OMA Webinar

Transitioning from Living History to Living the History

Thank you for joining us!

Katrina Pyke

Coordinator, Pickering Museum Village

Ellen Tayles-Armstrong

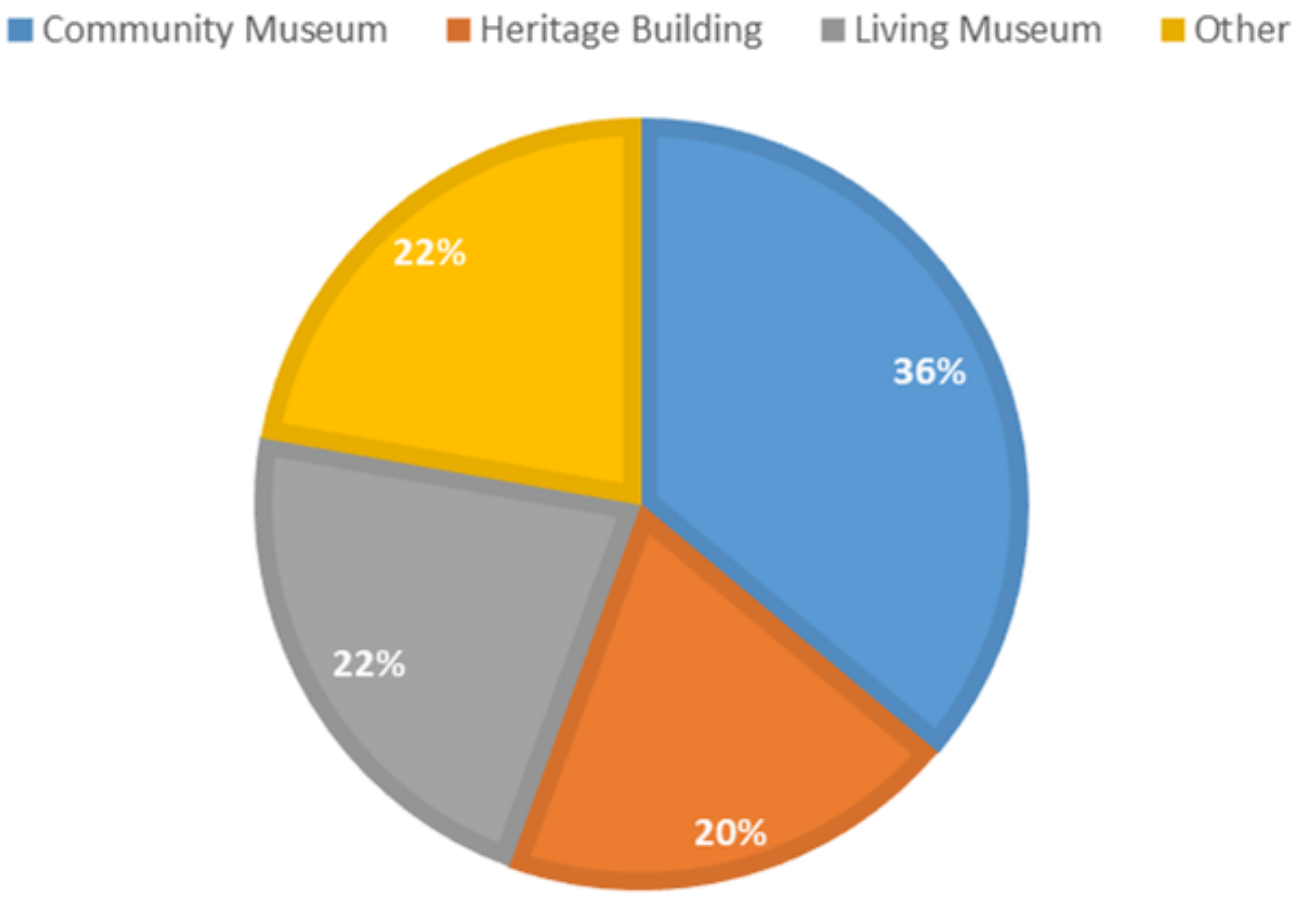
Conservator

Agenda

1. Living History – what is it, and who measures up?
2. The Visitor Experience (Events & Exhibits)
3. Wake up call
4. A New Approach
5. Shifting the Culture
6. Results

Living History

Survey Says...


