Close to Home: The Evolving Engagement Strategies of Alberta’s Local Museums in Canada’s Cultural Landscape

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Museum Studies
Faculty of Information
University of Toronto

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Abstract

In February 2016, the Canadian Government announced for the first time in thirty years it would undertake a study on the state of Canadian museums, yet there was no mention of small local museums. Despite the prolific nature of local museums in Canadian communities, little scholarly work has been done with or on them to understand their specific obstacles and locally-focused engagement strategies. Local museums, then, develop distinct forms of museological practice but receive little attention when it comes to policy, strategic planning, or reliable public funding. To address this gap, my thesis contributes a comparative analysis based on three local museums in rural and suburban Alberta. Through an analysis of policy, funding, programming, and community contexts, I seek to explore how community well-being, museum-community relationships, and museum sustainability can be identified and understood though local museums.
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Chapter 1
Local Museums in Context: the Albertan, Canadian, and Museum Studies Perspective

History is important to this community because it is one of the things we have left. The mining is gone, the lumber is gone, a railroad is just a railroad . . . What do we have left? It boils down to heritage. It boils down to history.

– Chris Matthews, Executive Director of the Crowsnest Museum & Archives

Introduction

In February 2016, the Canadian Government announced for the first time in 30 years it would undertake a study on the state of Canadian museums (Canadian Museums Association, 2016). Yet there was no mention of small local museums. Local museums are often community-focused, having been established to communicate the history of an area, often by a group of local volunteers (Crooke, 2008). Catlin-Legutko and Klingler argue that local museums are the bedrock of the museum profession: “You will not find museums the size of the Smithsonian or historic sites like Gettysburg in every American community, but you will often find a small museum, sometimes more than one” (2012, xi). The prolific nature of local museums is important because that means they are the most readily available form of interpretation and programming that people interact with. The Canadian Museums Association responded to the proposed study in 2016 with the Brief to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, stating that “The Canadian patrimony is not all located in national museums . . . and the real stories that shaped this country are found in local, regional and small museums and galleries across our incredible land. This is a rich tapestry knitted together by the love of volunteers and some generous donors. It is a tapestry that is very fragile and this country needs to take this issue very seriously” (p. 2). Although there is an understanding in the field that local museums are important to the cultural landscape of Canada, there is little attention being given to them. Besides being understudied, the Canadian Museums Association (2016) states that these
museums are underfunded. I return to the question of what makes a museum “local” on pages 15-19.

Despite this prominence of museums in Canadian communities, little scholarly work has been done with or on local museums. The primary roles of museums in Canada are often associated with collecting, preserving, educating, and exhibiting tangible and intangible history (see pp. 13-15 for a fuller discussion). Local museums, particularly those located in more rural areas, however, frequently expand their work into their communities, with whom they are in close contact on a more regular basis. The faces of those museum employees, volunteers, and board members are seen daily by the community and therefore create a personal link to the museum and its mandate. Museums on a local level may be more inclined to participate in a variety of public events or personal inquiries. Museum studies scholars have pointed to smaller, local, community-based museums as institutions to look to for possible solutions and strategies to create new engaged frameworks for museums to work from (Janes, 2009; Kerr, 2014). For local museums, “building connections across disciplines and throughout the community enables them to accomplish more with less” (Hartman & Hines-Bergmeier, 2015, p. 301). The goal is to create a sustainable and relevant institution for whomever the museum believes makes up their community. One sentiment that has been repeatedly written is that local museums have intimate relationships with their communities, perhaps more so than larger museums at the city, provincial, and federal level (Candlin, 2015; Goforth, 2012; Janes, 2009). The stories they tell reside in local memory and centre upon the local community. It is these relationships and local values that guide small museum problem-solving in a more personal way than in larger institutions. Staff must step out of standard roles to take on more active civic responsibilities to engage audiences (Matelic, 2012; Walden, 2012). They can be, with the right people, places of experimentation (Gurian Heumann, 2007).

When museum scholarship does attend to small museums, it is often as an idealized, even romanticized, concept, which can lead to assumptions about the role of small local museums. Robert Janes (2009) claims the unique relationship between local museums and their communities is the key to intelligent adaptation that all museums should replicate to stay sustainable. Douglas Worts (2016) states that when a museum looks to its local community for guidance in terms of needs and opportunities, it allows for a more rigorous and healthy exchange
of ideas among museum professionals on a national scale. In museum studies, this relationship is cited as the exciting path forward for the future for museums, but for many local museums this is, and always has been, the basic survival mode.

Suggestions in the literature for what museums can do to better engage their communities are often already being done by local museums, such as developing events tailored to local interests, taking collections to the community, and collaborating with community partners (Matelic, 2012; Turakhia, 2014). The creation and support of these community relationships to create investment is otherwise known as community engagement, where museums work with their communities to create exhibits and programming that matter to local concerns (Matelic, 2012). Local museums, then, develop distinct forms of museological practice but receive little attention when it comes to policy, strategic planning, or reliable public funding.

The specific challenges tackled by local and regional museums have not been discussed at length or studied in any rigorous manner in Canada, aside from the recent work of McTavish (2017). Since 2014, McTavish and her research team have been attempting to visit the over 300 museums in Alberta to study the ways in which these centres sustain local identities while contributing to economies (McTavish, 2016; Nikolic, 2017). Still, to address this gap, my thesis contributes a comparative analysis based on three local museums in rural and suburban Alberta. I give special attention to the community engagement strategies of the Crowsnest Museum in Coleman, the Multicultural Heritage Centre in Stony Plain, and the Lac La Biche Regional Museum & Discovery Centre in Lac La Biche. I also surveyed museums of all sizes in Alberta to create comparison data on community engagement practices that did not previously exist. I seek to expand museological understanding that more fully acknowledges how local museums foster civic responsibility, create social change locally, or act as a point of convergence between local interests and global concerns. Further, I seek to generate data that can assist in strategic, policy, and funding decisions at municipal, provincial, and federal levels. Fundamentally, this thesis seeks to answer the question: What kinds of community engagement strategies do local museums
in Alberta use and to what extent do these lead to long-term investment and museum sustainability? Through an analysis of policy, funding, programming, and community contexts, I seek to explore how community well-being, museum-community relationships, and museum sustainability can be identified and understood through local museums.

This thesis details the context of each case study (chapter two), the obstacles the institutions face (chapter three), the engagement strategies they utilize to create sustainable museum practices (chapter four), and ultimately considers what local museum practices in Alberta can contribute to our understanding of community engagement and museology (chapter five). According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary (2018), an obstacle is something that impedes progress or achievement. Museums face many obstacles: declining funding coupled with increased demands; the growth of collections along with a reduction in collections care resources; increasingly complicated policy and regulatory issues; and the need to become more socially responsible and relevant (Latham and Simmons, 2014; Stein 2012). Canadian museums—especially small museums—are no exception to these challenges (CMA, 2016). Museums are increasingly expected to be responsive to their communities and to justify and develop their roles in society. There are visitors and museum workers who find these changes exciting while for others they threaten the traditional role of the museum; some fear the work of collecting, researching, and documenting will be swamped by financial, political, and social pressures (Watson, 2007). This means that the boundary between ideas of obstacles and opportunities can remain unclear in many local museum contexts.

My research demonstrates that solutions are particular to each museum and region and that it is not easy to declare general frameworks or solutions for small museum community engagement practices. Strategies to compensate for the many obstacles local museums face may vary considerably depending on museum mandate, the opinions of board members, directors, and staff, and the community that the museum is trying to form a long-lasting relationship with. In the USA, there are proponents of the idea that local small museums serve distinct functions and

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1 For the purposes of this thesis, long-term investment means how much the community believes in the museum and its purpose and how that belief translates economically and socially in the area.
are not little museums trying to become major museums, but rather, are “string quartets, not orchestras” (Friesen, 2012, p. 50). This metaphor supports my main conclusion: that small museums are a genre and that we should not view them as on the same trajectory as large museums. They often cannot and should not seek to be the same as large institutions. Likewise, large museums cannot presume that they can simply adopt the strategies of local museums with the same outcomes. It is my hope that this thesis will help to lay the groundwork for further research with local museums across the country to create a more nuanced picture of local museums in Canada.

Community Engagement and the Social Role of Museums

Despite there being little research on local museums in Canada specifically, there is a wealth of literature on community engagement practices and the changing social role of museums. My theoretical framework is based within research on local museums from global, national, and provincial perspectives; community studies and the idea of social change; and finally, museums and community engagement strategies. In considering this literature, it is crucial to balance it with what little research does exist about local museums in Canada, and more specifically, in Alberta.²

Museum and Local Museum

The International Council of Museums, or ICOM, defines a museum as a “non-profit permanent institution in the service of society and its development . . . which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates, and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity” (ICOM, 2007). There is no federal level museum policy in Canada that corroborates this definition. The only definition is in the 1990 Museums Act, which focuses solely on Canada’s National Museums. The Alberta Museums Association (AMA) definition of “museum” is nearly identical to that of ICOM. These definitions, while covering the basic duties of the museum, continue to frame museums as the traditional researcher, preserver, and educator.

² The Alberta Museums Association is a prominent voice in the museum field in Alberta; however, it is more a source of professional development opportunities and operational documents and materials. They are not a body that conducts research with local museums. Not all museums in the province are accredited through the Alberta Museums Association and hence, gain the ability to get support from the Association.
The museum’s role is beginning to encompass much more though, particularly with the institutionalization of 1980s postmodernist theory addressing museum policy and practice (Gable, 2013; Hooper-Greenhill, 1994; Wood & Wolf, 2008).

Professionals have begun to realize there is a growing emphasis on the plurality of publics and the creation of collaborative spaces, although inclusive community models for museums exist as far back as the mid-20th century (Modest, 2013). Known as the second museum revolution, during this time museum professionals grew weary of the ivory tower status of their institutions and began to reach out to their communities. These new mindsets contributed to the ecomuseum movement in France, which focuses on local identity and the participation and development of communities (Davis, 2011; Sutter et al., 2016). Ecomuseums take the entire community, locality, built and intangible heritage, and create an experience that immerses visitors (Davis, 2011).

While there are a few ecomuseums within Canada, local museums—or community museums that focus on the history of an area or group—are a common presence across the country. Crooke (2008) sees local museums as community-focused, independent, and established to communicate the history of an area by passionate local individuals. They are frequently created through grassroots initiatives, developed by non-professionals ardent about the value and significance of the heritage in the area and its potential.

**Local Museums Globally, in Canada, and in Alberta**

Globally, local museums are the focus of research in regions such as Western Europe (Crooke, 2008; Davis, 2011; Gonzales, 2013; Hubert, 1985) and countries such as South Africa (Rassool, 2006), Taiwan and Hong Kong, (Choi, 2017; Liu, 2015), Peru (Klarich, 2014; Rathbone, 2007) and Brazil (Duarte Cândido, 2012). The local museums at the heart of these studies are more radical than those in North America and developed with social agendas in mind (Crooke, 2008). They are often used to counteract traditional museology and serve the community in some distinct way. A frequently cited example of this is District Six Museum in Cape Town, South

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3 The most well known are the Ecomuseum Zoo in Montreal and Kalyna Country in Alberta, which claims to be the world’s largest ecomuseum at 20,000 square kilometres (Kalyna Country, 2016).
Africa, which integrates community in all aspects, from its creation to its exhibitions and programming (Rassool, 2006). It is a forum for discussion and a space of knowledge production and cultural representation. It is also active in land redistribution and reclamation. In Brazil, there has been a recent spike in community-driven local museums, all connected in an ecology of state, regional, municipal, or themed networks, proven to increase dialogue between museums (Duarte Cândido, 2012).

In the UK, research has focused on holistic community-based museum experiences. Fiona Candlin’s book *Micromuseology* (2015) is a case study experience of micromuseums in the UK, which are a smaller and more intimate type of museum experience. These small museums bridge the divide between personal and professional, political and neutral, proper museum protocol and something akin to an overstuffed closet. Her research argues for a reconsideration of museology based on small museum ideas and personalities, not only larger and world-class institutions.

In the USA, there has been plenty written on small museums such as historic houses, ecomuseums, and neighborhood community-driven museums, mostly as case study chapters in museological anthologies (c.f. Catlin-Legutko & Klinger, 2012; Levin, 2007). Work with small museums is often professionally done through the American Alliance of Museums, which offers support and resources for small museums in the country (American Alliance of Museums, 2017). It is fair to say that small museums are perhaps undertheorized and put on a trajectory to become like larger institutions; writing seems to be focused on professional practice and development, not necessarily to understanding small museums as a genre.

The role of the museum in Canada has changed dramatically over the last half a century, with the *Massey Report* in 1951 being the first legislation that outlined the role of museums in Canada. In 1967, for Canada’s centennial, the government infused millions of dollars into the heritage sector and many civic museums were built or renovated during this year (Canadian Museums Association, n.d.) The roles of museums grew and changed under Prime Minister Trudeau in the 1970s and 1980s, when the Canadian national mindset shifted to one of “multiculturalism”, a term originally coined in a 1971 speech by Trudeau and subsequently implemented in the 1988 *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* (MacDonald & Alsford, 2007). Because of this policy, museums have evolved to focus on a culturally plural Canada and are faced with the challenge of
becoming a model for intercultural respect and cooperation, at least on the federal level. Canada’s federal government funds the National Museums of Canada, six museums located in the country’s capital of Ottawa, along with the Human Rights Museum in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The country’s *National Museum Policy*, established in 1972 and last reviewed in 1990, still only concentrates on national museums and institutions of a larger scale. According to the CMA’s 2016 *Brief*, the federal government offers only modest support to Canadian museums.

For example, the Museums Assistance Program (MAP) was created in 1972, overseeing an annual total of $7 million for grants to fund projects within non-federal museums. Based on inflation, this is equivalent to $38 million today, yet MAP’s current allocation is only $6.5 million per year—even less than when it began (Canadian Museums Association, 2016). It is also important to note that at the time of the creation of this fund, there were approximately 500 museums in Canada; there are now more than 2,600 museums. With a minor decrease in the overall amount of funds, and five times as many active museums, it stands to reason that many museums are not receiving substantial federal assistance, if they are receiving any at all.

In Canada, local museums outnumber large institutions (Janes, 2009). It is believed that many of these small museums strive for provincial accreditation; in that process, they struggle to mimic larger institutions with different resources. Within Alberta, local museums make up 88.4% of museums in the province and it is believed that this is reflective of other provinces across the country (Nikolic, 2017). Fiscal attention, similar to research, has focused on larger, provincial museums. Provincial budgets provide stable funding that supports long-term planning in larger institutions. In Alberta’s case, the government owns and operates nineteen heritage sites and museums.

