

Supporting Seasonal Staff during COVID-19

A Quick Guide for Canadian Museums
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Introduction:

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, heritage institutions are now facing the unique circumstances of having to hire, train, and manage temporary and/or seasonal staff while they work remotely. This resource has been developed to assist you in identifying ways to interact with your seasonal staff remotely, developing task lists suitable for remote work, and monitoring work progress. It is by no means exhaustive, but should help the museum shift from former to current work realities and spark some ideas.

While the museum is closed to the public, this is an opportunity for growth and development. It is an opportunity for students to learn and refine a variety of skills, and for the museum to accomplish a variety of tasks and projects. It is also a time to build relationships with current and new partners.

Any projects, programs, software, websites, or other resources mentioned in the document serve as examples only and should not be seen as endorsements.

Hiring Considerations

If you have not yet hired your seasonal staff, review your usual interview questions and make sure they are applicable to the current reality. Add or adjust as required:

- Do they have concerns about working remotely?
- If the province “opens up”, will they be expected to work at the museum? If so, how would their job description change?
- Do they work well independently?
- Do they tend to reach out when questions arise or try to troubleshoot on their own? (consider pros & cons of each approach in relation to the job description)
- Are they comfortable admitting when instructions are not clear or they have made a mistake?
- Do they take initiative? When they finish one task will they be comfortable moving to a new one or do they wait for instruction?
- Do they need set hours of work or would tracking hours be a better model?
- Do they have stable internet access at home?
- Do they have a preferred communication method/meeting platform? (telephone, email, Skype, Microsoft Teams, etc.)
- Do they have a computer or other equipment that will be required for their work?
- Do they have communication, museological, technical, and other skills required to do the work or will they require a lot of training?

Contractual Considerations

It is the museum’s responsibility to ensure that staff have the resources required to do their work. Some considerations for contracts:

- If workers are using metered internet, staff must track usage and the museum must reimburse; or provide a set amount of support in lieu of providing office space;
- Outline the hours of work, or expectations around tracking and reporting hours worked;
- Outline the frequency or schedule of staff meetings or virtual check-ins;
- Outline the frequency or schedule of progress reports and content requirements;

- List any equipment or resources that will be provided to staff to facilitate their work and that these must be returned to the museum upon completion of their contract;
- If the province “opens up” and workers will shift from remote to on-site work, clearly outline this expectation.

It is also the museum’s responsibility to conduct performance reviews and exit interviews with all staff. This should be clearly outlined in contracts. Capturing feedback and ideas from frontline workers will be critical as the museum evaluates its COVID-19 efforts. Forms/questionnaires should be provided in advance. Current forms should be reviewed to make sure they adequately accommodate the adjusted work reality.

Training and Orientation

Even if staff are not working in the same physical location as a team, it is important to cultivate a team-based work environment. As members of the museum team, remote staff should be aware of and have an understanding of how the museum operates. For the general training and orientation of your remote seasonal staff to your organisation, provide staff with an orientation package of the museum’s policies and procedures and other guiding information that will impact their work. This should include guidelines for respecting confidentiality of museum affairs. Outline the year’s strategic goals and how staff will contribute to the realization of these goals. All orientation materials should be in a format that is easily transferred online either through e-mail (keeping in mind potential size restrictions on certain mailboxes) or through file sharing systems like Google Docs and Dropbox.

- Google Docs <https://www.google.ca/docs/about/>
- Dropbox <https://www.dropbox.com/>
- Google for Non-Profits suite of tools <https://www.google.com/nonprofits/>

Once your seasonal staff has received all the relevant information from you and your organisation, it will be important to hold a real-time chat. This can be done either through telephone conversation, Skype, Google Duo or Hangouts, Zoom, or other means of video calling. The benefit of having a live session with your seasonal staff member is to go over their role and expectations with them. This will allow you to answer any of their questions or concerns while providing you with some insight into their expectations of the task(s) they have been assigned.

- Google Duo <https://duo.google.com>
- Google Hangouts <https://hangouts.google.com>
- Skype <https://www.skype.com/en/>
- Zoom <https://zoom.us/>
- Adobe Connect <https://www.adobe.com/products/adobeconnect.html>

For a review of video calling apps:

<https://foundation.mozilla.org/en/privacynotincluded/categories/video-call-apps/>

Working Environment

There are a few things to take into consideration regarding the work situations during the Covid-19 reality.