Community Museum
Heritage Building
Living Museum
Other
36%
20%
22%
22%

Poll!

What elements do you think are needed to be an award-winning Living History Museum?

a) An authentic setting that makes the visitor feel as though they have stepped back into the past

b) The opportunity for visitors to try activities of the interpreted time period (churning butter, participating in a Viking drill, etc.)

c) Re-enactors in period attire, performing and demonstrating skills and trades in situ

d) Animals and livestock in barns and fields

e) All of the above

[**liv**-ing **his**-t*uh*-ree myoo-**zee**-*uh*m]

A living museum or a living history museum is a museum that recreates historical settings to replicate past time periods. The objective of living history museums is to provide visitors with a practical interpretation of the past. They bring history to life by imitating the conditions of a natural environment, historical period, or culture to the fullest. Living museums use various interpretive techniques such as exhibitions and costumed historians who represent historical characters to make simulations of past periods as authentic as possible. The key difference between a living museum and other historical sites is that living history museums give interpretations in the first-person present.

(World Atlas definition)

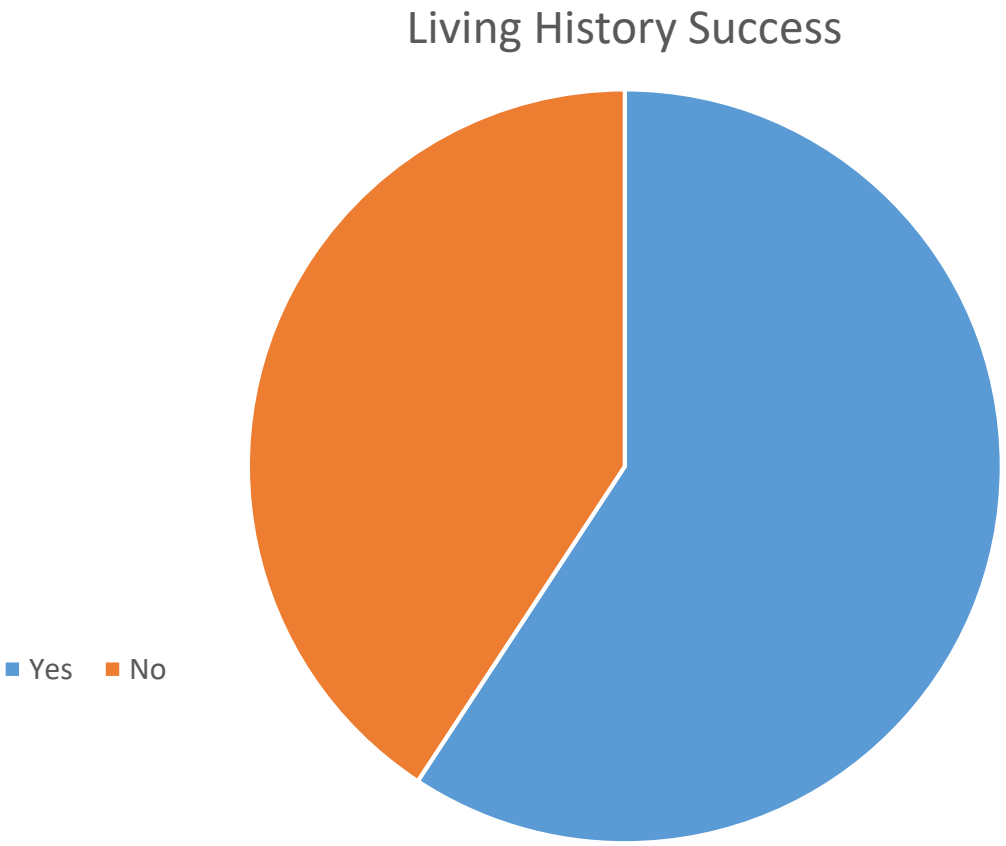
Chat!

Name the first Living History Museum that pops into your head.

The Top 10!