According to the Government of Alberta, in the 2017 annual budget, $57.6 million has been allocated toward heritage, which includes: $8.2 million to the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, which supports the Glenbow Museum, Alberta Museums Association, and provincial heritage organizations; $2.3 million to increase operational funding to the Royal Alberta Museum; and support to other provincial museums such as the Reynolds-Alberta Museum, Royal Tyrrell Museum, Head Smashed-in Buffalo Jump, the Provincial Archives of
Alberta, and more (Government of Alberta, 2017). The Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, a branch of Alberta Tourism & Culture, supports museums through the Alberta Museums Association as well as through independent grant programs, such as the Heritage Awareness Grant (Government of Alberta, 2017). Provincially, then, the fiscal focus rests on provincially designated museums (Alberta Historical Resources Act, 2000). The Royal Alberta Museum, for example, is moving into a new state-of-the-art facility, with $253 million from the provincial government and $122.5 million from the federal government for a total cost of $375 million (Alberta Culture and Tourism, 2016).

Local museums in Alberta can be both municipal and rural. Municipal local museums are often run by a branch of city or county government and included in city or county budgets. Rural local museums are small with operating budgets under $250,000 per year (Alberta Museums Association, 2016) and rely on granting bodies, securing funds usually on a yearly basis. What makes museums “local” or “small” is not just their budgets, but their content and messages. Local museums can also have an intimate and crucial relationship with local residents. This has led to them being idealized as outposts of dialogue and social change, as demonstrated in writings by Paul Born (2006) and Robert Janes (2009). However, the reality of what is going on in these community museums is not often discussed in the literature. The work that they attempt to do within the community can be difficult to make a reality due to numerous obstacles. These museums in Alberta also tend toward similar stories and artifacts—namely that of early agriculture and pioneers, which can be a difficult starting point for dialogue. Ideas brought up by Janes and Born—such as lesser bureaucracy and the ability to take more risks—are certainly possible, but context is necessary to understand what local museums are attempting to do in their communities. The museums I visited demonstrate that although collections and subject matter is common across small museums in Alberta, the stories are highly localized (cf. Hursey, 2014).

These numbers are comparable with previous budgets in the last several years, with $54 million in 2016 and $53 million in 2015 (Culture and Tourism Annual Report, 2016; Culture and Tourism Annual Report, 2015).
Community studies, community engagement in museums, and social change

Community and social responsibility have become increasingly important to the value of today’s museums; this is often expressed by museum staff through involving oneself at the local level. Amidst a growing resurgence of interest in civic issues, engagement, and social change, museums of all sizes can implement strategies that create stronger levels of communication with visitors and enhance delivery of institutional missions or mandates (Wood, 2009). Community engagement is not only a social concern but an economic one. Support from locals, as both volunteers and visitors, may be the difference between staying open and shutting the doors (Latham & Simmons, 2014).

Community is a challenging term that is variously defined. A community is made up of complex individuals, each with their own experiences, emotions, and concerns (Onciul, 2013). People may identify themselves (or are identified by others as) a community because of shared geography, beliefs, ancestry, norms, and/or lifestyles (Krmpotich, 2014, 41-2; Waterton & Smith, 2010). Karp (1992) analyzed the term community and its related complexity and assumptions: despite trying to create ideas of communities, each person who defines their identities based on their communities has intensely personal and unique points of view.

According to Karp, communities exist within people, and their values affect people’s perceptions and structure their personal values. Rather than attempting to define community, it has been advised to consider the multitude of facets of community: “Communities have been based on ethnicity, religion, class, or politics; they may be large or small; ‘thin’ or ‘thick’ attachments may underlie them; they may be locally based or globally organized; affirmative or subversive in their relation to the established order; they may be traditional, modern, and even post-modern; reactionary or progressive” (Delanty, 2003). Frequently, community is thought to be associated with a fixed place (Crooke, 2008; Watson, 2007).

It is important to emphasize the range of experiences that make up a community. Crooke (2008) points out that this may lead people to dismiss the term as vague or unhelpful but for Crooke, we have come to a point when the frequency of the word in the literature equates its importance. The process of attempting to define the term community informs us more than we may realize; we
must understand that society and its values are constantly changing, and as these changes occur, definitions of related terms like community will have to change with it (Turakhia, 2014). Despite these variances, there is a common understanding that behind the idea of community is a sense of belonging and allowance for individuals to understand their bonds to one another in place, social networks, culture, and commonalities (Crooke, 2008; Garcia, 2012). It is a complex term that, while creating a sense of belonging, may also create aspects of separation and segregation that are necessary to recognize in a museum context.

When using the term community, I am aware that it involves a heterogeneous group of people, even within rural Alberta. “Community engagement” in the context of my research, refers to how a museum identifies and addresses what its community cares about and how to implement it into the museum’s work. It means establishing long term relationships with community members and working with them to plan programs, share control, and get involved outside of the organization (Matelic, 2012; Onciul, 2013). It is important to note how a museum institutionalizes these relationships; Weil (1999) states that mandates and all aspects of the museum’s work should include public value and social outcomes. However, engagement faces its own challenges and has real consequences for all involved (Onciul, 2013).

In North America, the idea of community engagement and civic-mindedness came to the forefront in the American Association of Museums 2002 report Mastering Civic Engagement: A Challenge to Museums. However, museum work had been shifting over the preceding decade, with actions such as the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act of 1990 and the Task Force Report on Museums and First Peoples published in 1992. These examples demonstrate that work was already being done in the professional sphere in an attempt to bring the museum world up to speed with changing social norms, such as concepts of communities and collaboration in the role of museums and their collections, exhibitions, and programming. The

5 Community engagement can also refer to museums collaborating and working with other museums and not just their local communities. By reaching out to collaborate and engage, museums can tap into a rich bank of ideas, talent, and money that can result in larger networks, and that tapping into community wisdom ensures relevant exhibits (Born, 2002).

6 The American Association of Museums changed their name to the Alliance of American Museums in 2012.
idea of the museum as a political institution with a social agenda is not new, and it is frequently
cited that civic-mindedness was in the original purpose of the museum to better the masses
(Davis, 2011; Silverman, 2010). Over the past several decades, this idea has adapted to
continuing societal changes. The theory of New Museology, for example, encourages improved
understanding of the complex social environment in which museums exist, encourages flexibility
in interpretation of objects, and advocates for increased communication of information among all
stakeholders, both internally and externally (Stam, 2005). The theory of New Museology in a
practical, community-altering sense, however, is more difficult to define and undertake
meaningfully. These ideas did not just stem from the publication of the theory, however; it is
necessary to recognize the entities that have helped to create and share this restructuring of the
museum sector, such as Indigenous and African-American associations and provincial, state, and
federal museum associations. Working with communities either inside or outside of the museum can be viewed to broaden
power sharing and make museums more relevant to more people; however, the process is multi-
faceted and fraught with practical and theoretical problems that need to be addressed (Watson,
2007). Museums must find ways to better and more cost effectively communicate what they do
for the public to see value. According to Born (2006, p. 10), museums, as “keepers of
community history, values, innovation, and provocative ideas” are often overlooked by
community groups as unapproachable tourist destinations, but they can become important
partners, particularly on the local level (Janes, 2009; Jung, 2014). Community engagement is
also working with communities to determine needs, assets, and interests (Garcia, 2012).
Relationships between communities and their museums vary drastically depending on the
situations of each museum and community. Regardless of location and relationship, museums
and communities are intertwined, even though each other’s initiatives and functions are not
always moving in the same direction (Garcia, 2012). Ideally, museums can represent and serve
their communities while communities have the capacity to shape museum agendas (Crooke,
2008).

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7 The latter having influence over museums because of their grants, memberships, and accreditation programs (Weil, 1999).
One way museums measure community engagement success is through social change and well-being. Social change refers to shifting mindsets and what Worts (2006, p. 162) has termed the “cultural health” of a community. Worts advocates for museum engagement strategies that create open-mindedness, empathy, an understanding of differences, and changes in human behaviour that contribute to the sustainability of communities and, ultimately, the planet. Social well-being is further defined as a sign of successful human enterprise and a desirable quality of life (Sutter et al., 2016). Social change and social well-being are entwined with the idea of community engagement and relevance; if a museum is relevant to its communities and if it exhibits and discusses issues of community relevance, then it can lead toward social well-being or social change. In 2013, the UK Museums Association published the report *Museums Change Lives*, in line with UK policies on civic development and community cohesiveness. This report discusses the ability of the museum to change and affect society in positive ways. As noted previously, some pioneering local museums, such as District Six Museum, are actively involved in processes of land reclamation and redistribution. In Canada, museums are being called to participate in reconciliation in the aftermath of residential schooling by educating the Canadian public about this history and its effects. There is the growing expectation of museums to offer pluralistic perspectives in their exhibitions and programming and to take more political stances. It is important to consider how these shifts are felt and practiced in museums, particularly in local museums, compared to these broader calls for social action in the museum field.

**Methods**

*Introduction/Research design*

My research design consisted of a qualitative case study design. I analyzed three case study museums using mixed methods to demonstrate relationships (Cresswell, 2014). This enabled me to explore the many levels of support in small museums, the varied missions and programming, and the range of partnerships. My main research methods consisted of site visits and interviews, document analyses, and a province-wide museum survey. I visited each museum and conducted semi-structured interviews, observed programming, and reviewed documentation related to the case studies’ engagement, such as posters, event announcements, annual reports, and social media presence. I sent out a survey regarding community engagement via email to AMA
accredited museums\(^8\) to create baseline data for comparison of the case study museums to broad museum practices and interests in the province. Data collection was complete at the end of October with analysis (discussed below) through to November 2017.

**Setting and sample/participants**

Case study museums were chosen from the list of AMA Recognized Museums—the accreditation program through the AMA—ensuring my case study museums would share basic expectations in terms of collections management, exhibition and programming mandates and standards. I further determined my case studies by selecting institutions based on their programming and community involvement activities taken from their websites and social media, as I wanted case studies to have evidence of community engagement attempts. My case studies consist of:

- The Crowsnest Museum in Coleman, AB
- The Multicultural Heritage Centre in Stony Plain, AB
- The Lac La Biche Regional Museum & Discovery Centre in Lac La Biche, AB

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\(^8\) All three case study museums were AMA accredited through the Recognized Museum Program.
Figure 1: Site visit locations in Alberta, with British Columbia to the west, Saskatchewan to the east, and Northwest Territories to the north.

Data collection

The site visits took place in three locations in Alberta: Coleman in the south, Stony Plain in the centre of the province, and Lac La Biche in the northern region (see Figure 1). Site visits occurred between August and September of 2017. I visited each museum and conducted semi-structured interviews with staff to gain an understanding of museum roles and perceptions. I was at two case study museums for approximately one week, with my third case study at Lac La Biche shortened to three days. On my site visits, I observed employees, museum programming, and events to understand how museums integrated with their communities through civic work and collaborations with outside entities and what that means to museum staff, volunteers, and board members. During this time, I also conducted an analysis on secondary data. I analyzed local demographic data and evaluated the role of the community and the museum’s engagement based on publications, including pre-existing texts such as newspapers and institutional records, social media presence, and annual reports.
I also sent out a survey in September via email to AMA designated museums. The survey was emailed to eighty-nine museums, with a response rate of 28% (25 respondents). I collected data on budgets, staff size, community engagement practices, and obstacles (see Appendix A for survey questions). The survey consisted of open- and closed-ended questions and was distributed using SurveyMonkey. Cluster sampling was used by choosing survey museums out of the AMA Recognized Museum Program list, and convenience sampling was also used, based on the availability of emails to send the survey to through websites and social media. Reminder emails were distributed on October 20, 2017, and data collection was completed by the end of October.

**Data analysis/interpretation**
Quantitative data from the survey was analyzed through SurveyMonkey and was exported as a .xlsx Excel file. I hand categorized responses based on operational budget brackets (see page 45 for budget ranges). For qualitative survey questions, I also hand-coded data based on operational budget brackets and then further refined my coding dictionary using answers to my qualitative questions focused on income, staff and volunteer numbers, visitor numbers, community definitions, past programs, and engagement definitions. These codes were visualized as graphs to better demonstrate response frequencies for further analysis.

The coding of qualitative interview data based on open-ended questions was done by hand and based on key words informed by museum studies literature on engagement and community museum practice. A second set of codes was developed as emergent keywords based on the responses of interviewees (for a list of all codes, see Appendix B). These codes were refined as I hand coded the printed transcripts in order to organize responses. Two general categories emerged as central to the analysis of community engagement: obstacles and strategies. Thus, data points were coded as belonging to one of these two categories as well as a secondary keyword. For example, obstacle—outreach, or strategy—staff. Through analyzing these codes, I was able to see patterns—or lack thereof—in different aspects of the case study museums and their strategies, based on categories such as funding, community involvement, paid/volunteer status, and outreach. I then determined meaningful similarities or differences in how museums conduct engagement. To determine accuracy, I enlisted member verification (Knight, 2002), where I shared a draft of my findings with the participant(s) to ensure the accuracy of the data
used and to encourage discussion of my interpretations.

**Limitations of research design**

As a researcher, I am aware that subjectivity can play a part in social science research. I used due diligence to be as transparent as possible. Other limitations included: access to people for interviews and surveys; possible respondent refusal; participant honesty; and constrained budget and timeframe. These limitations mean that my case studies are inherently restricted and will not completely portray Alberta’s local museum community. However, they do affirm the benefit of deductive research methods to better represent the experiences, values, and shifting practices of small museums.

The next chapter goes into detail about each of my three case studies. It is important to understand the context of each museum and the different circumstances in their creation and continued existence. I will then compare these case studies against survey data I collected from other museums in Alberta to better situate the case studies in the larger museum field of Alberta. Together, this data allows for a more nuanced understanding of institutional obstacles and reasons for particular engagement strategies.
Chapter 2
The Case Study Museums in Context

The Crowsnest Museum, Coleman, AB

The Place

When I first drove into Coleman, it was through a forest fire haze of smoke that had descended from the Rocky Mountains. It was the summer of forest fires, and this would continue through my entire research trip. My drive passed the Burmis Tree, known as the soldier that watches over the Pass, and the Frank Slide, a rockslide that devastated the Pass and trapped half the town of Frank underneath it in 1914. The remnants of the slide still rest on either side of the highway. The huge scoop taken out of Turtle Mountain is an eerie reminder of the power of nature. I also passed Crowsnest Mountain, like a living creature that had risen and stood above the plains around it, observing, watching, and waiting. I quietly set up my tent and settled into the stillness of the Pass near the end of summer.

Coleman is a town of approximately 1,500 people (Stats Canada, 2016) located in the Crowsnest Pass, one of the most northern thoroughfares through the Rocky Mountains. In 1979 the town amalgamated with four other towns to create the Municipality of Crowsnest Pass with a population of approximately 5,000 people. Coleman, a town created in 1903 to service a new coal mine, is a National Historic Site. The Pass’ coal mining heritage is evident in its historic buildings, the ruins of the coal plant and coke ovens, and its regional museum. The Crowsnest Museum is in downtown Coleman. Coleman exists on two planes, with one half adjacent to the highway and the other half hidden below in an abrupt drop from the mountain (Figure 2).
It is important to remember that the area has faced large economic setbacks in recent decades. Still, it is a beautiful place. The sunsets are stunning and the mountains serve as a protective presence around the towns of the Pass. One day I hiked into the forest and found a waterfall where I drank from fresh mountain water. The town of Bellevue has some of the best ice cream I’ve tasted and I went on a truly memorable tour into the coal mines that deeply descend into the mountain system. The Pass towns—Frank, Bellevue, Blairmore, and Coleman—are so tightly intertwined that it is hard to tell when you drive from one to the next. But the moment you begin talking to people, they know exactly how to explain the differences to you, that there is a difference in the towns and it does matter. The Crowsnest Pass stands vividly in my memory as a place where heritage, history, and family are stalwart fighters against the difficulties of small town life: disappearing jobs, financial instability, and an exodus of youth to the much larger city of Calgary two hours away.
I drove through town in under one minute and frequently got out of my car to explore and see the neighborhoods. Downtown Coleman—where the museum is in a heritage school building—was made up of mostly vacant businesses and buildings. Pieces of plywood boarded up windows, paint was peeling, and the odd vehicle looked like a lone explorer, investigating the streets. One abandoned store was full of port-a-potties with no explanation; another had the heads of mannequins displayed in the window right next to a “FOR SALE” sign (Figure 3a and 3b).