Working remotely:

As noted above, the museum must ensure that remote staff have all equipment and resources required to accomplish their assigned tasks. Given the isolated nature of remote work, develop a work plan that is flexible and allows the individual(s) to alternate between tasks rather than getting frustrated or bored with a singular task. The work plan should note deadlines or highlight dates of completion as goals, and name collaborators for tasks as well as their contact information. If any tasks are deliverables for funding programs, be sure these are highlighted as such so they are given top priority, and make note of any special reporting requirements that may impact the work.

Providing guidance to remote staff on mental and physical realities of remote work is also crucial. The following resources provide guidance to both employers and employees:

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health & Safety <https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/hsprograms/telework.html>

University of British Columbia <http://www.hr.ubc.ca/wellbeing-benefits/workplace-health/ergonomics/office-ergonomics/mobile-computing/>

Workplace Safety & Prevention Services <https://www.wsps.ca/Information-Resources/Topics/working-from-a-remote-office.aspx>

WorkSafeNB <https://www.worksafenb.ca/safety-topics/covid-19/working-safely-from-home/>

Working on-site:

Those that can work from home should. If your seasonal staff are required to work on-site, health and safety come first. Ensure that provincial health authority guidelines are part of orientation, are reviewed regularly, and are updated in the event of any changes. Establish a clear plan for providing supervision and guidance in a safe way, and make sure that staff are able to reach out to their supervisor whenever there is a need. Ensure staff have a safe means of transportation to and from the museum. If an employee is working alone, the facility should remain closed and locked at all times. If multiple employees are working on-site, make sure all parties know the areas they are keeping to and working in, as well as cleaning procedures for any shared spaces to minimise the risk of exposure. Measures should include the use of masks and gloves in shared spaces, wiping down shared surfaces and furniture after use with appropriate cleaning agents (i.e. chairs, tables, door handles, light switches, keyboards and mice, etc.). Have a schedule posted for when to take breaks and where, to help minimise any unnecessary contact with other staff. In terms of scheduling, stagger days when people need to be on site to minimise the number of people at your institution.

- The Canadian Conservation Institute has developed a resource on caring for heritage collections during the COVID-19 pandemic:
 - https://www.cac-accr.ca/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2020/04/ci_covid-19_en_2020-04-17.pdf
- The National Center for Preservation Technology and Training has developed several resources on collections care and health & safety:
 - <https://www.ncptt.nps.gov/blog/covid-19-basics-disinfecting-cultural-resources/>
 - <https://www.ncptt.nps.gov/blog/covid-19-basics-re-entry-to-cultural-sites/>
 - <https://www.ncptt.nps.gov/blog/covid-19-basics-personal-protective-equipment-ppe/>

Collaborating & Monitoring

It will be prudent to implement some system to facilitate check ins with your remote staff members in the absence of being able to physically monitor their progress daily onsite. Consider using something like Google Drive, Microsoft Teams, or Slack to encourage staff collaboration in real-time. If the museum can provide virtual access to a shared drive or folder of files, this will make collaboration and monitoring much easier.

- Google Drive <https://drive.google.com/>
- Microsoft Teams <https://products.office.com/en-ca/microsoft-teams/group-chat-software>
- Slack <https://slack.com/intl/en-ca/>

Schedule (at minimum) weekly virtual staff meetings to provide support and help you evaluate the progress of your remote staff and their respective tasks. At this time, staff can also report on logged hours and expenditures. The same system of short, weekly (at minimum) check-in meetings is also useful for one-on-one progress sharing or supervision, by the main supervisor or a project-specific supervisor, and will help seasonal staff feel connected. In both cases, be sure to encourage staff to be creative and share ideas as well as lessons learned.

Some other helpful resources:

- Article on managing remote employees: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/mikekappel/2018/08/22/how-to-manage-remote-employees/#1d-6171b56ab5>
- Remote work tips: <https://slackhq.com/remote-work-tips>
- Options for remotely accessing workplace computers:
 - GoToMyPC - <https://get.gotomypc.com/>
 - RealVNC Viewer - <https://www.realvnc.com/en/>
 - <https://www.business.com/categories/best-remote-pc-access-software/>

Reminder: Review license terms to determine the option that is appropriate for you.