- Norstead (NL)
- Fortress of Louisbourgh National Historic Site, (NS)
- King's Landing Historical Settlement (NB)
- Village Historique Acadien (NB)
- Upper Canada Village (ON)
- Saint Marie among the Hurons (ON)
- Fort Gibralter (MAN)
- Ukrainian Cultural Historical Village (AB)
- Heritage Park Historical Village (AB)
- Barkerville (BC)

We're not on that list. Are you?



Visitor Experience: Events & Exhibits

Drawing Back the Curtain

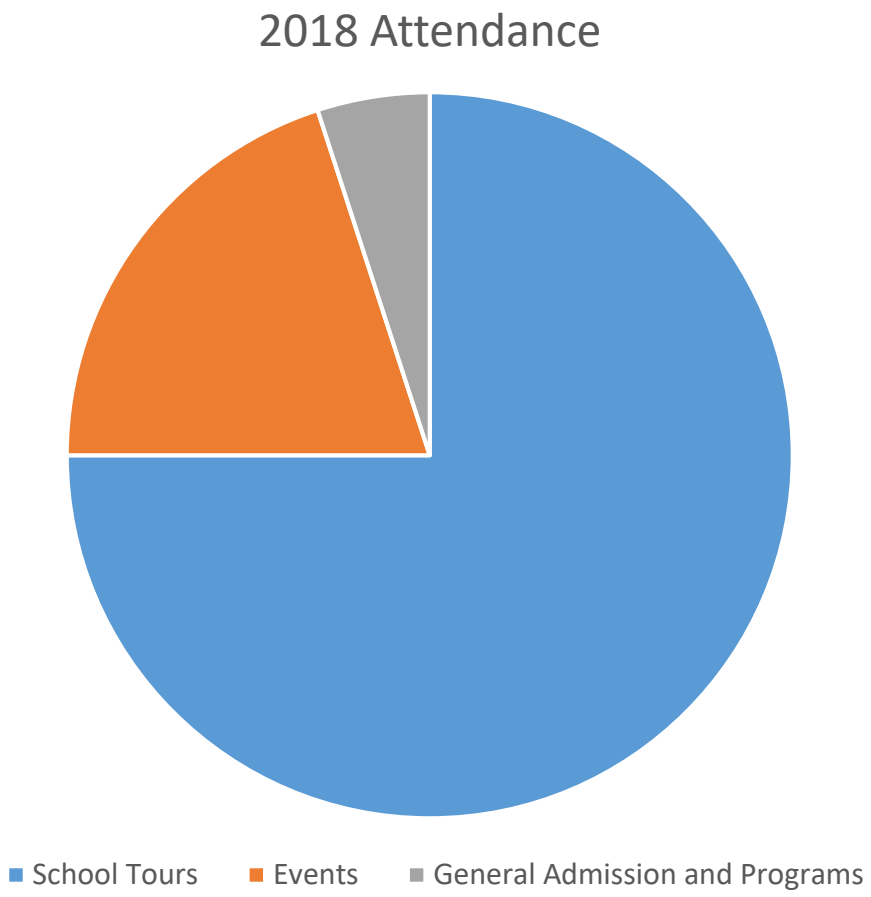
Poll!

Which best describes your museum?

a. Our museum is doing the “event façade”.

b. Our museum is “all in” all the time

Danger Ahead!



Poll!

Pre-COVID, did your museum depend on events to draw your greatest public attendance?