**The Museum**

The Crowsnest Museum can be found in the old high school, a two-level brick building with an informative history plaque on the outside wall (Figure 4).
It hosts large grounds that are scattered with picnic tables and old rail machinery. The museum consists of three staff members: a full-time Director and Programmer, and the part-time Collections Manager, all funded through annual grant applications, mostly through the Alberta Museums Association (AMA). It is run by the Crowsnest Historical Society, which was formed in 1973 and during its first decade created the museum and published local history books. The museum was officially opened in 1985. The mission statement of the museum reads:

Through its collection, the Crowsnest Historical Society and Crowsnest Museum & Archives\(^9\) protects, preserves, and portrays the cultural heritage of Crowsnest Pass and its people to ensure the knowledge of the past enriches the lives of present and future generations.

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\(^9\) There is no dedicated staff for the archives. The Collections Manager also runs the archives. This was the same situation throughout all my case studies.
Value statements on the museum website include: collaboration and partnership, good communication, professional and ethical conservation practices, responsibility and accessibility to their community, fiscal responsibility and sustainability, learning experience and growth, collaborative leadership, and preservation of their heritage. The collection consists of many local historic objects, large machinery, and the archives. The museum also hosts a gift shop and has just opened a new exhibit space down the street in the Alberta Police Barracks. The museum is set up throughout the rooms of the school, with each room equating to a different local topic (mining, family life, shops/blacksmith), with the top level being a space for traveling exhibits and events, as well as mini dioramas that resemble an old streetscape.

**The Community**

To those I talked to in Coleman—mostly the board and staff at the museum—the museum’s “community” is everyone in the Pass, residents of the region, and visitors to the region. Others specified their communities were local clubs, associations, and businesses. Most clarified it was the entire Pass, and not just the town of Coleman. As Lori Prentice, a board member, said, she believed the values of the community focused on a sense of heritage, a “great sense of connection to the past . . . a sense of small town community connection” (August 1, 2017). A recurring theme in people’s responses centered upon the idea of miners creating tight-knit relationships in the mines out of necessity, and this closeness carrying over into everyday life. It was believed (and hoped) by participants in the interviews that people in the Pass were invested in the local history and in the efforts of the museum. The relevance of the museum to the local communities was to share the stories of local families specifically; it was stated by participants that when local people visited, it was often to read stories related to their families or those they knew. There was a sense of a need for a place that told for the history of the area, particularly for the mining accidents and for those people who lost their lives. The Pass is more than just the Frank Slide, and staff believed the museum fills important historical gaps of the area. The preservation of personal and community histories, aiding in genealogical research through the archives, and the capacity to tell the stories that may otherwise not be told to the Pass and to its visitors were noted as community relevance by museum staff and board members. Most of the current exhibitions focus on mining history, natural history, and settler history. There is an opportunity to remedy gaps within this community history—First Nations history, women’s history—that is not happening. Some staff and board members recognized this need. History is
important to this place, some told me, especially when it goes through economic downturns like it currently is. Successful community engagement, according to participants, would include: people being more involved in the running of the museum; more volunteers; higher attendance numbers; knowing if people enjoyed their visit or learned something (satisfaction); and positive word of mouth.

Regional Museum & Discovery Centre, Lac La Biche, AB

The Place

Lac La Biche is a town on the edge of Alberta’s boreal forest in the north. The drive there took me through muskog, the fire-ravaged forests outside of Lesser Slave Lake, and winding solitary roads through river valleys. The leaves were just beginning to turn, and the drive was full of bursts of orange and yellow amid the green. Autumn comes early in Alberta, during the last weeks of August. It rained my entire time in Lac La Biche. Before that though, on the night of my arrival, a lovely sunset settled over the lake (Figure 5).

Figure 5: A sunset over Lac La Biche.
Lac La Biche was once a hamlet but then became amalgamated with Lakeland County in 2007 to form Lac La Biche County. The town has approximately 2,300 people (Stats Canada, 2016). It is located northeast of Edmonton on the southern shores of Lac La Biche. Lac La Biche was on the historical voyageur route that linked the Athabaskan region to Hudson Bay. In 1799, Lac La Biche was a trading post (Lac La Biche County, 2018). Before the 1800s, there is evidence that the Beaver, Sarcee, Sekani, and Blackfoot peoples inhabited the Lac La Biche area. During the fur trade, however, they were pushed westward by the Cree and Chipewyan populations moving in (Johnson, 1999). By the 1800s most of the inhabitants were trilingual, speaking French, Cree, and English. There was a tight knit French-speaking community through the Lac La Biche Mission, which was one of the first residential schools in Alberta and now a National Historic Site.

The County contains more than 50 lakes, rivers, and vast forest land. Plamondon, a nearby hamlet in Lac La Biche county, is one of four places in Alberta that is officially recognized as bilingual (Lac La Biche County, 2018). Lac La Biche’s demographic today includes Cree, French, Métis, Ukrainian, Lebanese, Italian, Russian, with one of the largest Muslim populations per capita in all of Canada. The County shares borders with two First Nations and two Métis settlements (Lac La Biche County, 2018). The local economy is made up of workers in the oil, logging, forestry, and fishing industries, as well as agriculture.

**The Museum**

The Regional Museum & Discovery Centre is in the basement of the Lac La Biche and District Chamber of Commerce, a building on the shores of the lake that is a reconstruction of an old luxury hotel built in the early 1900s (Figure 6).
To an outsider, a typical provincial blue museum sign on the highway was the only indication that the museum exists. I turned off the road and parked in the parking lot for several minutes, double checking my maps. The rain was pounding on the windshield and the waves of the lake were slamming against the shore several feet away from me. When I finally decided to venture inside the official building (no umbrella or proper shoes) that sits on the shores of the lake, I saw a small sign directing me down the stairs toward the museum… and down more stairs… and down more stairs.

When I finally reached the museum, I was greeted by Shirley Klyne, the acting manager while they look for a new director of the museum. She had been involved in the museum since its creation in 2014. She knew all there was to know about the museum and how it functioned. We met in the office to talk, but she kept one eye on the floor of the museum at the same time, where one man was wandering for the entire interview. She stepped out occasionally to see if he needed help or what he wanted to learn about. It was a nice gesture, one that could easily have not occurred. I could tell that Shirley Klyne was dedicated to the museum, even with some of the recent bumps they have hit. At the time of visitation, the museum had no employees and Shirley
was volunteering her time to run the museum, living two and a half hours away from the town; she embodied the dedication of those who are passionate about their local heritage.

The museum was created in 2014 by the Lakeland Interpretive Society, which, according to local newspaper coverage, has been working since 1997 to create a museum space to showcase local history (Marcellin, 2012). The board of the Interpretive Society operates the museum and cares for the collection in trust for the Lac La Biche County (Lac La Biche County, 2013). The collection consists of historic objects, many on loan or donated by local families, as well as the archives (Figure 7).

Figure 7: This display is an example of an exhibit focused on a local townsperson, a well-known archer. The museum also serves as the county visitor information centre. It is one level, with many of the display cases and desks borrowed from the space’s previous use as a meeting space and library. The museum utilizes dioramas and models and looks at natural history, voyageur history, local economy, and local cultures, as well as a focus on the old local hospital and hotel. The museum usually has three full-time staff members: a director and two regular staff members that cover the museum work as well as the information desk tasks. Because the museum cares for the collection in trust for the county, the county helps with some budgetary aspects such as providing space for the museum and staff remuneration.
At the time of my research, Lac La Biche most resembled a traditional museum among the case studies. It had the more recognizable traditional museum values of preserving, exhibiting, and educating. They are currently less engaged with evolving ideas of what museums are for than my other case studies.

The Community

In talking with staff, the museum’s community was identified as inhabitants of the county, all its cultural groups, as well as “a wider North American community with ties to the region” (Victoria Holota, September 28, 2017). Community values were focused on the economy and present obstacles rather than engaging with history, however with Canada 150 “there was a strong surge in people seeking information about the past and general pride in the community’s past” (Victoria Holota, September 28, 2017). The relevance of the museum to the community is rooted in the idea that if you don’t know where you’ve come from it is hard to know where you are going to go. Despite this concept, the exhibitions and programming of the museum seem to only focus on a select aspect of the area’s history—that of the European pioneer and voyageur—at odds with the demographics listed earlier in this section. Solid evidence of ancestors in the form of photos and documents were crucial to the community, and this way the museum served an important genealogical role. Successful community engagement was characterized as doing what adds value to the community members’ lives and receiving something in return from the community, such as recommending it to others.

The Multicultural Heritage Centre, Stony Plain, AB

The Place

Stony Plain is the most familiar town to me: in my childhood, annual family trips to Edmonton were one of the most exciting times of the year and Stony Plain was often enroute. Seeing towns surface along the highways extending outside of the capital was a common sight growing up; I had family in Spruce Grove, another small community just beside Stony Plain. It is surrounded
by parkland and rolling hills that have been utilized by farmers over the past century. When I arrived in Stony Plain it was hot and dry, typical late August Alberta weather. Even here, the fire smog was thick and heavy just outside of town but cleared after a breezy day. The town is split by the highway, and some people, I discovered later, do not even realize that the museum exists because it is not on their daily commute. It is a town of pockets and neighborhoods.

Stony Plain is the largest place I visited, with a population of approximately 17,000 people (Stats Canada, 2016), and located in Parkland County. It is a community located 42 kilometres west of Edmonton, the capital of Alberta, and is situated on the main highway. Once you turn off into the town it becomes quiet and quaint, with town history murals painted on many of the buildings (Figure 8), and an old downtown thoroughfare with independently owned shops and antique stores. It is known as the “town with the painted past” due to its number of murals. Stony Plain prides itself on being a friendly and family-oriented community. The main economy of the area is agriculture, as well as oil and gas, manufacturing, forestry, power generation, and tourism (Stony Plain and District Chamber of Commerce, n.d.; Parkland County, 2016). The town is arts-focused and follows through on this by supporting potter’s guilds and hosting musical events like the Blueberry Bluegrass and Country Music Festival (the largest bluegrass event in western Canada).
Walking up to the Multicultural Heritage Centre was a different experience than the other museums I visited. It was a hot and sunny August day, and I parked beside the high school football field. The museum was hard to spot, tucked away in a corner within a residential neighborhood, behind a wall of plants. The grounds were relaxing, with ponds, beautiful flowers, and vegetables, herbs, and fruit trees growing everywhere. Later I learned that the museum utilized these grounds for a master gardening class as well as for the food they cooked in their restaurant. Everyone greeted me as I walked through the grounds. Before I conducted any interviews, I visited the kitchen, where I had a soup and sandwich for lunch. I learned that most of the major ingredients came from the gardens on the grounds, and if not, ingredients were sourced from local producers. This was my first hint about the museum and its goals in the community: to be a location, a place to visit and see, and a place that helps a small town become food secure and self-sustainable. Of all my case study museums, the Multicultural Heritage
Centre in Stony Plain, Central Alberta, was the one with the most socially-conscious programming and engagement strategies.

The Multicultural Heritage Centre is an interesting integration of several types of heritage institutions. It was created in the 1980s by the Heritage Agricultural Society (HAS) to protect the old school house that the museum is in (Figure 9).

It has a fourteen-member volunteer board of directors. The Multicultural Heritage Centre is a registered not-for-profit charity, and is not a part of the municipality, although it receives financial aid from both the town and the county. The museum has a larger budget than the other institutions I worked with, and once had upwards of forty staff members; it is currently undergoing a restructuring and has a new director, with an education coordinator, animateur, organic master gardener, a chef for the kitchens, and several part-time staff members. The museum also hosts a gift shop that is populated by work done by local artisans, a local restaurant on the ground floor of the building, and an organic master gardener program that is run through the museum. The mission of the centre is described on their website (Multicultural Heritage Centre, 2016):
The Heritage Agricultural Society will engage local residents, businesses, governments, community organizations and visitors as we record, promote and celebrate the agricultural heritage, cultural roots and historic values of the tri-communities [Stony Plain, Spruce Grove, and Parkland County]. We will develop and deliver creative and innovative programs and services. These programs and services will provide quality experiences focused on our areas of excellence for our residents and visitors and will provide private, public and philanthropic partnership opportunities.

The museum partners with many other bodies in the province and town and promotes these partnerships on its website. According to its 2016 annual report, the museum received 80,000-100,000 visitors in 2016 (Heritage Agricultural Society, 2016), and its organic master gardener program is the only one of its kind in Alberta. “Agriculture”, “green”, “organic”, and “sustainability” are the new themes for the institution, as well as being a proponent of supporting local initiatives, such as buying local. The large grounds are also utilized for a variety of community events (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Some of the grounds located at the Multicultural Heritage Centre.
The Community

According to staff and board members, the local community for the Multicultural Heritage Centre is made up of residents of Stony Plain and Parkland County, but also visitors from an assortment of places, as well as schools, young families, and senior citizens of the area. Other towns in the area such as Spruce Grove, Edmonton, St. Albert, and Leduc were also mentioned. One community value is expressed through the town’s refusal of city status despite having the population for it; Stony Plain purposely remains a town to encourage a small-town feeling. There is also a drive to be a family community, to focus on outdoor living, growing entrepreneurship, and keeping a low-key atmosphere. The museum expresses its relevance to the community through its free archival services, operating a low-cost destination for families, and being a place for people to hone skills through volunteer and paid positions. Staff vocalized that every town needed a place where residents are reminded of the town’s roots. Again, however, the exhibitions and activities lack a focus on the diverse histories of the area, such as First Nations presence, treaty obligations, or histories outside of the pioneer or farmer story familiar to the area. The Centre has a goal of becoming a community hub that is still connected to the cultural and historical roots of the town. Successful community engagement is seen as partnerships in town, higher visitor numbers—especially increased visits by school groups—and to better the lives of visitors through food sustainability and awareness.