Potential Tasks

Since the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, museums have been responding to community needs, by donating personal protective equipment such as masks and gloves, repurposing in-person programs to online programs, and promoting online collections and associated resources as educational offerings. Now that this initial response has taken place, welcoming remote seasonal staff gives the opportunity to further meet community needs in a more strategic and responsive way.

There are a number of tasks for your organisation that your summer student(s) can work on remotely. In fact, these tasks are likely not much different from what you would have your summer student(s) do if things were business as usual. These tasks include collections management, educational programming, exhibition planning, research, and resource development.

Reminder: When working with copyrighted material for a purpose protected by copyright law, ensure the use is legal, i.e. that you have permission from the copyright holder, or that your use falls under fair dealing or another exception outlined in the copyright act, and you are respecting moral rights, before proceeding. Some useful resources are as follows:

- Canadian Copyright Act <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/c-42/index.html>.
- “What is fair dealing and how does it relate to copyright?,” Simon Fraser University <https://www.lib.sfu.ca/help/academic-integrity/copyright/fair-dealing>
- “Public Domain,” University of British Columbia <https://copyright.ubc.ca/public-domain/>
- “Moral Rights in Canadian Copyright Law,” Copyrightlaws.com <https://www.copyrightlaws.com/moral-rights-in-canadian-copyright-law/>

Collections Management

If you are using a web-based collections management system, devoting some time and attention to it can easily be done from anywhere. Data entry, clean-up, and enrichment (i.e. information improvements) are excellent uses of time that will open doors to new opportunities. If your collection is available online, this is also an opportunity to share your behind-the-scenes efforts with your community. Highlight new discoveries and interesting artifacts by sharing links on social media.

- **Data entry**

Provide remote staff with backup copies of catalogue worksheets and other associated documentation for entering into the database. If possible, set up students with their own unique login so that their work can be easily tracked and reviewed. Be sure to provide staff with training on data entry standards, and reference resources. Ask them to share their first few entries with their supervisor for feedback. These are critical first steps. Skipping them could mean a lot of clean-up work later.

- **Data Clean-up**

Provide staff with a few simple clean-up tasks such as merging duplicate entities (people & organizations) in a relational database, converting imperial measurements to metric, and proofreading entries for spelling and grammatical errors.

- **Data Enrichment**

Challenge staff to “fill in the gaps” of collection records. Using online research, remote staff can research contextual information about businesses and artisans, narrow down date ranges for when objects were made, make improvements to descriptions if multiple high-quality images are attached to records, and more.

- **Digitisation**

If staff are working on-site, they can also digitise the collection. The easiest unsupervised task in this area is to scan 2-dimensional items such as letters, photographs and postcards. As with other tasks, they must be trained on file formats, naming conventions, how to attach the images to the database, and other institutional rules and guidelines. Ask them to share their first scans with their supervisors for feedback. Be careful in setting numerical goals for this work. You do not want students to rush the process.

- **Subject Matter Experts**

Reach out to local experts to see if they are interested in reviewing collection records with staff. Remote staff can schedule virtual meetings and share screens and/or files relating to the individual’s area of expertise and ask for feedback. Staff can take notes on corrections, additions, and/or edits, and make these changes after the meetings. A tip sheet on working with subject matter experts can be [downloaded here](#).

- **Transcription**

Provide staff with backup copies of oral history recordings or handwritten archival documents that can be transcribed. If your database and online collections website has the capacity, have remote staff set these records to be transcribable and promote community transcription challenges on social media. Encourage staff to develop groups of items to be transcribed, following a theme, subject, or even individual that is well known in the community. Share newly transcribed resources and acknowledge when the public completes transcription work online.

Educational Programming

Museums have a lot to offer as educational institutions, and now is the perfect time to revisit former and existing programs to see if they can be repurposed for new delivery platforms. Not only will this help to meet the current educational needs, but in the long-term it will provide your museum with greater flexibility in your educational offerings by giving the option of in-person or online programming. It is important to remember that this is new, experimental work. Some initiatives will be more successful than others, and it is okay if some programs cannot be repurposed. Include evaluation mechanisms to capture what works and what needs improvement.