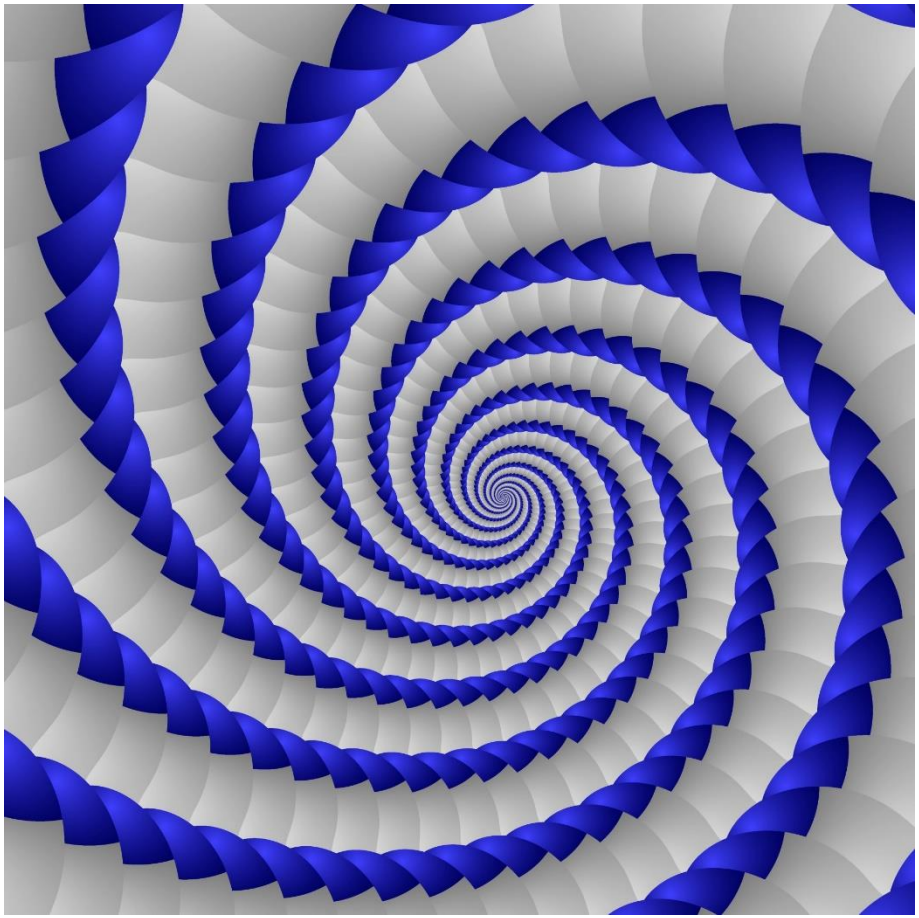
Are Our Exhibits Unique?

Ho-Hum...

Poll!

If you have permanent exhibits in your museum (living history or non-living history), how long has it been since you have reviewed, renewed, or refreshed them?

Been There, Done That



Wake Up Call

Attendance Trends at Major U.S. Heritage Village/Living History Sites

	FTE	PTE	Volunteers	Attendance 1998	Attendance 2008	Attendance 2010	Attendance 2017
George Washington's Mount Vernon	333	247	400			1,154,781	1,136,793
Jamestown Settlement, American Revolution Museum at Yorktown	163	250	1200	613,275	705,290	692,086	610,092
Colonial Williamsburg				938,079	900,000	780,000	568,932
Old Salem Museum & Gardens	96	82	75	138,973			450,000
Salem Maritime National Historic Site *(2010 staff numbers)*	25	12	70	802,214	856,935	806,506	373,630
Conner Prairie	89	238	488	310,000	175,000	315,455	315,455
Plimoth Plantation	112	58		473,650	366,403	324,351	257,048
Mystic Seaport	150	200	600	466,631	300,000	300,000	250,000

Uh Oh!

- ✓ Extremely authentic looking settler village
- ✗ Digital experiences
- ✗ Diversity of experiences
- ✗ Interactive, inclusive and story-based experiences
- ✗ Interdisciplinary activities and experiences
- ✗ Personalized pathways and experiences
- ✗ “Surprising” pathways and experiences

A New Approach

Where to start?

Exhibit Goals

1. Create a fun space for visitors to play and learn with as many interactives and hands-on activities as possible

2. Create a space that did not depend upon a staff person interpreting it

3. Create a space where families with young children could explore, discover, and learn independently

4. Create an exhibit space and theme around which education and public programming could bring a new storyline to life

5. Create space that provided room within the building exhibit for programming

Poll!

Would a radical change in interpretive programming result in pushback from your internal stakeholders?

Shifting the Culture

Woo-ing

Uh oh! What will our staff, volunteers and public think?

Is this too sharp a left turn? Is it tooooo radical?