The Museum Community in Alberta

To better understand how and whether the selected case study museums represented small Alberta museums, my survey tool gathered information on museum operations and staff members’ values toward community and engagement in the province. It is possible to categorize museums in any number of ways: by size, theme, budget, collection content, mission, audience, and more (Latham and Simmonds, 2014). My survey tool creates an initial landscape of museum practice in the province. For my purposes of contextualizing my case study museums, I utilized a survey to better understand:

a) the variety of operating budgets
b) how many museums operate with a small staff number
c) what values around community and community engagement is the broader museum community expressing in Alberta
It was helpful to break down museums into operational budget brackets, which are often indicators of museum size, staff numbers, and funding models, to more thoroughly understand how the landscape of museum practice in Alberta. It is important to remember that operational budgets should not constrain our ideas of what the museums are capable of within their communities. Respondents were asked to indicate if their operating budget was:

- Less than $50,000 – 12%
- $50,000-$100,000 – 24%
- $100,000-$250,000 – 20%
- Above $250,000 – 44%

According to the survey question “please list past programs, events, or relationships of your institution you believe fall under the idea of community engagement (both inside and outside of your building(s))”, there was a wide variety of strategies implemented by the survey respondents. I have categorized them as “inside” the institution and “outside” the institution and by operational budget, as demonstrated in Figure 11a and Figure 11b on the following page. The reason for this distinction is to demonstrate how frequently museums are stepping outside of their physical walls to engage with their communities.

![Figure 11a: Engagement strategies inside of the building, separated by operational budget.](image-url)
From this data, institutions with smaller budgets (see those under $250 000, and especially those operating with budgets under $50 000) largely focus on outdoor activities, such as festivals, parades, and community days; this is similar to my case studies, all of which focus heavily on activities outside of the museum to integrate themselves within their communities. In the qualitative responses of museums with smaller budgets there was also more specific mentions of senior’s programming, and programming that related specifically to the town, region, and its inhabitants. The Multicultural Heritage Centre is an example of an amalgamation of the small and larger museum responses to community engagement strategies. The MCHC has a strong focus on local storytelling but a larger budget than the other case studies. This fact means it should have strategies like those in the above $250 000 category, but instead it continues to utilize those similar to those in the budget brackets below $250 000. This demonstrates that the line between museum budgets and chosen strategies is more complex than at first glance.

An operational budget of $250 000 may still sound small, but it is a demonstrable difference when compared to museums with operational budgets below $250 000 (the AMA definition of a small museum), as demonstrated in the survey question “what would you like to see your
museum do more of in the future, if anything, to engage your community?” The responses can be seen in Figure 12.

Figure 12: Responses to the question “what would you like to see your museum do more of in the future, if anything to engage your community?”

In summary, of the museums that responded to the survey, common community engagement goals seem to revolve around audience diversification, updating exhibitions and programming, and creating and holding more school programs. These results are dissimilar to my case study results, as the survey data focuses largely on social issues and diversity. The survey consisted of 44% of museums with budgets over $250 000, meaning that these results, while not majority “large” institutions as defined by the AMA (56% of survey respondents were under $250 000), are skewed by larger institutions. If we break it down, those museums under a $250 000 budget focused on exhibition building and school programming. The case studies goals focused on exhibition updates, school programs, more diverse perspectives being told, and further collaboration with other museums. When one separates out the smaller museums in the survey, the data suggests that smaller museum engagement strategies, concerns, and goals across the province are similar, and that my three case studies are well representative of local museums in Alberta.
Discussion & Conclusion

By giving an overview of each case study museum through its landscape, museum history and organization, and participant ideas about their communities, we can better understand the nuanced situations of each case study museum. Comparative survey data regarding specific questions on community engagement strategies situates the case studies in the overall museum landscape of Alberta to determine if they are accurate representatives of other local museums strategies in the province. This comparison shows that the case study museums and smaller institutions that responded to the survey hold similar goals and community engagement practices and that all of them in their responses focus on local concerns and people. The remainder of the thesis reveals the obstacles each case study finds in operating and engaging with their communities and the distinct and often locally-focused strategies that each utilizes to create long-term investment and sustainability. These comparisons demonstrate the reality facing local museums in Alberta and what this may mean across the province and across Canada.
Chapter 3
The Obstacles that Local Museums Face

Introduction

In this chapter I analyze the obstacles discussed by my case study institutions and how those obstacles relate to community engagement practices. This is not to say that these obstacles define local museums or necessarily limit their ability to communicate and engage with their communities; rather, the purpose of this chapter is to create an honest and holistic approach to better understand the context in which local museums find themselves. This is the first step towards a more thorough understanding of the complexities of local museums and their relevance to their communities, by examining the obstacles they face and overcome.

Primary & Secondary Concerns

The three case study museums that I visited had long lists of challenges facing their institutions. In analyzing my data, I discovered that many obstacles repeated across the three museums, albeit sometimes worded in different ways. I organized them into two main categories:

- **Primary concerns**, or something that impedes the progress of the museum and is found in at least two of the three case study museums (but more often found in all three).
- **Secondary concerns** are concerns that were either seen by museum staff to be out of reach to effectively change with current resources or were not brought up at all by at least one of the case study institutions (examples of both kinds are presented in Table 1).
### Table 1: a table of primary and secondary concerns found in the three case study museums.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Concerns</th>
<th>Secondary Concerns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate funding and a slow local economy</td>
<td>Small town politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff: lack of training, past management issues and</td>
<td>Lack of First Nations presence</td>
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<tr>
<td>closures, board concerns</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outreach: unable to reach younger or local</td>
<td>Lack of diversity in exhibits</td>
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<tr>
<td>communities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deficit of (young) volunteers</td>
<td>Changing concept of community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Limited time and staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of collaborations with other museums</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unorganized/irregular collections</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exhibit updates</td>
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<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Difficulty of discussing social issues in community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Limitations of facility</td>
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</table>

Despite the similarities between institutional obstacles, it is important to note that comparing museums needs careful consideration, as all museums are distinctive and work in specific environments (Graden and O’Dell, 2017). This chapter explores the concerns in detail to better portray the different situations of these local museums. Local museums demonstrate great self-awareness but focus less on social issues (such as diversity and collaboration) than they do on basic operating needs. This finding demonstrates that optimistic museum studies literature, which often heralds small museums as the next site of social change in museums, is missing the first integral stepping stone: that small museums first need to make sure they can operate comfortably to change community engagement practices on a larger scale.

## Primary Concerns

**Inadequate funding and a slow local economy**

Funding challenges are a root problem for museums at large (CMA, 2016; Friesen, 2012) as well as for the case study museums. Many other challenges—outreach or staffing, for example—stem from the larger problem of inconsistent revenue streams (Nikolic, 2017). Unless museums have a
long history and therefore a resultant collection of supplies and resources built up over decades, it is often problematic—if not most problematic—to find money for the basic operation of a museum. Victoria Holota (September 28, 2017) from the Lac La Biche Regional Museum & Discovery Centre stated:

Museum supplies and resources are incredibly expensive and a museum generally does not generate profit. To follow recommended practices and guidelines, we need certain supplies or system that often cost a lot of money. A single acid free storage box costs around $10 each depending on the supplier and quantity ordered . . . We try to get around our financial limitations by using grants when available and using alternative practices to do the same jobs but are generally less effective.

Holota’s comments draw attention to the ways museum standards themselves place an economic burden on museums, though others spoke to the economic challenges they perceived stemming from being in a small community itself. “Probably a lack of funds [is the greatest challenge]. It’s always a challenge in a small community,” said Pat Rypien from the Crowsnest Museum (August 8, 2017). Never having enough resources means small museums have to think about cost over outcome, as Chris Matthews, the Executive Director of the Crowsnest Museum, pointed out, “Everything comes down to how much money we have and the answer is none, even if we have some. You are always in cost saving mode, do what is cheapest, that’s your mode of operations, so that’s a baseline” (August 1, 2017).

The reliance on granting bodies to function at the most basic level was also a recognized difficulty. Government grants for museums are often administered through the Alberta Museums Association or the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, both connected to the provincial government. Grants are rarely given for basic operations, like facility improvement, which staff addressed multiple times across the institutions. Furthermore, conversations acknowledged that small museums cannot rely on the provincial government as its funding abilities fluctuates depending on many factors such as global or provincial economy, political platforms, and policy (Rudy Pagnucco, August 1, 2017; Melissa Hartley, August 14, 2017). All three museums worked with the local municipality for various funding levels, however, these relationships were often described as being newer or on the mend, so are also not predictable sources of funding.
Citizens may misunderstand that not-for-profit means that these museums have funding from the government or make enough from their own programs to operate (Latham and Simmons, 2014). It seems to be rarely understood that not-for-profit status does not guarantee money to operate. One staff member observed that many community members assumed that being a not-for-profit meant the government funded the museum enough to comfortably function (Debi Mills, August 16, 2017). As Figure 13 demonstrates, while government funding helps in the operation of Canadian museums, it does not fully fund them. Other sources of income, such as earned revenue (31% from things like ticket sales) and donations (9%) are too low to support museums. No one method supports Canada’s museums to the extent they need. This chart represents Canada’s museums at large, but I use this graphic because it is helpful in understanding what museums in Canada generally face when it comes to funding.

![Graph showing typical sources of financial support for Canadian museums. Source: Canadian Museums Association, *The State of Museums in Canada*. 2016.]

The problems with diversifying revenue streams and the resulting commoditization of the museum have been discussed at length in museum studies literature (Graden and O’Dell, 2017; Luke, 2002), and small museums feel these difficulties keenly. If a museum becomes so diverse that “you’re only an inch deep and you don’t even know who you are anymore, you’re just doing things to grab money,” (Debi Mills, August 16, 2017), this is a cause for concern. Promising too much just for the funds can muddy museum objectives. Mills went on to say that the biggest challenge after bringing their museum back from near closure was financial, and that finding
different revenue streams over government resources had become the focus. Both government grant chasing (particularly provincial and federal grants) and searching for somewhat random revenue streams are not viable ways to create a secure and sustainable museum. The concern over tailoring museum activities just to chase grants for basic income appeared in conversation multiple times. Melissa Hartley, the Executive Director of the Stony Plain Multicultural Heritage Centre, discussed the problems her institution has had in the past with this type of mentality.

Getting a grant to do your grounds or your building structure is great, but getting a specific programming grant and having to pay the people to do that programming when that’s not really adding anything to your bottom line . . . you have to take a larger view of cost and do things in a more studied way, not so haphazard. (August 14, 2017)

Melissa Hartley recognized the danger of this system and informed me that a part of her new role was lessening that reliance on scattered income, by telling me “In the past, it was sort of the dog wagging the tail; this is what we got a grant for so that’s what we’ll focus on. I’ve tried to back off that and tried to scale things down. . .” (August 14, 2017). Despite these problems, it is difficult to turn down funding opportunities. Government funding cycles are not aligned with each other and museum staff may not know which funding they may get before applying to other forms, so projects become contingent on other sources. It becomes precarious and difficult to plan, difficult to commit, and difficult to build stable relationships. Many staff members felt that their limited funds limited their work. Many participants I spoke with had big goals for their exhibitions and saw funding as the biggest obstacle for their programming, exhibits, and collections to reach audiences, to be modern, to affect audiences on a deeper level, or to meet collection and exhibition standards (Angela Fetch Muzyka, August 14, 2017; Michelle Cavanagh, August 2, 2017). The added difficulty of fund shortages for the promotion of programming and events limited the scope of their audience, which led to further problems, as noted by Angela Fetch Muzyka from the Stony Plain Multicultural Heritage Centre:

Budget is a huge challenge. In terms of money, sometimes what we get funded just isn’t enough to do things justice. A lot of times when I run an event it’s on a shoestring budget: what can I do for 100 dollars? It’s a challenge in that way to make these things really great and to get the word out. Social media doesn’t do everything and not every person has Facebook, so we need to invest in other marketing. Just the signs in Spruce
Grove, that’s $85 and that leaves me $15 to run my program. The challenge is definitely getting the word out, getting volunteers, finding the money.

A slow local economy came up in discussions with two of the three museums. Through 2015 to 2016 Alberta faced an oil industry crash (Gibson, 2016), which negatively affected tens of thousands of people across the province (Willms, 2015). Over 40,000 people lost their jobs, their pensions, and more (Johnson, 2016). The crash is still being felt, even as Alberta’s economy builds back up and looks to diversify resource production (Alberta Government, 2016). In more rural areas of the province—where industries such as oil and coal are large job creators—the effects of the slowdown are palpable:

There is a lot of history in the area but with the closure of the mines, losing the economy, everything just crumbling . . . we’re a part of that crumbling economy as well. People aren’t funding things, they’re not going to fund the museum, they’re going to fund public works before us. (Siobhan Rasmussen, August 2, 2017)

There’s a few [businesses] that can’t [donate] because it’s been a bit slow around here for the past few years. (Rudy Pagnucco, August 1, 2017)

Not only is this downturn felt by museums searching for donations, but also potential visitors who are unable or hesitant to pay money for programs or entrance.

People are still in the mindset of “I don’t know if I’m going to have a job this week.” And I think that’s what happened to our summer classes this year. How do you make it more of a priority for them? I personally think it’s a great investment but I can understand. (Jennifer Burns-Robinson, August 15, 2017)

Museums across Canada deal with funding issues, not just small local museums. Museums of different sizes have different needs, especially financially. However, as noted by the CMA (2016) and voiced by several participants in the study, local museums have been largely ignored when it comes to the topic of financial assistance (Canadian Museums Association, 2003). It is important that museum workers, policy makers, and government employees understand the specific situations that local museums find themselves in: that funding can be sporadic and unreliable for sustainable development and that museums feel they need to create programming just to get the funding rather than programming that serves their communities; that staffing relies heavily on grants; that communities’ economies often lack diversity and stability; and that basic
operations suffer the most. Ultimately, museum workers feel that their buildings are in danger, their collections are not safe, and the ability to reach their local audiences is impeded upon.

*Lack of training, past management issues and closures, and board concerns*

Common concerns among the case study museums were topics related to the staff and the board. A lack of, and inaccessible, opportunities for staff and board training and development were popular themes, as well as past management issues, near closures of the museums, and concerns with the board’s knowledge or passion. A deficit of training and lack of access to professional development is important to consider. Many employees in local Albertan museums are not trained museum professionals; they often come from other educational backgrounds or succeed without post-secondary education, as stated by Victoria Holota (September 28, 2017) from the Lac La Biche Regional Museum & Discovery Centre:

> Individuals with actual museum degrees or certificates are often not present in small town museums who can’t afford to pay them what they should be [paid]. We are often self-taught in certain practices and take workshops.