Regardless of whether the program is repurposed or new, design it for your targeted audience(s). Consider age, dexterity, length of time it takes to complete the project, and difficulty of the project. Reach out to local schools and/or teachers to see if there is anything the museum can do to help with their virtual learning reality.

Reminder: Review license terms if using graphic design or media software to determine the option that is appropriate for you and your staff.

- **Colouring Pages**

Turn artworks, maps, photographs and similar items from your collection that are in the public domain (i.e. not impacted by copyright) into colouring pages, sharing these on your website and social media. Host a virtual colouring contest and ask people to share their entries. Consider offering a prize as well, such as free admission when the museum reopens, museum swag (branded pen, mug, or t-shirt). This also opens the door for a future exhibit that pairs the actual collection items with the colourful interpretations of the community. Be sure to include items that will translate into various difficulty levels so there is something for everyone. Use #ColorOurCollections to expand your reach. This is an international initiative.

- Some free apps and websites to convert images to colouring pages:
- Colorscape (<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/colorscape-turn-your-photos/id1054822637?mt=8>)
- Lunapic (<http://www169.lunapic.com/editor/?action=colorbook>)
- Pixlr (<https://pixlr.com/>)
- ScrapColouring (<http://scrapcoloring.com/convert-images-to-coloring-pages>)

- **Teacher Resource Templates**

Remote staff can conduct research on the wide variety of educational resources that museums currently have available. After investigating and comparing the options, they can develop a short list of favourites that would align with the museum's mission and mandate and also meet key provincial curriculum outcomes and tie-ins.

These examples can be customized into templates that the museum can use multiple times, working with specific artifacts and information from the collection. Ideally, the museum should partner with a local teacher (retired or active) who can review the templates to make sure they will meet teacher and student needs.

- **Virtual Learning**

Remote staff can review existing programs and repurpose them into live, online learning sessions. To do this, it is important to have a script, and to test drive the activity and lesson before it is actually delivered. Be sure to use materials that are readily available so people will not struggle to find supplies or participate. Check out the Museum of Ontario Archaeology's [Facebook page](#) or the [Northern Rockies Museum's Quarantarian](#) program for ideas.

- **Virtual Tours**

If staff are working on-site, they can showcase the museum through virtual tours. Each exhibit can be filmed separately, and then shared on social media, encouraging people to ask questions and share memories or other information. Alternatively, staff could host Facebook Live tours and answer questions from the audience as they are submitted. The BC Museums Association hosted a webinar for an [Introduction to Livestream Site Tours](#), and you can check out [The Army Museum's](#) virtual tours to see examples of pre-recorded virtual tours.

Exhibition Development

While your museum may be closed to the public, this does not have to mean that your exhibits are inaccessible to the public, or that you can't be preparing for your next exhibit. Remote staff can compile ideas for future exhibits and conduct research for them. They can also turn current exhibits into virtual exhibits, or develop entirely new virtual exhibits. There are many options for sharing collections records and exhibits online.

Intellectual property rights must be taken into consideration with online exhibits.

For contemporary artists whose work is (or will be) featured in permanent online exhibitions, consult the Canadian Artists Representation/Le Front des Artistes Canadiens (CARFAC) fee schedule at <https://carfac-raav.ca/2020-en/>.

- **Artefacts Canada**

If your organisation is registered with CHIN (Canadian Heritage Information Network) as a contributor, remote staff can refresh current uploads or prepare new records for uploading. CHIN staff are also currently working remotely, so there may be delays in records being published. If you are not registered as a contributor, CHIN is currently unable to follow-up with requests that are submitted until staff return to normal duties.

<https://app.pch.gc.ca/application/formulaires-forms/ac/contribuer-contribute.app?lang=en>

- **Canada Council for the Arts**

This organisation has released a new grant to help arts organisations go digital. Projects will be hosted on a dedicated CBC/Radio-Canada website. Competition will open in mid-May and close in June. Provincial/Territorial Collections Portal

<https://canadacouncil.ca/initiatives/digital-originals>

- **Provincial/Territorial Collections Portal**

Several provinces/territories have their own provincial version of Artefacts Canada or otherwise facilitate the sharing of collections records or exhibits online. Contact your provincial/territorial museum association to learn more about these options.

- **Social Media**

Posting your collections online to social media is a legitimate means of community engagement, provided that the posts are accompanied with appropriate context.