How we “woo-ed” the staff and volunteers

Creating Living The History Experiences

Results

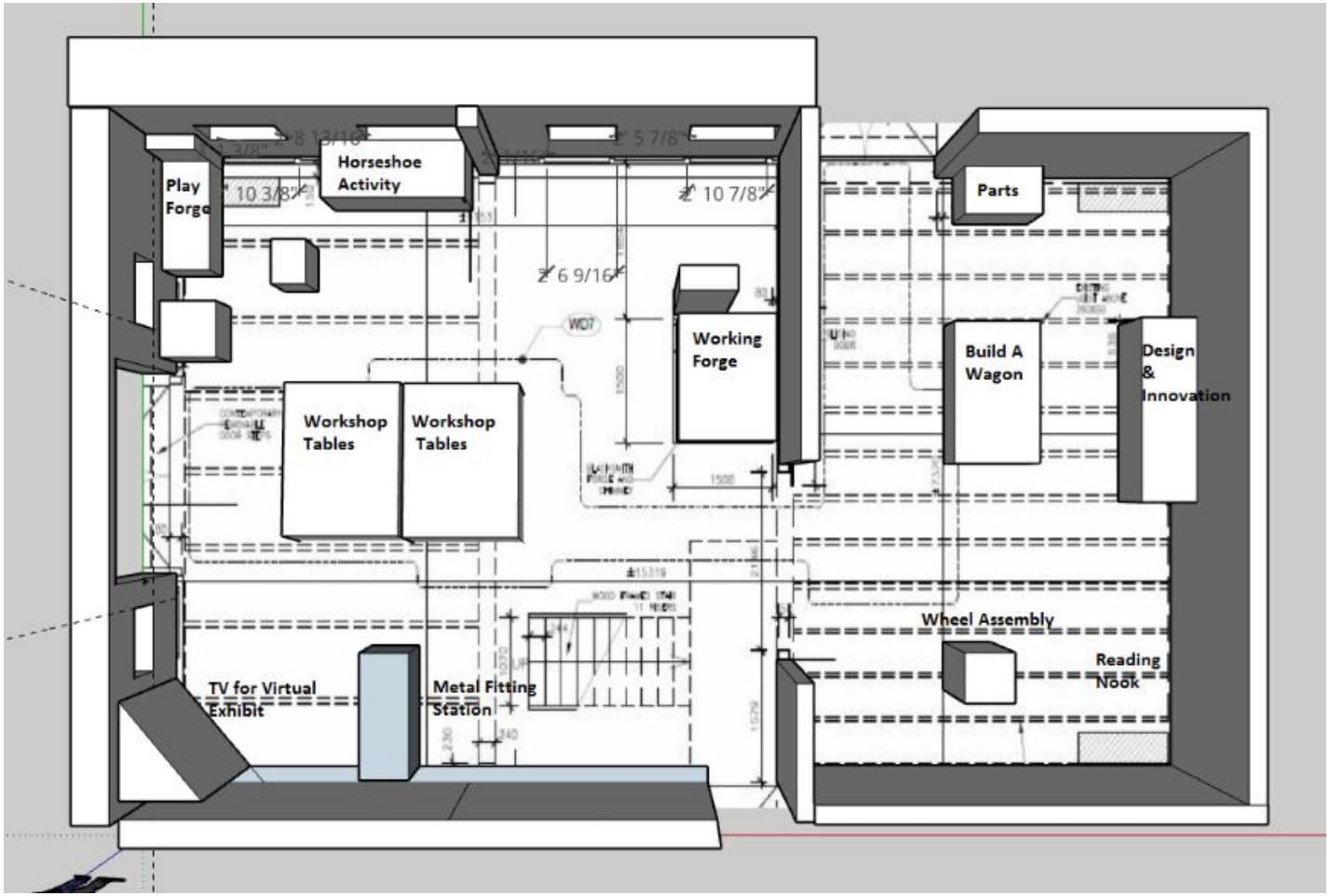
The Finished Exhibit

"My kids (2 and 5) loved the program and have not stopped talking about it. They especially loved the interactive barn."