I cannot overstate that there is a need for training opportunities. As written by Murphy (2012), the success of a museum depends on the ability for staff and volunteers to understand their roles. Each employee, volunteer, and board member should have the opportunity to increase and enhance their skills. Among the three museums, past near-closures and mismanagement meant the last several years focused on reorganizing, restructuring, and rethinking. Past mismanagement occurred because staff and volunteers were not trained in skills needed to run a local museum. A main training method in Alberta is the Museum Certification through the Alberta Museums Association (Alberta Museums Association, n.d.), however, with only the one entity it is not easy nor affordable for staff in smaller institutions to take part:

> I’m trying to do AMA classes, but they are very difficult to get into here. They need more opportunities, definitely, because it would give people like myself more of a chance. I feel like you hear about it. You need approval before you can sign up. It’s part of your professional development but you need permission from the director and the board in terms of commitment and fees and things. You can’t just sign up when you see it. (Angela Fetch Muzyka, August 14, 2017)
The lack of training opportunities can affect many aspects of the museum, such as management, collections, policy, and grant writing. As stated by the CMA (2016), there is an “urgent need for more and better training opportunities” (p. 5). Another type of professional development opportunity would again be through the AMA at their annual conference, where presentations, workshops, and networking can aid in idea generation and communication. This remains out of reach for local museums. Attendance to an AMA conference is usually in the range of $400 CAD per person. Staff must also budget for travel, accommodation, and meals. Local museums often cannot afford these expenses, and so rarely send staff to attend the conferences. Even when they do, staff are not always impressed with the content:

These conferences are geared to large museums. They talk about displays, this is what this big museum does with lots of space and lots of money. What about us small museums? . . . everything is geared to the bigger museums. I don’t get that. How about gearing it toward us? How about a nice exhibit in a room the size of this office? That’s half the reason I don’t go to the conference. Even the last workshop I went to… large museums and jobs being contracted by large museums. We don’t have that kind of money. So how do you “dumb it down” for us? (Michelle Cavanagh, August 2, 2017)

It is important to note that the AMA is a strong proponent of small museums and community-based heritage work, particularly through their Community Engagement Initiative. Even so, it is necessary to acknowledge the gaps that exist between the AMA’s mission and the reality of local museums who feel they are not getting the support they need from their primary museums association. As the museum field becomes more specialized and programs dedicated to museum studies appear in colleges and universities, this may be less of a concern in the future, but the prices of conferences and the inaccessibility to further training is a cause for concern. Even “trained professionals” require professional development throughout their careers, and funds to enact programming, collections care, and more. For those that have not or will not continue with specific post-secondary education, it is even more vital to keep this type of training consistent.

10 The Community Engagement Initiative (CEI) “works towards incorporating community engagement into the programs and services of the AMA and the general practices of the Alberta museum community. CEI supports museums by demonstrating the importance of community collaborations as a viable path toward sustainability” (AMA, 2017). It is a blog that can be found here: http://museums-cei.blogspot.ca/
affordable, and accessible to local museum staff and volunteers.

**Unable to reach young or local communities**

Publications on museum and community relations often revolve around the involvement of a museum’s communities being integral to its survival (Crooke, 2008; Golding & Modest, 2013; Janes, 2009). The question is no longer simply about what the museum houses but how it creates a better community by taking the lead from the community itself (Museums Association, 2013). There needs to be a feedback loop of outreach and information from not only visitors but other publics—employees, local government, other organizations, media, and the local community (Capriotti, 2010)—that can help local museums create sustainable futures by building its future exhibitions, programs, and mandates around what their local communities want or need. However, small local museums do not have the same communication resources as large and even medium-sized institutions (Capriotti, 2010). Based on their 2015 study of the Ohio Valley Museum of Discovery, Hartman and Hines-Bergmeier argue small museums often suffer from “rurality and disconnect.”

One of the recurring challenges faced by my case studies was the difficulty in finding the time, money, and energy to reach audiences and create a feedback loop. Participants in my research noted input and participation were difficult to obtain and once they were, the actual implementation of changes people wanted—that required their participation—were difficult to start. Offering different methods of obtaining this information—visits, newspaper calls, and so on—did not always get the response staff needed:

If we’re visiting with someone who has visited the museum, we’ll get some feedback: ‘I would have liked to see that’ and ‘my family did that’ and then it’s like well bring me the stuff and we can tell the story. But if you don’t bring it to me I can’t do it. We tried various ways . . . (Shirley Klyne, September 19, 2017)

The participatory museum is frequently foretold as the future (Simon, 2010; Stein, 2012): a place where community members feel welcomed, where dialogue can unfold, where community

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11 Economic disparity and local mistrust were major obstacles in Hartman and Hines-Bergmeier’s study. These obstacles created a separation between museum staff and local community members, which inhibited the ability to gain useful feedback for further community engagement practices.
input and ideas are incorporated, and where communities help to create content. However, this always looks easier on paper than in implementation. There are many factors to consider—particularly for local museums—that hinder the creation of this seamless, productive, and collaborative institution of the future. Outreach to local communities, limited by budget, time, and staff, is not always enough to gain traction and sustained community investment. Victoria Holota (September 28, 2017) from the Lac La Biche Regional Museum & Discovery Centre voiced concerns over these limitations:

The greatest challenges involve dialogue with the public. We frequently put out calls for artifacts, photos, and interviews with multiple ways to contact us, by phone, email, social media, or in person. We made it clear that the public could leave items with us for temporary exhibits or for scanning and they could get it back. We rarely received responses, despite advertising through social media, posters, the local newspaper, direct calls to recommended individuals, and the radio. Very few people were willing to share information with us.

This is not to say that the participatory collaborative museum is not possible or that it is not already underway. As I discuss in the following chapter, local museums already put significant energy into rising to this challenge. For example, the Crowsnest Museum has taken big steps to involve itself outside of the museum walls within the community. They help plan large Canada Day celebrations, commemorate mining disasters, host concerts, and recently created another exhibition space in a building down the street. These are all positive steps toward what I have termed community engagement, however, it does not come without its own obstacles. Such focus on large events and openings pulls the attention away from other internal museum work, which can be hard when staff sizes are small. Some staff discussed the challenges of trying to balance new large-scale public outreach initiatives with their expected workload in their roles:

In the summer we have to stop all regular programming in lieu of tour season. Like the Heritage Day events… everything takes precedence. In the summer I feel like I’m not programming [her job role] as much because we have to focus on the tourists coming in and now the Barracks.” (Siobhan Rasmussen, August 8, 2017)

I guess the Barracks took up so much time and prior to the Barracks opening, it was the Hillcrest Mining Disaster 100th Anniversary. Those two events took up big chunks of time in my six years I’ve been here. The Barracks opening was a one weekend big event but now the challenge is greater than things we were doing prior. We have to
figure out how to run it, how to operate it, how to keep it open, fund it, pay for things we need. That’s going to be one of our major challenges. (Pat Rypien, August 8, 2017)

“Outreach” for these museums is sometimes constricted to simple marketing tactics such as buying advertisements or promoting upcoming events through the media. Whenever the topic of outreach came up in interviews, most respondents talked about these as their methods of outreach. There were limited instances where the participants talked about outreach as a technique to engage in dialogue and establish long-term relationships with the local communities. The more pressing issue was making people aware of the museum’s existence, as stated by Debi Mills (August 16, 2017) and Jennifer Burns-Robinson (August 15, 2017). Outreach was not necessarily about the larger and more intricate issues of community and museum relationships.

The feedback I’ve gotten from teachers and parents is that they didn’t even know this was here, that these programs were happening, which told me there hadn’t been a lot of outreach done on behalf of the school programs in the past. (Meggi Mah, August 16, 2017)

We have just sort of started to wrap our head around community engagement. Certainly, the museum is involved, or needs to be involved to a much greater degree than we are. We need to find the time to sit down with different community groups and find out what their needs are, how the museum can be helpful to them. (Pat Rypien, August 8, 2017)

Feedback in its most basic form (often as a visitor survey) is even difficult to come by in these museums, as stated by Chris Matthews (August 1, 2017) from the Crowsnest Museum:

We’ve tried ‘what do you want, what do you want us to be for you?’ Community engagement in its purest form. We failed at doing it well. Really, there’s not enough time in this institution with the current resources and even expertise, or we’re not utilizing the right people or enough people. We’ve fallen down in that regard and we’ve tried, but most of the stuff is our best guess.

Changing technologies, distinctions between “local” populations and commuter communities, and an aging demographic have meant more challenges in getting messages out to the public. Two groups noted as difficult to reach were younger people (mostly young adults and teenagers) and the local population itself. What this term meant was different for each participant I talked with. For example, Crowsnest Museum employees frequently stated local
communities would be anyone who lived in the Pass and its five towns. In Stony Plain, the local community was Stony Plain as well as the nearby town of Spruce Grove, the county, and even Edmonton. In Lac La Biche, local community was noted as everyone in Lac La Biche County with a focus on the town itself. In all cases, non-locals were usually the audience that visited more regularly. Overwhelmingly, these were mentioned again and again as discouraging challenges. Younger audiences seemed to be of particular concern, as the majority of the museums’ audiences, staff, and potential donors are aging. Museums tend to appeal to more of an older audience, offered Lori Prentice, as people in their 20s and 30s may be too busy and focused on family. In contrast, she felt when you get older you “have more ties to your history and it’s something that you are more likely to take part in” (August 1, 2017). Another obstacle may be the fact that the board members themselves are aging. With more availability and experience, board members tend to be on the older side. However, this may also affect who board members reach out to for donations, volunteering, and promotion. As Lori Prentice continues: “The average age of our board is the 50s. We work in our comfort zone too. So, if I have to sell 15 tickets, I sell them to my peers”.

Other staff members felt that they had missed teenagers or older youth in their programming and outreach (Angela Fetch Muzyka, August 14, 2017). In smaller communities, there may still be the idea that museums are places to observe objects and not as places of activity and participation. In cities, larger museums like the Royal Ontario Museum and the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto are attempting to change this thought process with different activities for youth, such as live shows and parties. However, in smaller communities where again, the money is not always there, this inability to reach the youth in a different way can be a potential outreach barrier. Books and articles on outreach and engagement often make reaching out to communities sound like a simple move: a letter, a call, or a social media post may yield responses. Yet it is extremely difficult to garner the attention of local audiences, even through all these means combined. Local communities seem to be the most difficult to draw in, as a museum may not be a place they think of to go regularly. This type of perception can be difficult to change; rarely do locals make repeat visits.

Many Lac La Biche residents have never been to the museum before and many don’t know it exists either. So not only are we not engaging with them, but we also don’t
have their family history for exhibits or research, and we are unable to create an accurate depiction of Lac La Biche as a community without their stories. (Victoria Holota, September 28, 2017)

You can’t get local people to see the local sites. People do not visit their local sites. People travel to see stuff, but you don’t come to the places where you live. So that’s been a huge problem. (Michelle Cavanagh, August 2, 2017)

Some staff members even felt that the local community was not the strongest audience to concentrate their outreach focuses on because of these problems, as well as a deteriorating sense of local community that made such work seem fruitless:

It’s important that we draw them [tourists] in. They’re the people who come. Locals don’t come in. So, what’s the point of serving them? To tourists we are presenters of a product. To locals we are just a repository. It’s both. The locals give us our material but the tourists are what keeps us going. (Siobhan Rasmussen, August 2, 2017)

Reasons given for this were disinterest, busy lives (particularly of young families), an inundation of messages in all different media content, or simply not knowing of the museum’s existence. This may be an issue of marketing, branding, or advertising. However, those terms are more applicable in larger institutions with dedicated staff and departments. In my case studies it is asking museum staff—often one to three people—to coordinate all marketing and outreach activities as well as the regular museum workload. The common link between outreach and marketing and advertising tactics that occurred in conversations is also inherently problematic, because a heavy focus on marketing and event promotion alone tends to pull away from the larger community engagement goals of the institution.

**Deficit of volunteers**

The American Alliance of Museums (AAM) estimates that volunteers currently perform three times as much labor in museums as paid staff. The CMA also states that museum volunteers in Canada contribute over 5.6 million hours of work each year (CMA, 2016). Latham and Simmons (2014) observe that volunteer numbers are declining, at least in the case of larger museums. Local museums also rely heavily on volunteers. All case study museums reported a severe lack of potential volunteers. In these cases, it is not so much an issue that volunteers are needed to do
some of the work staff do not have time for, such as in large institutions; it is that sufficient
volunteers do not seem to exist. Museum staff were particularly concerned about the age of
volunteers. All three had dedicated volunteers, but they were of an older demographic. The need
for young volunteers was palpable; without a next generation of volunteers, the sustainability of
the museum is jeopardized.

[A challenge is] a lack of volunteers, and because we’re a volunteer board, [there
is the added] inability to have the time to sit down and think about how we get
more volunteers. We are largely a senior’s community. A lot of the people who
volunteer, volunteer for just about every board in every community in the
Crowsnest Pass. These folks have done their thing and are on the way out. You
don’t get young people as keen anymore. That would be a big challenge for me,
not a hopeless one, but some way to encourage young people to get more involved.
(Pat Rypien, August 8, 2017)

Volunteer concerns were frequently voiced by board members, who understood the time
commitment of volunteering and saw on a regular basis which types of people were volunteering
and which were missing, as Lori Prentice (August 1, 2017) a board member of the Crowsnest
Museum, pointed out:

I think we have to find a way to reach [the young audience] because we have a
shelf life. We can’t be on the board forever. Some of our members are in their 70s.
We need to have some succession planning kind of done. Maybe it won’t be 30-
year-olds, maybe 50 or 40. One thing we dropped the ball on was recruiting
volunteers.

Potential volunteers are overtaxed already by volunteering in other societies, for kids’ sports, and
other organizations. In small communities, you are asking the same small pool of people to
volunteer extensively. The highest number of regular volunteers was five or six, with the others
having near zero, aside from board members. Matthews went on to say that “we rely on
volunteers, especially for events, but we’re thin, really thin. That’s on us I think, our recruitment
isn’t really high. We’ve been very reactionary since we almost closed” (August 1, 2017).

Related to the mounting concern about a paucity of volunteers is the issue of limited time on the
staff’s part. Some staff are only part-time and expected to do full-time work as well as train new
volunteers. When those volunteers leave soon after beginning, it is a frustrating use of time on
the staff member’s part and everything must be retaught to new volunteers again and again. As one staff member stated, “What’s tough for me is I have to do grant work, other work, and train volunteers in three days and hope that the volunteer stays or it’s back to square one” (Michelle Cavanagh, August 2, 2017). This creates a difficult cycle of untrained volunteers, limited staff, financial strain, and overwork. Despite the museums valuing and appreciating their volunteers, the volunteers are inevitably getting older, and sometimes unable to do what the museum may need or want. Participants expressed a cultural concern over fading notions of civic duty and felt that parents do not instill the idea of volunteerism in their children like they did forty or fifty years ago. Their experiences left them feeling as though civic-mindedness may have vanished amid busy and chaotic lifestyles, as detailed by Angela Fetch Muzyka (August 14, 2017) from the Stony Plain Multicultural Heritage Centre:

People don’t just volunteer the same way they used to . . . I think it’s not something that we have put value on for children anymore . . . We’re also in a busy time in our lives. We take our businesses to our house because they can reach you. Work has extended beyond the regular hours. I think that makes it more difficult and more challenging.

Staff frequently demonstrated critical awareness and analyses of the context of volunteer obstacles. Melissa Hartley, the Executive Director of the Stony Plain Multicultural Heritage Centre, was aware of the changing society outside the museum’s doors and how it then affected the museum’s ability to draw in volunteers. This is not a new problem and has been happening over the last several generations, as she points out:

I would say the historic challenges of getting the community involved were smaller [than today]. Stony Plain has an older demographic where lots of these people were volunteers and at one time we had a very robust volunteer program. A lot of those people have retired and moved on or their health has made it so they aren’t actively volunteering. They haven’t been replaced. The next generation is not as civic minded or as hands on in terms of their volunteering. Even my generation gives money rather than time. The younger generation, our challenge has been finding something that interests them.