Staff will need account/login information and guidance on content. There are numerous social media campaigns that the museum can participate in, such as #Museumfromhome and #CultureinQuarantine.

Read about what works. A number of bloggers have written about social media best practices and digital engagement (i.e. [Museum Hack](#), [The Museum of the Future](#), [Museum 2.0](#)). As a general rule, any images you are posting to your organisation's social media accounts of your collections must meet the following criteria:

- Be of an item that is part of your permanent collection;
 - Be of an item for which you have appropriate documentation regarding the proper transfer of ownership to your organisation
 - Be in the public domain, or something that your organisation is legally and ethically permitted to publish online
 - Be posted with a watermark of your organisation; and
 - Provide a credit line for the author (artist) and date of creation.
- **Virtual Museum of Canada**

Administered by the Canadian Museum of History, calls for participation are typically made in June. Multiple grants are available through the Community Stories and Virtual Exhibits Investment Programs. Support grants range from \$15,000 to \$250,000.

- <https://vmc.historymuseum.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/VMC-information-EN.pdf>
- <https://vmc.historymuseum.ca/community-stories-program/>
- <https://vmc.historymuseum.ca/virtual-exhibits-investment-program/>

Resource Development

Museums have a wide variety of internal resources that support the board, staff, volunteers, and the visiting public. Museums are also openly sharing resources and ideas online as operations shift to a new reality. While remote staff may not have the authority to revise policies or develop new resources, they are perfectly positioned to review both internal and external resources and draft updates to reflect the new reality. These drafts can then be reviewed by senior staff and/or the board. In all work, be sure to accommodate online sharing and operation realities, which may not be reflected in older resources. Include information about what was learned during the museum's COVID-19 response.

- **Curriculum Review**

If the museum does not have an overview of the provincial curriculum with heritage ties, this is an excellent time to develop this resource. Most provincial curricula are available online. Remote staff can read through by subject and identify links to museum programs and resources. For younger grades, social studies and visual arts often have clear linkages to material culture and

local history. For higher grade levels, Canadian culture and history courses are rife with opportunities for museums. If possible, partner with a local teacher (retired or active) to review the resource when it is completed.

- **Donor/Member/Volunteer Database Clean-up**

Whether the museum uses a database or spreadsheet to maintain donor, membership and/or volunteer information, this is a good opportunity to review the information and ensure that it is accurate and up-to-date. This may involve phoning and/or emailing individuals, so providing staff with a script or talking points would be beneficial.

- **Emergency Plans**

Numerous museums have noted that their existing emergency preparedness plans do not account for a situation like COVID-19. Reviewing the existing plan and adding details about quarantine, sanitation of contaminated areas/items, and other lessons recently learned is a prudent and timely exercise.

- **Monitoring and Reporting on Analytics**

For social media and website use, remote staff can monitor feedback and platform analytics, compiling a report on their findings. This may be especially useful after COVID-19, to determine what sorts of online activities the museum may want to continue, since it is a good time to experiment.

- **Online Fundraising Campaign**

While remote staff will not likely have the authority to carry out fundraising campaigns, they can conduct research on past and present online campaigns being run by other museums, and compile a report for their supervisor and/or the board of directors. Looking at the different platforms/websites available, links to museum programs, promotion and if possible, community response, would all be helpful to the board as they develop a plan to address the financial impact of COVID-19.

- **Policy Research**

As noted above, remote staff will not likely have the authority to revise policies, they may be able to assist in conducting research for new policies that have been earmarked for development, to identify common types of policies that your institution does not already have, or to identify areas in which existing policies may need to be updated. Senior staff and/or the board can then refer to this research when reviewing and developing policies.

- **Procedural Updates**

Working remotely is an excellent opportunity to make improvements to procedural documents. Remote staff can test out existing procedures and add/edit missing details or make additional notations about handling tasks remotely. This is a great exercise in succession planning and will support future training and supervision efforts.

- **Website Review**

Conducting a review of the museum's website is a good task for new, remote staff. Ask staff to check for broken links, out-of-date information, spelling or grammatical errors, inconsistent formatting, and other issues, reporting their findings to their supervisor in the form of a report. They can also compare the museum's website with other museum websites and share suggestions for improvements based on their findings.

Many thanks to our contributing partners:



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