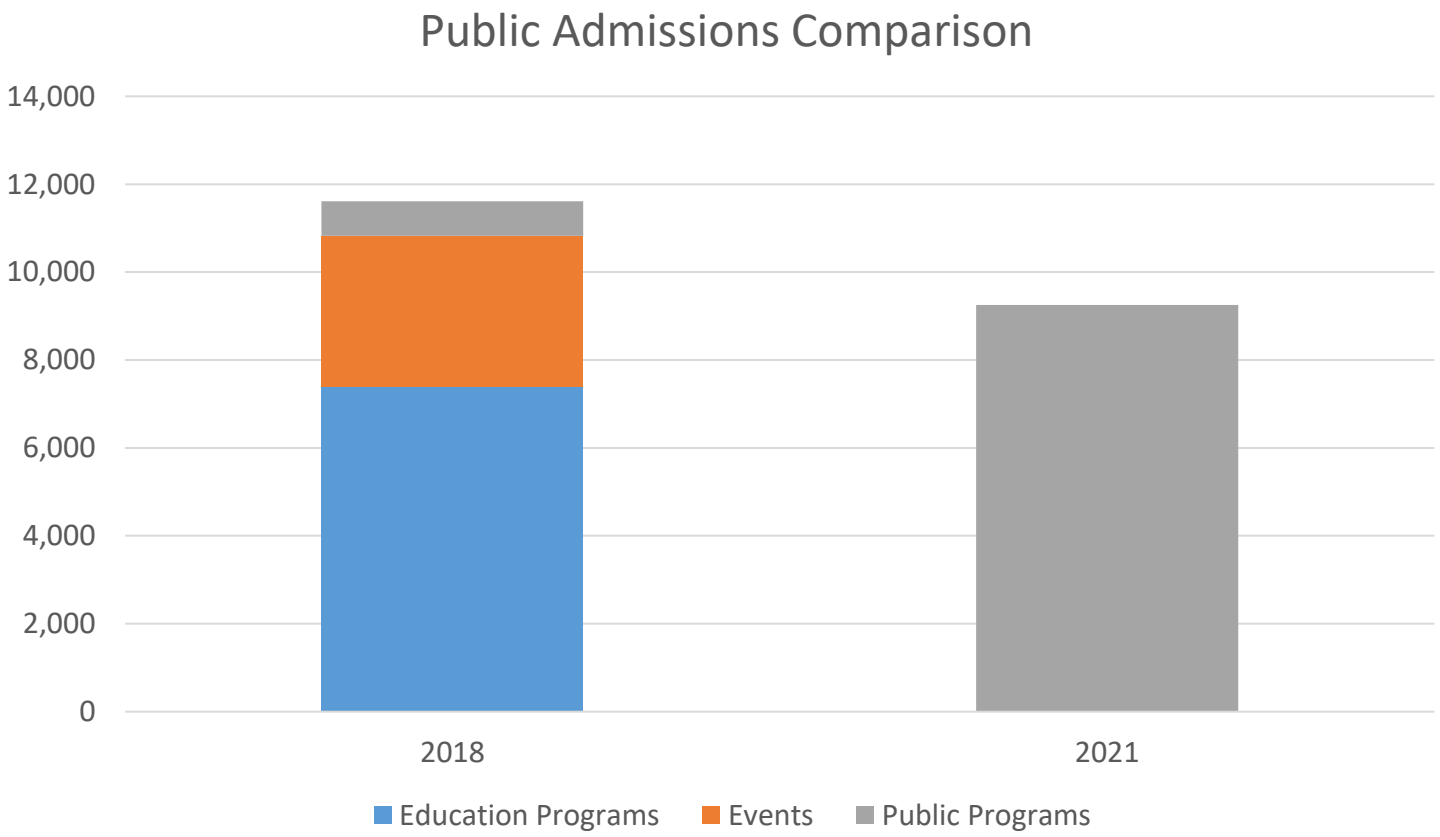
"It was GREAT!"