The value of volunteers cannot be emphasized enough. Local museums largely depend on volunteers to function, not only those volunteers that make up the board but those that help with day to day operations (Miller, 2012). Larger institutions are often lucky enough to have a
position dedicated to managing their volunteers or at least having a larger pool of potential volunteers to choose from. For example, in my survey results shown in Figure 14a and 14b, respondents gave a number value in answer to Question 14 “How many volunteers contribute to your institution?” Volunteer numbers ranged from 5 to nearly 900 at institutions in Alberta.

Figure 14a: This chart demonstrates volunteer numbers based on operational budget brackets, with those with a budget of less than $50 000 barely visible on the chart, the highest number of volunteers in that category being 20.

Figure 14b: A closer look at the volunteer numbers of smaller institutions.
In smaller communities where populations are aging, where younger individuals are leaving for work or education, and population are small to begin with, assuming volunteers can help run small museums is assuming too much. Observations from participants told me that the focus of younger generations is on giving money over time or on different volunteerism more directly tied to potential volunteer’s children, such as sports. People in some communities are therefore able to commit time or money but they are often choosing other opportunities over museums. These issues may also be related to concerns of limited time and staff, as I discuss next.

**Limited time and staff**

Part of it is time, with the low number of people that work here and the large areas of responsibilities that each of us has, we don’t have a lot of time. Me especially, I can’t just leave my desk and walk away for large amounts of time because I’m the person that everybody comes in to see. I can’t just walk away and go to a meeting, I have to have somebody at my desk if I’m going to leave. For me personally, that is a challenge. (Angela Fetch Muzyka, August 14, 2017)

Time restrictions are most often due to the amount of work that limited staff members must share amongst themselves. The issues surrounding human resources in a local museum are manifold, and other obstacles (exhibition creation, volunteer recruitment) suffer from limited time and staff, which stem from, once again, a lack of funding. With only a few staff members, the lead staff member—director, manager, or more often someone in a combined role as director/curator or curator/educator—has a lot of their time taken up by grant applications to keep the museum functioning. Grants serve many purposes, but for local museums often it is about retaining the staff they have. For example, the Crowsnest Museum has two full-time staff, with one part-time staff, all on grant contracts; if the grants do not come through, the positions disappear. Lac La Biche has three staff funded by the city, and the Multicultural Heritage Centre has nine staff members, including part-time—a significant drop during their recent restructuring from only several years ago when they had upwards of forty. The need for successful grant writing is therefore very real and very necessary and yet the application process cuts down the availability and capacity of staff to fulfill day-to-day operations. As stated by Alicen Montalbetti (August 3, 2017) from the Crowsnest Museum, this limited staff complement affected the hours the museum was open and had led to shorter work weeks in the past. Being open for less days is not
necessarily a bad thing, but it does demonstrate that a lack of staff does affect basic operations of a museum.

It also means that staff do not have the time to direct their energies toward projects or goals of the museum that look more to the long-term and social picture (Chris Matthews, August 1, 2017). Staff must cover tasks that would, in larger institutions, warrant their own department or at least be divided among a larger number of positions. This consistent strain on staff can limit their work in other areas they may find personally interesting or fulfilling. One staff member noted that although their favorite part of the job was in research and exhibition creation, most of their time was taken up by grant writing (Chris Matthews, August 1, 2017). Murray Whyte’s November 2017 piece for the Toronto Star on Indigenous museums in Ontario succinctly summarizes the precarious situation of grant writing tied to small museums keeping their doors open: “Piecemeal support from government agencies and, in some cases, crippling debt have conspired in this critical moment to leave these institutions in a familiar position: on the outside, looking in” (Whyte, 2017, para. 8). It is not as easy as doing less to save time, since grant writing is such a necessity for these museums to exist at the most basic level. The stressful situation of short-term grant hopping and struggling for funding with limited staff numbers is a reality across the country. Another example of this is programming, which is an important component of interacting with communities but is difficult to create and implement with limited staff.

We had a young woman who wrote some amazing programs. Really, really good. But we found out programs were only good if we had people to deliver them. If she was writing them she didn’t always have time to deliver. So they’ve never really taken off because we don’t have enough bodies. (Lori Prentice, August 1, 2017)

Concerns over low staff numbers and increased workload were voiced by many participants from the case study museums. The combined issues of limited staff and time negatively affected staff’s ability to run the museum like they wanted to. Oftentimes topics about what they would like to see the museum do or goals they had were finished with the sentiment that there just was not enough time or enough staff, such as collections management projects or exhibition redesign.
**Lack of collaboration with other museums**

It is a common perception among the public and some small museum staff that museums are open with their information (Catlin-Legutko & Klinger, 2012; Latham and Simmon, 2014). The idea is that when museums communicate with each other and build relationships it will increase knowledge, techniques, foster partnerships, and more (McHugh, 2012; Stein, 2012). Janes (2009) states that a lack of interdependent relationships between museums is a liability, and that there is a need to forge an ecology of museum relations. In Brazil, for example, the set-up of state, regional, municipal, or themed museum networks—similar to Alberta’s and, in a larger sense, Canada’s—is proven to increase dialogue (Duarte Cândido, 2012). This may be true in a general sense, but when it comes to the practicalities of contacting other institutions, consistently and reliably sharing knowledge, and networking with museums that are not your next-door neighbors, the dialogue does not always happen readily or often enough. Networking is another demand on staff and volunteer time that can take away from a museum’s ability to obtain essential grants or conduct and carry out programming for their publics (Angela Fetch Muzyka, August 14, 2017).

The Crowsnest Museum puts energy into connecting with other heritage institutions within the Crowsnest Pass, but that partnership building is not easily extended outside of the Pass, and concern was voiced over staying insular rather than connecting with museums further afield (Chris Matthews, August 1, 2017). When asked if there was a benefit over local networking versus external networking, some participants stated that local connections were more important because it meant you had your finger on the pulse of the local community, the main visitorship, whereas external partnerships were sometimes too abstract or out of the day-to-day operations that they did not see it as conducive to working best for the local community (Debi Mills, August 16, 2017; Angela Fetch Muzyka, August 14, 2017). Another concern arose when it came to collaborations with other museums, that of a perceived fear that other institutions may find them annoying, intrusive or as competition, even if there were ways that they could help each other.

Obviously their culture [large museums] and their management style has to be different because it’s city versus country . . . Even things like rewriting policy or things where you could get a bit of help so you’re not scrambling. We have policies in place that probably need to be updated. (Pat Rypien, August 8, 2017)
My experience in other departments is that museums—especially big institutions—tend to be really free with their ideas and their strategies, and so I can’t imagine it would be any different around here. There’s always kind of the worry in the back of my mind of “Would they view us as competition?” Is that something they wouldn’t want to share with us? That’s not how I view them because I think we all offer different things. That worry’s always in the back of my mind. (Meggi Mah, August 16, 2017)

The above quotes demonstrate that most people felt connecting to other museums would create a positive outcome. At the same time, they recognized these relationships did not currently exist or were difficult to start, as Hartley from the Multicultural Heritage Centre said: “I don’t know if we’re out of the loop or there is no loop. We don’t have any ideas what’s available. No one communicates with us” (August 14, 2017). However, not everyone believed that connecting with entities outside of the immediate local community was useful. Debi Mills, a board member at the Multicultural Heritage Centre, told me that “probably the best that came out of that [going to conferences] was just we could tell each other our sad stories of having no money . . . I’m not sure there was a benefit to the organization as a whole” (August 16, 2017).

Overall, museum staff felt that collaboration with other museums could lead to a clearer understanding of their positions within the museum world of Alberta. As the CMA (2016) recommends, mechanisms should be put in place that help museums to collaborate with each other, possibly with incentives for them to commit. This may be a naïve viewpoint to take however, as it undermines the significant financial burden that small museums face. Still, if there was time, these partnerships could lead to more positive and open understandings between museums of all sizes. Angela Fetch Muzyka (August 14, 2017) from the Multicultural Centre talked about how the relationship would not simply be small museums utilizing larger museums for their potential resources and knowledge, but that larger museums could also learn from small museums:

I think in some ways, a lot of the museums are bigger, they have a bigger base, and sometimes they don’t understand the challenges of smaller museums as well. I feel like more communication would help them understand that . . .

At its core, this obstacle is about what resources local museums miss out on by being isolated from other museums or the museum community. Other institutions may have strategies on
policy, collections care, exhibition building, board education and training, or even donations of old exhibit cases and materials.\textsuperscript{12} When this topic came up during the interviews, however, I could hear the hesitation in responses. Local museum staff feel that it would be positive, but it is an effort that may not be worth the time or the fight. Participants voiced concerns about reaching out to try and build these relationships but leading nowhere or being disregarded for being a smaller institution. Despite small museums facing very real problems and financial strain, there is a sense that institutions may not understand their obstacles or that the precarious funding and efforts just to stay afloat make it hard to put energy into change and growth. These thoughts are at the root of this obstacle. If local museum workers do not feel that these collaborations will lead to positive gains over time—even if it could lead to stronger strategy building or information sharing—why bother?

\textit{Exhibit and programming updates}

Human resources often came to the forefront of conversations but another concern which arose within all three institutions were the limitations of exhibition building capabilities. As previously noted in the staffing obstacles section, local museums often feel scorned when it comes to aid in planning or designing for their unique spaces, like heritage buildings with cramped rooms or basements. There were not always specifics about what exactly needed upkeep but staff often touched on the fact that exhibits needed updating. In one instance, the museum exhibits had been the same since the 1980s (Lori Prentice, August 1, 2017). Although there is a wealth of literature on interpretation and exhibition design for meaningful and transformative experiences, such information circulates at conferences or in journals requiring paid subscriptions, putting them out of reach of many staff. It is important to note that some staff did note that exhibits and programming can make meaningful change for visitors. Some were aware of the importance of the role of inquiry and different learning styles rather than just the visual mode, reflecting the direction of many museums in recent decades to create more pluralistic and stimulating exhibits (Hennes, 2002; Soren, 2009). When Angela Fetch Muzyka talked about the possibility of different styles of exhibits in the Multicultural Centre, I saw her eyes light up at the potential for

\textsuperscript{12} For example, some of the exhibit cases in the Crowsnest Museum are old cases from the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, a much larger institution.
more meaningful engagement with visitors. She told me: “I’d like to see an exhibit that changes, a less static exhibit… I’d love to see one room that brings in things and expands the minds of everybody” (August 14, 2017). Her executive director, Melissa Hartley, voiced the concern about static exhibitions, which often become the norm in small museums because staff focus and energies are redirected elsewhere:

The danger of being too static is that “it’s lovely but I’ve seen it, it’s not gigantic so is there anything to come back for?” Part of our challenge has been trying to come up with innovative—not too cost-heavy for us—ways to have activities that draw people to the centre. (Melissa Hartley, August 14, 2017)

As museums try to reach out to new audiences through exhibit redesign (Hennes, 2002), the topic of interpretation and content could be a larger one in the minds of small museum staff. However, this is not always so easy. Long term exhibition planning and creation is not foremost on the minds of small museum staff. As one director of an institution stated, he was aware that they needed to make a larger plan to update exhibit design, but that it was never a good fit because these projects would sidetrack more immediate concerns or issues that museum staff were facing, such as facilities concerns and fundraising (Chris Matthews, August 1, 2017).

The Crowsnest Museum just opened a new exhibit in the nearby Alberta Police Barracks building but staff noted that it took up so much time, effort, and focus, that many other things in the museum, such as recruiting volunteers, fundraising, and programming fell to the wayside. During my visit, a month after the new exhibit building opening, staff discussed finally being able to get back to their regular jobs. The content of exhibits was not discussed much, although several staff members noted that they lack non-white and particularly First Nations perspectives, which I discuss in more detail later in this chapter.

**Difficulty of discussing social issues in the community**

I went into this research very interested in the capacity of local museums to foster social change in smaller communities where experiences and outlooks can be more homogenous or non-expansive. How do small museums have conversations that contest popular opinions or perceived local wisdom? With more operational concerns frequently barreling over some of the more sensitive interpretive topics museums work with, it became clear that, despite museum
studies’ push for socially innovative engagement in local museums, it is not easy to consistently implement. Chris Matthews from the Crowsnest Museum talked about how some museums cannot think about socially conscious programming to the level that may be expected of them, particularly because they may too focused on keeping the doors open to pause and reflect on how implementing engagement changes may help: “Some groups don’t want to hear it. Some institutions, some museums in Alberta, are so bogged down that they can’t even think like that” (August 1, 2017). It may be hard to admit, but it can be difficult to be creative when you are simply trying to survive.

Museum theorists argue that museums must promote and take part in social work (Silverman, 2010). Robert Janes (2009) says that museums need to be different and take a leap of faith. Museums have an obligation to probe humanness, Janes claims, even when it is difficult. A driving question in this re-imagined sphere is what can the museum do to better the lives of those around it? Before becoming outposts of dialogue and social change (Born, 2006), museums face the very real obstacle of starting conversations around sensitive issues and how to exhibit them to local communities. As Janes (2016) states, “although embracing a socially responsible mission does not require forsaking either education or entertainment, it does require an intuitive appreciation of certain values that are largely absent or unspoken in contemporary work” (2016, p. 216). These values can make potential visitors or community members uncomfortable or raise defenses. There is a real fear of alienating some of the only visitors that the museum receives; this fear outweighs the understanding that change may be necessary to interest new demographics. It may sound strange that small museum staff want to stick to a strategy that, overall, may not be working; it is important to recognize that, once the museum finds an equilibrium, staff do not want to disrupt this because of how tenuous that equilibrium is likely to be. Past near closures and conservative local values add pressure to taking such a leap of faith, fearing what will happen if it fails; the museum risks losing what limited visitorship it does have. Instead, the focus is on keeping these audiences while trying—perhaps too tentatively—to reach out to new ones at the same time. The museum needs to stay funded, and many funding models value traditional methods, which also encourages museums to stay the way they are; it is an easier route for already-overworked staff (Chris Matthews, August 1, 2017). My case study museums did not feel like they were able to risk already precarious funding sources by taking on projects that might make their own existence even more precarious.
Some staff, particularly at the Stony Plain Multicultural Heritage Centre, recognized that social relevance is the next step for their institution, and to attract new audiences they need to balance social engagement pieces into exhibitions (Angela Fetch Muzyka and Melissa Hartley, August 14, 2017). This likely works well for this institution as their updated mandate of sustainability and food safety makes space for these conversations. Others felt that if they did not hear concerns from their audiences, then it was not a topic to focus on; communities may have different needs or wants from the museum (Chris Matthews, August 1, 2017).

Museologists look to the adaptability of small museums as grounds for intelligent reworking to community needs because they enjoy a certain intimacy with their communities (Janes, 2009). There is a sense that the smaller the institution, the easier it should be to engage quickly and topically, in a less rigid manner (Candlin 2015; Janes, 2009; Matelic, 2015). Several participants lauded the small museums that have the capability to create or manipulate exhibits around social issues. However, it sounded as if these participants saw these other risk-taking small museums as different from themselves. The shifting mentalities that may be occurring in larger urban centers are not always occurring in smaller rural communities. Or, if they are, the politics of small communities can hinder consistent development; as Janes (2009) continues to say, there can be forward-thinking and insightful individuals—in all areas of society—whose goals are never translated into reality.

