovate to serve their communities in more responsive and impactful ways—but doing so requires a big-picture perspective that only an organization that reaches across disciplines and regions like AAM can provide.

Launched in 2008 to report on trends and inspire future-oriented thinking, AAM's Center for the Future of Museums (CFM) serves as a lab for new ideas, fresh insights, and global perspectives. CFM leads critical conversations and is a catalyst for change—whether that means advancing scenario planning and new business approaches, leading discussions about museums as community infrastructure and sources of social impact, or inspiring new approaches to bringing communities together. This has included inspiring museums to play a role in focusing on creative aging activities, building new cultural audiences, and nontraditional activities like getting out the vote.

Through thought leadership that explores different business models within and adjacent to the field, we are leading museums through a period of transformation—and helping museums everywhere thrive in a new context.

57

blog posts since 2018 addressing museums' role in creative aging and combating ageism supported by Aroha Philanthropies

31,000

print and digital readers of "Museum 2040," the award-winning future fiction edition of *Museum* magazine

13,500

TrendsWatch downloads since 2016, with a total reach of over 100,000

“Something I really admire about AAM is the openness to hear the views of others and consider them, and to work through consensus. In some ways, it’s a great representation of democracy...The outcome is way stronger than having a group of people with homogeneous perspectives and voices. It’s a huge umbrella where everyone is welcome to participate, and where all voices are valued.”



William T. Harris

President & CEO, Space Center Houston

Photo by Sara Lowenburg
Courtesy of Louisiana State Museum

A Louisiana State Museum drumming class in Congo Square, New Orleans that inspired connections between participants and with the museum. The museum was in a cohort of twenty 2018 grant recipients of the Aroha Philanthropies' Seeding Vitality Arts program.





“What makes me most proud is that AAM as an alliance was there for the museum industry in 2020. It carried out its mission in full force during a time of crisis. The resources and support that AAM has given the field are unparalleled, and they shined during one of the most challenging moments in our history.”



Chevy Humphrey, *Chair of the AAM Board*
President and CEO
Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago

37,685

museum and individual
members as of March 2020

NEARLY
700

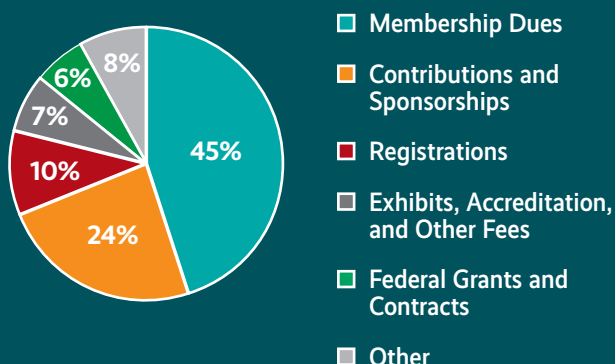
\$25 deeply discounted conference registrations
in 2020 supported by generous donors
including the James Ford Bell Foundation

350

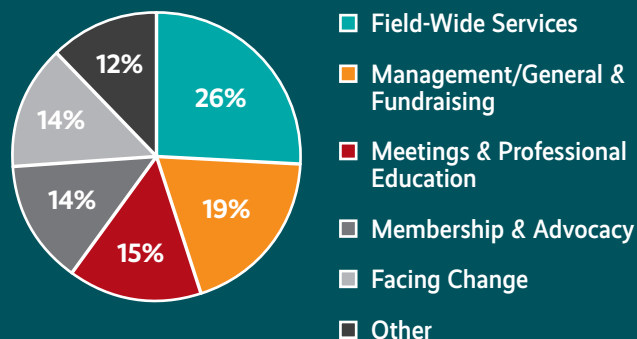
special \$25 Individual
memberships in 2020 funded by
the Samuel H. Kress Foundation

The Alliance You Make Possible.

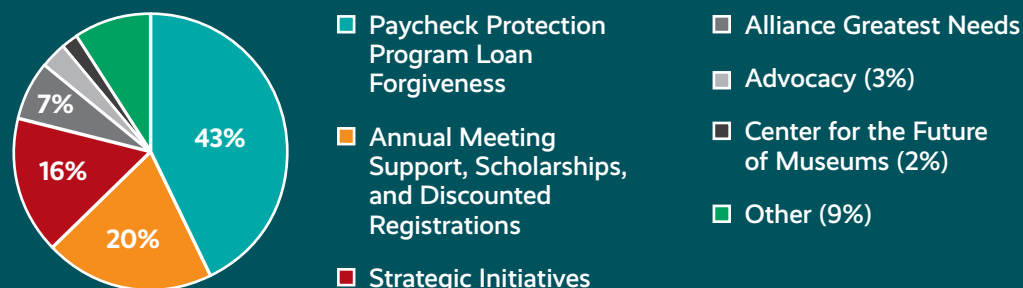
Revenue - \$7,392,738



Expenses - \$7,800,556*



Sponsorships & Contributions by Fund



*In 2018, AAM received a \$4 million multi-year grant for the Facing Change program. Per FASB standards, a majority of this revenue was recognized in 2018 with associated expenses incurred during the following years.

We extend our gratitude to all who are part of the Alliance—whether you are a member, donor, volunteer, or supporter—for all the ways you make the museum sector stronger and more vibrant.

13,920 hours

MAP and Accreditation volunteers worked in 2020

OVER
\$1 mil.

pandemic relief and support in 2020

OVER
\$1.7 mil.

sponsorships and contributions in 2020



The mission of the American Alliance of Museums
is to champion museums and nurture excellence in
partnership with our members and allies.

We acknowledge the ancestral lands of the Piscataway people, the lands on which the American Alliance of Museums office is located. We pay respects to their elders past, present, and emerging.

2451 Crystal Drive, Suite 1005 | Arlington, VA 22202
www.aam-us.org | development@aaam-us.org | 202-289-1818