Round 2: Applying What We Learned

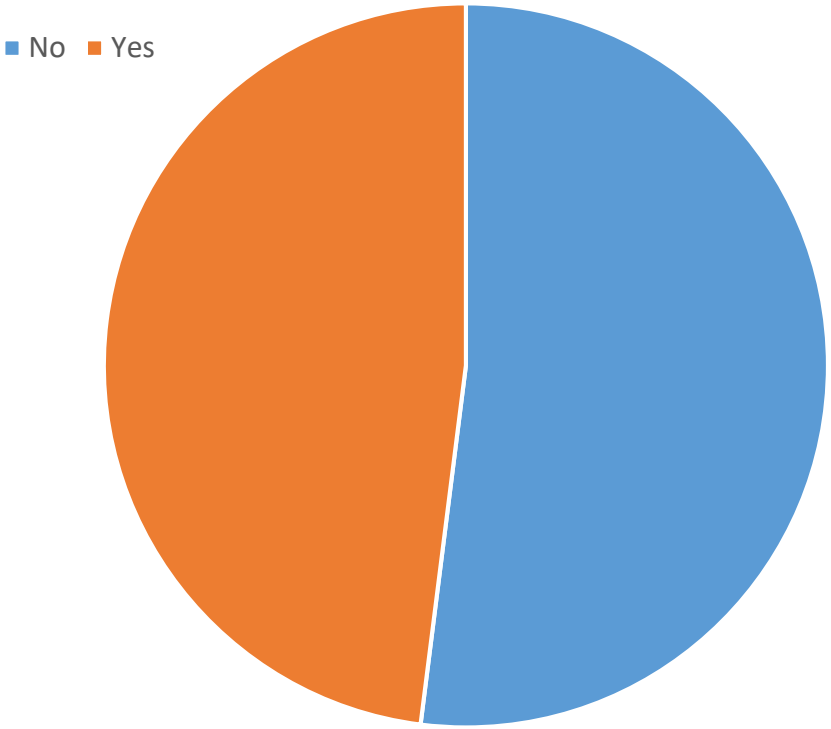
What's in Store



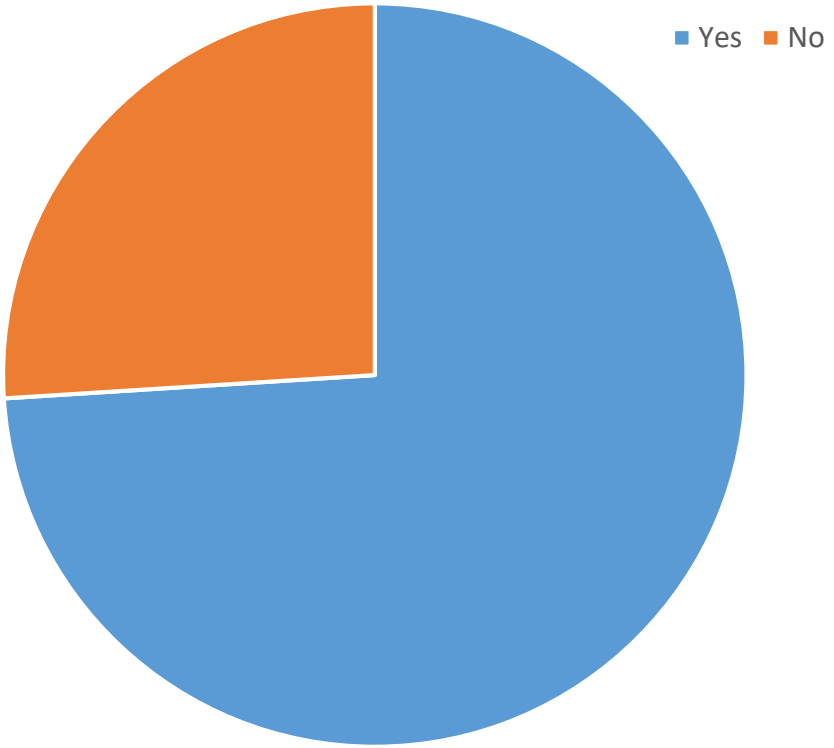
The Right Path?



Go Ahead... Challenge the Status Quo



Pre-COVID push for change



COVID reaction

In Conclusion..

Take-Aways from today:

1. Challenge the status quo
2. Hard truths are hard to accept
3. Tips for shifting culture

QUESTIONS

Ellen Tayles-Armstrong

Conservator
T. 905.420.4620 ext. 3717
etayles@pickering.ca

Katrina Pyke

Coordinator, Museum Operations
T. 905.420.4620 ext. 3714
kpyke@pickering.ca