Various experiences and personal opinions create another obstacle: there is difficulty in figuring out how to even begin discussing or exhibiting effective content on issues such as the environment, racism, or gender. It is worth considering that local museums would attempt to focus on these more socially-conscious topics but prioritize local values and concerns to create content for. Instances of larger museums offending audiences—the Royal Ontario Museum’s Into the Heart of Africa and the Glenbow’s Spirit Sings and, more recently, their exhibition North of Ordinary—do happen, but in most instances, they can bounce back and if not retain all visitors, at least not collapse. The fear in small museums is that if one were to take a risk, it may spell the end for the institution. So how can they go about considering such issues in their content and exhibitions? Participants did not seem to know what the next step would be to begin focusing in on socially-conscious exhibit and programming content.
Unorganized or irregular collections

Museums are object-based institutions; according to Latham and Simmons (p. 48, 2014), the relationships between people and objects is at the heart of the museum concept. When collections are unorganized, mismanaged, or irregular, it makes creating interpretive content and exhibitions that forge genuine relationships and meaning for people difficult. Often this obstacle arose from past collection issues; sometimes past collecting and record-keeping standards were very different:

I’ve heard different things about when the museum was created. It was a bunch of well-meaning volunteers, but they weren’t museum professionals. From the standpoint of the community they were amazing and did all these things but from a professional and collections point of view it’s just a mess. This is completely disorganized, no rhyme or reason to how it was done. (Siobhan Rasmussen, August 2, 2017)

When I started everything was a mess, nothing was what you think… like if you look at it, it’ll be easy to figure out when I’m not here. Trying to label everything “This is where this is, this is where that is.” There are some things only I know where it is and that’s not a good thing. But that is the problem with a small museum here. (Michelle Cavanagh, August 2, 2017)

Some museums were not selective enough and accepted everything from old dolls to worn clothes that were outside the institution’s mandate (Melissa Hartley, August 14, 2017). Collections were often mishandled or improperly utilized. This could also be said for exhibits, where artifacts were often left to sit without interpretation. In one instance, the building of the first business in Stony Plain from 1904 was donated to the Stony Plain Multicultural Heritage
Centre and sits on its grounds (see Figure 15). It was then used as offices and a shop and staff did not feel it was reaching its potential in terms of the donor’s original intent (Melissa Hartley, August 14, 2017).

![Figure 15: The Oppertshauser House, the first business in town donated to the Multicultural Heritage Centre.](image)

The messiness or inherent disorganization of collections in these institutions was often brought up in conversation. Rooms ended up as an accumulation of generally related objects, sometimes filling corners without interpretive material; rooms were dense with objects, but no real story was told (see Figure 16).
This concern was also voiced in some interviews. Staff, particularly at the Multicultural Heritage Centre and the Lac La Biche Regional Museum & Discovery Centre, were aware of some of the inherent problems in this method of display:

Some of the things you’ll notice about our living museum when you see it is that we haven’t done a very good job of isolating the period we’re looking at. Because the building was open when the then-board rescued the building, well, it’s all gutted so we’ll set up a settler’s cabin . . . For 40 years it’s been one static exhibit which is a large portion [of time] . . . The upstairs has been totally renovated since I started. It used to be an eclectic collection—a generous word—it was just whatever struck somebody’s fancy. It wasn’t really related to heritage, green, agriculture, sustainability, all the other things we do. (Melissa Hartley, August 14, 2017)

Another concern was that much content relied on the community’s input, particularly for new museums such as the Lac La Biche Regional Museum & Discovery Centre. While this is in itself a positive thing, as it pertains to ideas of relevance and relationship building, the problem was that this necessary information could be difficult for museum staff to obtain from the
community. Without the input of community members, the exhibits and collections lacked integral information for storytelling about the area (Victoria Holota, September 28, 2017). Reaching out to and visiting community members for artefacts and stories requires significant labour on the part of museum staff.

**Competition**

In society, museums compete with different entities for the same audiences, often mimicking forms of entertainment to garner interest (van Aalst & Boogaarts, 2002). This tension is enlarged in small communities. With any event going on, it is important that the museum consider all other organizations and the events they may be hosting, so that double-booking does not occur. In the case of the Crowsnest Museum, being in the Crowsnest Pass means being surrounded by other big-name cultural and historical memorials: The Bellevue Mine, the Frank Slide (see Figure 17), the Hillcrest Mining Disaster Memorial Site, and ghost towns, among other sites.

![Frank Slide](image)

*Figure 17: Frank Slide, which continues on either side of the highway, making for a very visible stop.*
Frank Slide is a rockslide straddling the highway and a provincially run heritage site that sits on the top of the slide and tells the story through a new interpretative centre. There is also the concern of visitor fatigue, as attempting to visit all these sites within a few hours or a day is overwhelming. The Museum often found itself as the skipped site, as Lori Prentice told me: “There’s so much, so many things that compete with us in terms of the museum part of it. The Frank Slide is glitzier, newer, and more obvious. We’re off the highway. So a lot of people are not going to stop” (August 1, 2017).

This concern was also raised in the other institutions, although perhaps to a lesser degree. The Multicultural Heritage Centre sits in Stony Plain, a small town right outside of Edmonton, the capital city of Alberta that is very culturally active and acts as a locus of competition for the MCHC. The Lac La Biche Regional Museum & Discovery Centre is in a county that already has several other long-standing museums and one national historic site (The Lac La Biche Mission) that are perhaps better known. Despite some of these attractions being a potential pull for visitors to the area that may result in more visits to the case study museums, participants did not view it as such. To them, their institutions were always the ones that could be “skipped” on a day of activities, particularly in the Crowsnest Pass, which is teeming with heritage institutions and visitor outings.

**Limitations of the facility**

The limitations of a facility can also be the reason for the previously mentioned obstacle of collections mismanagement. As stated, case study museums consist of heritage buildings and a basement; for many local museums, utilizing these types of buildings or spaces is common. Heritage buildings may be atmospheric, but they often come with associated maintenance costs that are debilitating. They can also give the appearance of stasis rather than change. The CMA Brief vividly summarizes the situation: “The current state of non-government museums is generally one of extreme neglect . . . Roofs leak, buildings lack proper heat and humidity

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13 This means that the Frank Slide Interpretive Centre receives more funding than the Crowsnest Museum, its local counterpart in the Pass.
controls, artefacts rot away in poor conditions, little research is done—the reality facing many small museums is not a pretty picture, it is a shocking portrait” (2016, p. 4). A reminder is necessary here that grants for capital costs are not very common and staff recognized that.

This building needs work. It will need a very expensive facelift to keep going. Like the storage room; if it gets a leak in the room it will damage everything in there. It’s just a catastrophe waiting to happen. It’s very hard to convince the grant or donations [entity] to pre-emptively fix a roof. (Siobhan Rasmussen, August 2, 2017)

In the case of the Lac La Biche Regional Museum & Discovery Centre, some of their collection is currently housed in a decommissioned trailer offsite due to a lack of storage space, kindly donated by a member (Shirley Klyne, September 19, 2017). A lack of storage space, display space, and work space were common concerns:

We don’t have sufficient storage, display, and work spaces. My office was technically the archives storage room and repair or cleaning projects were often carried out in that space or the back foyer. (Victoria Holota, September 28, 2017)

Small museums can house important resources for local communities that serve a valuable purpose, for example, by fostering feelings of local pride and civic identity (Conn, 2010). While strategic deaccessioning is being seen more and more as a healthy move by museums—and is performed by several of these museums—the staff believed that the collections housed in their institutions have value for their audiences and feared their deterioration under the limitations of their aging facilities.

Secondary Concerns
Secondary concerns are concerns that were either seen by museum staff to be out of reach to effectively change with current resources or were not brought up at all by at least one of the case
study institutions. These are categorized as such due to the limited amount of time they took up in interviews as opposed to primary concerns, which dominated conversations.

**Lack of First Nations presence**

We don’t have a First Nations exhibit at all. We should. The fact that we don’t—haven’t had a First Nations presence—is a story too. (Lori Prentice, August 1, 2017)

A clear issue in local museums is either a lack of First Nations history or a colonial perspective on First Nations history of the area. Unlike some of the exhibits I saw on European communities of the local area—such as Ukrainian or German—the perspectives of First Nations community members were not connected to in a similarly personal way. The relationship between museums and First Nations is an evolving one; Canadian museums are being called on specifically right now to be sites of education for reconciliation (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). With no prior relationship between these small museums and local First Nations communities, it remains unclear how or if the case study museums will participate in (re)conciliation. Limited funding to update exhibitions exacerbates the situation, particularly as collaborative exhibition processes require greater funding and more time.

There are, however, precedents of local museums taking up the challenge of conciliation. One example is the award-winning exhibit at the Atikokan Museum in Northern Ontario in partnership with the Friendship Centre, curated by Lois Fenton and a young First Nations dancer, Jaret Varen from Nigigoonsiminikaaning First Nation, who was selected to dance at the Olympic Ceremonies in Vancouver. His dance regalia is on exhibit in Atikokan, and the exhibit itself

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14 The idea of conciliation is a meeting of two previously separate parties; applied to Canada, it means First Nations and Inuit peoples “having an independent existence prior to contact” (David Garneau, 2012, p. 35). He sees “reconciliation” as synonymous with difference, or the attempt to repair a previously existing harmonious relationship. This word, Garneau states, “imposes the fiction that equanimity is the status quo between Aboriginal people and Canada. Initial conciliation was tragically disrupted and will be painfully restored through the current process . . . limited to post-contact narratives” (p. 35). Garneau goes on to say that the idea of “reconciliation” erases the extant Aboriginal sovereignty prior to contact and creates a false image of earlier cooperation with colonialist entities. With no prior relationship to their local First Nations, these case studies may be strong contenders to open a line of, in Garneau’s terms, conciliation.
allowed for new conversations and relationships to begin in a place where they had not before (Ontario Museums Association, 2017).

Staff at the case study museums expressed interest, but also some hesitation about the scale of the work that needs to be done.

The museum itself is an old school you know… so I think anything you can connect to those sort of big events to educate . . . the fact that we sit on Treaty 7 land . . . we haven’t done a lot regarding that, there’s something we can be working on as an engagement opportunity. That would be a big one. (Pat Rypien, August 8, 2017)

It is important to realize that on the part of some First Nations communities, there is understandable hesitation to partner with already extant museums in the area.

Another barrier would be reluctance to deal with the public history sector at large due to past experiences not necessarily with our museum. For example . . . a few Cree individuals stat[ed] that they would prefer to create their own museum that they would have control over. (Victoria Holota, September 28, 2017)

Because of the scale of these museums, integrating First Nations perspectives to portray a more diverse and pluralistic history of the area may be easier to consider than in larger more bureaucratic institutions with long and painful histories. To return to the example of the Atikokan Exhibit, it is quite small in scale, but it represents a start in local museums that is rare to find. Staff at the Crowsnest Museum recognized that small gestures of respect can lead to big changes, such as the opening of the Alberta Police Barracks in the summer of 2017:

The last couple years, every other place I go as an educator we have somebody from Treaty 7—an elder—say a blessing before we start an event. We never have [at our museum]. Some of the people on the board say that’s not important. I say that doesn’t matter. We are on Treaty 7 land, that’s something we should be doing. So we did do it when we opened the Barracks. And I thought: finally. (Lori Prentice, August 1, 2017)

This issue is larger than the scope of this thesis, but it is important to emphasize that some local museum staff recognize the need or the gap in First Nations content and collaboration. Alongside reconciliation, and even simply improved representation (including self-representation), of Indigenous peoples, museums are being called upon to consider representation and self-
representation from a broader diversity perspective. Participants did not speak to issues of gender diversity, multicultural representation, LGBTQ inclusion, or ableism.

**Lack of diversity in exhibits**

Museum staff noted that exhibits in all three museums could use a “freshening up,” with some exhibits remaining the same for several decades. They brought this interest up very generally; most people did not get into the specifics of what kind of content, approaches, or interpretation they would like to see in revised exhibits.\(^1\) Participants from the Lac La Biche Regional Museum & Discovery Centre, a northern museum that focuses on the history of trapping, forestry, and local historic buildings, put quite plainly that the lack of cultural and topical diversity was a concern, especially considering the diverse demographics of the area. In many local museums, visitors—and sometimes staff—may presume the types of stories that will be told: a focus on pioneer, male, white Anglo-perspectives. As Janes (2009, p. 59) writes, “smaller museums are no less immune to the tyranny of tradition.” One participant acknowledged how unchanged exhibits can have a negative impact on people’s interest in engaging with the museum (Victoria Holota, September 28, 2017). Only one institution raised questions about the availability of funding for diversity initiatives, and how diversity is understood in rural or smaller centres.

**Small town politics**

One topic that continuously arose that I was not expecting was the impact of the museum on tenuous community relationships, or what I term here politics. Most museum staff were aware of the politics that occur both within and outside of an institution. These issues are amplified in small communities, where everyone knows everyone:

> There’s been some damage done in terms of people who have left the centre. There’s been a bit of an exit that has not always been a positive one. That has hurt our standing with the community a little bit . . . In the same way that it’s a welcoming community it’s also got that same small town where when you hurt someone’s feelings twenty-five people are angry at you. It’s like that because there’s a lot of people related to this

\(^1\) The one exception being the Crowsnest Museum, whose staff spoke about their desire for First Nations content.
person or that person. It’s very political, so you have to be careful about each move you make. (Angela Fetch Muzyka, August 14, 2017)

If someone becomes upset or offended by the museum, the institution’s reputation can take a hit (Graden and O’Dell, 2017). The tight-knit relationship with people in the surrounding area was most often cited as a positive thing but that it was a double-edged sword (Alicen Montalbetti, August 3, 2017). It is also difficult for small museums to recover a relationship with the local community that may have suffered in the past, as local memories tend to persist. As Melissa Hartley, the Executive Director of the Multicultural Heritage Centre stated, “Part of my challenge has been to renew and rejuvenate our relationship with the county and the town. Those have gone by the wayside due to personalities of my predecessors” (August 14, 2017).

**Changing concept of community**

Local communities, even if they are small in numbers, are not cohesive entities (Onciul, 2013; Papadimitriou, et al., 2017). The concept of a community culture, even in rural areas, is dynamic, wide-ranging, and sometimes at odds with other concepts of culture in the community. These conflicted positions can affect the museum and its place within its community. If people do not feel they are a part of an inclusive, accepting, and active community culture, the museum community—constituted by the museum’s actions—ceases to exist (Rassool, 2000). People may not see the local museum as relevant to their concept of culture and community.

> It’s culture these days. People don’t… there’s not a lot of community anymore. We are trying to develop that community as it’s kind of being lost, so it’s a little bit hard, I think… (Michelle Cavanagh, August 2, 2017)

This may have something to do with larger issues, such as changing senses of civic-mindedness (or lack thereof), and younger citizens moving away to larger cities.

**Discussion & Conclusion**

At first glance, the obstacles that face local museums may not sound all that different from large museums: funding; social relevance; outreach; and lack of time, staff and volunteers, and training are common concerns in museum literature (Canadian Museums Association, 2016; Catlin-Legutko and Klinger, 2012; Graden and O’Dell 2017). It is through speaking with local
museum staff that we learn the details that expand the story, that tell us what kinds of challenges they are facing, and the interrelationships of these obstacles. Nothing works in isolation; altering or enhancing strategies to redress of these challenges could lead to positive changes in others.

Crucially, the types of obstacles highlighted in the museums come together to constrain or limit each museum’s ability to interact and create the relationships needed for community members to feel invested in what the museum is doing for the long term. These local museums, while demonstrating great self-awareness, did not focus on social issues, such as diversity, First Nations participation, and collaboration, as much as they did on basic operational needs. This is telling of the situation local museums find themselves in. A heavy focus by participants on human resources and financial assistance speaks to the enormity of these obstacles. If local museums felt secure in these two areas, it follows that positive effects could be seen in their community engagement strategies. It is necessary to ask if these common obstacles among local museums are like those of larger, more urban institutions and what that means on the larger scale of Albertan or Canadian museum practice. As local museums struggle to obtain operational funding through short-term project grants, their focus begins to drift away from the bigger idea of why they exist in the first place, which is, according to Janes (2009), that the role of the museum is to probe humanness, empower society, and focus more on the future.

In all three case study museums the primary concerns consist of: inadequate funding, staff concerns (lack of training and professional development opportunities), performing outreach to certain communities, volunteer deficit, limited time and staff, outdated exhibitions, lack of museum collaborations, difficulties in discussing social issues, unorganized collections, competition, limitations of the facility. The secondary concerns are still obstacles of concern but were less discussed for reasons not entirely clear to the researcher. These concerns—lack of First Nations presence, lack of diversity in exhibits, small town politics, and a changing sense of community—are still important topics that rely on contexts, such as region, training, or tradition.

It is essential to remember that obstacles do not define the local museum. Rather, they are important to consider in the context of grants, government, community sustainability, and relevancy, but a local museum has many opportunities and distinct strategies. The next chapter analyzes local strategies that the case study museums have devised to overcome the obstacles
discussed here and to reach the museum’s community engagement goals. I analyze these strategies by general topics that repeatedly appeared: community awareness, community engagement and outreach, collaboration and partnership, and board, staff, and volunteers. I compare and contrast amongst the institutions under these topics.
Introduction

Despite small museums having generally similar overarching obstacles to contend with, my study shows that these same institutions have distinct local solutions. The opportunities analyzed in this chapter do not necessarily exist as solutions to specific challenges but as museum and community values, staff goals, and strategies to remain relevant and sustainable. Although survey data suggests the case study museums are fairly representative of museums of similar size across the province, the data collected through site visits, interviews, and document analysis provides greater granularity and demonstrates that solutions are rooted in local dynamics. The opportunities pursued by each case study museum are distinct to their situation. Strategies to compensate for the many obstacles local museums face may vary considerably depending on museum mandate, the opinions of board members, directors, and staff, and the communities themselves that the museum is trying to form a long-lasting relationship with. Thus, my research demonstrates that it is not easy to declare general frameworks or solutions for museums to utilize; context is critical.

To understand small museums’ purpose in society and how they fit into their communities, one can look to the daily work and decisions each museum worker makes, both inside and outside the museum (Weil, 1999). It is important to recognize that small museums are not simply on their way to becoming large museums; they serve a distinct function. As Friesen (2012) says, “They [small museums] are carefully crafted to meet a particular mission and provide a particular service. They are different from larger museums not so much because of their subject matter but because of how their size enables them to present the subject matter. They are string quartets, not orchestras” (p. 50). In Candlin’s 2015 research on micromuseums in the UK, she also states that strategies utilized by small museums are distinct for good reason; these museums are meant to be a different experience than major museums, and they should be understood and viewed as such, not as an institution trying to necessarily fit the guidelines or “best practices” of archetypal
museums. This chapter demonstrates that local museums can create quality experiences and innovative solutions to the complications they face. As Friesen continues, “If small museums lack anything, it is the big ego that is necessary to transcend the hurdles that encourage small thinking. Usually all that prevents small museums from thinking big are self-imposed limits. But small museums can and should think big” (p. 48). This chapter analyses each case study’s favoured strategies and goals to remain a community-engaged, sustainable institution at the local level, demonstrating how museums must approach obstacles in locally-focused ways through strategies for community engagement and outreach, community awareness, for collaboration and partnership, and for board, staff, and volunteers.

**Strategies and opportunities for community engagement and outreach**

*Face-to-face contact and taking part in the community*

The Crowsnest Museum in Coleman, Alberta, came back from the brink of closure in 2012 by leveraging large events, local historical anniversaries, and opening a new exhibit building. A critical facet of their operations, however, involves face-to-face contact. Because of the close-knit mentality of the community, the board members all knew different people and worked hard to reach out to them. Going to city council meetings also helped to match a face with the museum and keep their business in the minds of councillors for funds and grants, a practice that was not consistently done until recently (Rudy Pagnucco, August 1, 2017). These methods required time outside of normal working hours for volunteers and staff but was one of the most important jobs board members had.

In terms of outreach, staff and board found it useful to participate in the community as an individual and community member and build on the local community feeling. One board member of the Crowsnest Museum, a retired teacher, used her education connections to encourage other teachers to participate in events and bring students, which she hoped would help develop programming (Lori Prentice, August 1, 2017). Most staff and board discussed how the director was very involved in the community, despite having only moved there for the job seven years ago: “He curls and plays baseball. He does all those things to make himself a part of the community, so people know who he is, and I think appreciate the job he does” (Pat Rypien,
August 8, 2017). This type of outreach makes for casual connections that prove small community connections matter:

It’s so important in this town to have contact. People will say call up so-and-so and talk about that. So calling people at their houses… that’s how it happens. People will come into the museum and ask for Chris for things they don’t always need him for but anyone can do. But once you know a person you just go back to them all the time. (Siobhan Rasmussen, August 2, 2017)

A lot of the face-to-face strategies that the Multicultural Heritage Centre developed were related to issues of limited staff and time. With limited staff, fostering local relationships are central to future collaborations for events and programming and to make sure that board members—and staff—are committed community members as well. Debi Mills, board president, stated the importance of the community becoming more familiar with the new executive director and seeing her face, bringing a sense of comfort and familiarity. The director now does the job of three or four people, which may have to change in the future. Rather than feeling that a small number of staff is an obstacle, the staff and board saw it mostly as a current strategy to deal with funding concerns. Mills continued, “I see the level of hard work and engagement it takes to keep a place or business going. And I feel like everyone has just had to pick up the slack and be super accountable. I feel like the accountability piece got lost somewhere [before]” (August 16, 2017). To be on the board, they asked for more commitment from people than just meeting once a month for meetings. It is a fine line to decide how much the institution can participate outside of its walls to keep the community engaged without using all its resources such as time and staff. Like the Crowsnest Museum, the board found it important to be involved in the community as individual citizens. The board president, Debi Mills, talked about how the board needed to be made up of very community-focused people in diverse areas of the community. They sit on other boards like the library and the community cultural roundtable. As she put it, “They tend to be people who want to really see the heart of a community expand and develop. If there’s not arts and culture in a community, then a community does not have a heart. It’s not sustainable” (August 16, 2017). These different ways of staying involved in the community can help when it comes to finding fundraisers and donors for the museum, such as the approaching fundraiser to transform the donated Oppenhauser House from office space into exhibit space.
Another key way of making sure they are important to the Stony Plain community is to stay up-to-date on what’s happening with the town and trying to keep the museum central to the arts and culture of the area; they believe that is the path forward for the museum. Angela Fetch Muzyka stated the importance of the institution “keeping their finger on the pulse of the community” (August 14, 2017).

**Working outside of the institution**

The Crowsnest Museum has more recently focused its work outside its walls. In the past several years there have been large local anniversaries, such as the 100th Anniversary of the Hillcrest Mining Disaster. Museum staff and board members helped create a new park with interpretive panels in the cemetery, which came with a large opening event. Canada Day events in 2017 coincided with the opening of a new exhibit building just down the street from the museum that focused on another anniversary, that of the shooting of a local RCMP officer during Prohibition. It was these types of large events that the museum focused on to promote itself to the larger Pass community in an integrated manner through locally important events. As Matthews said:

> I believe the museum has worked hard to be out there. When we were part of the Hillcrest Mine Disaster Anniversary, this was tens of thousands of dollars at risk. The safety net of our finances was risked to put on concerts for a major centennial. I think the dollars out the door were $80 000. If nothing returned that’s trouble for us. That takes us from stable to not stable. But we risked it and the only return is PR and that’s not very tangible. But we feel like it was good promotion and we try to be out there as big and as small as we can. It is a focus. We can do better, but I think we’ve gotten the buy back, we’ve gotten the vote of support from a lot of things too. We see it every time we go and canvas for donations. (Chris Matthews, August 1, 2017)

The museum is involved in events that occur outside of its doors. They put floats in the parade in the summer and they host numerous events on their grounds. As staff stated, they were very present in the events that went on in the Pass (Michelle Cavanagh, August 2, 2017). These types of events and outings are a focus of outreach. One example of this was when the museum put on an annual pub crawl. The first one was last year; these were made easy by the fact that Coleman, a town of approximately 1000 people, had pubs within walking distance of each other. In their first year they had around twelve participants; the next year had around forty people of all ages. This created another fundraising opportunity by charging people for participation. The pubs also got involved, getting dressed in Prohibition-style costumes, bringing in live music, and hosting
historical trivia (Lori Prentice, August 1, 2017). People from all over the Pass attended this event, and they had people from Fernie, BC, a 45-minute drive away, attend.

**Creative use of spaces**

There is no denying that exhibits are important to local museums; it is the main way they utilize their collections to tell stories (Candlin, 2015; Hennes, 2002). There are obstacles in updating exhibits that are at least several decades old, often due to the building itself. The Crowsnest Museum is an old school house from the early 1900s; there is a combination of old staircases, tiny rooms, secret nooks and crannies, and convoluted wayfinding. This is not necessarily always a negative, but it can make for creative exhibit planning. The staff worked with this set-up by telling a lot of different stories, with each room usually telling a discrete story. As Lori Prentice (August 1, 2017), a board member, said:

> We talk about migration, we talk about mining, we talk about wildlife, we talk about the wars. It’s broad, it reaches out to a lot of different things. When you go to Tyrell [Royal Tyrell Museum in Drumheller], you’re going to see dinosaurs. When you’re going to the military museum [in Calgary] you want to see war . . . Whereas here, there’s a little bit of everything.

One of the awkward rooms in the Crowsnest Museum is on the second floor. It is a large open space that seems to have at one point been the school gymnasium. The staff adapted this space for traveling exhibits and events. At the time of my research, there was a traveling exhibit from the Provincial Archives of Alberta (see Figure 18), as well as a companion talk from a visiting archivist from the Provincial Archives. They also hold “sister exhibits” with other institutions in the Pass, such as the Frank Slide Interpretive Centre, which means they exhibit about the same topic at the same time but from different angles and with different focuses. Bringing in a variety of visiting exhibits was a new tactic by museum staff to engage the wider community.
The Multicultural Heritage Centre’s focus on self-sustainability is done through studying the history of agriculture in the area and tying it into modern sustainability issues. The museum utilizes its extensive orchards, vegetable and herb gardens, and community garden plots for a variety of activities: the food in their own kitchen, education programs for kids and adults, farmers’ markets, and community outreach. As Jennifer Burns-Robinson (August 15, 2017), a woman passionate about organic gardening and Master Organic Gardener, explained:

Our chef has been using local produce and our own vegetables from our own gardens so that’s exciting. Our master gardeners grow the food and it gets funnelled into the kitchen. It’s a loop. So I think we’re doing that fairly well, it’s fairly new but I think it’s going to be fantastic as it grows into itself. We do a lot outreach with the schools which I think is fantastic, to connect them with the history of the area and growing and things like that.

Outreach is a focus of the museum. The MCHC does so in a variety of ways, from having local artists sell their wares in the gift shop (I witnessed an older man come in one day to discuss
selling his paintings in the shop), to creating a variety of cost-effective events that draw people in through their three-pronged approach of being a museum, an art gallery, and a restaurant.

We bring artists and teach people how to paint and teach people how to do ceramics or weave. We have a paranormal night coming up and we have the kitchen. It’s really cost recovery at this point, we aren’t making a profit but the idea we have of growing our own vegetables and the food being prepared in the kitchen by our chef…. We take the farm to table concept very seriously here. We also do it organically. (Melissa Hartley, August 14, 2017)

They hold a variety of concerts in their outdoor space, creating events with music and dancing to invite people of all ages to return. The youth interest in organic, green, and sustainable living has become a large part of their effort to attract that demographic, as it fits with their mandate. Hartley continued:

We are repairing our relationship with the community and proving to the town how important we are and trying to involve them in everything that we do. We hashtag them in social media and when we get press, we talk about the town itself and where we’re situated and it’s sort of a way of romancing them back to thinking we are important and willing to invest in us (August 14, 2017).

They are focused on what they have that other sites in the area do not, such as the grounds that also had room for events, concerts, and other community activities. As Debi Mills, board president, said: “We have a gem here. We have beautiful grounds. I feel like many museums would kill to have this kind of green space” (August 16, 2017).

**Locally specific programming**

When I visited the Multicultural Heritage Centre in August there was a calendar full of events, from harvest festivals to local mural tours to community garden volunteering, parties on the patio, whiskey tastings, book readings, and paint nights. Some feedback was that they booked too much, so that return visitors could not attend everything. That was how the museum was learning though, by giving content and programming to the public and tailoring it with feedback to suit the needs of their community. School programs and school visits are important to the Centre. In 2017 they added a program called Little Green Sprouts, where kids could come and tour the community and kitchen gardens, look at how things grow, and learn about the different
insects in the ecosystem. As Jennifer Burns-Robinson, Master Organic Gardener, said, they are “engaging them at a young age in a way that interests them. That’s exciting and we are moving that forward” (August 15, 2017). Another program, called Picnic in the Park, is a collaboration between the museum, seniors homes, and the Family Community Support Services (FCSS), where volunteers dressed up and did old-fashioned activities such as ice cream making and butter churning with senior citizens. There is a focus on community-minded ways of engaging people. This seems to be a successful way of integrating with the community:

They’re doing well in getting people here for event days. Not just the centre but hosting vendors, hosting entertainers, building ourselves up as a hub so that things are going on here or around here so that when people think of things to do in Stony Plain they think of us. I think it’s been done very well and it’s picking up momentum. (Meggi Mah, August 16, 2017)

This demonstrates that the goal of the museum is to become more than a museum or gallery but a community hub, available for all sorts of events and coming together for a family-oriented small-town community. Mah continued, “Our efforts to be a centre, to be the Multicultural Centre and to be a hub will hopefully help us surmount that barrier [of getting young families out].” Angela Fetch Muzyka told me that it was about fitting with other institutions or groups in the town; if they saw something that inspired them, was there a way to allow them to work together or make their goals fit each other? The museum frequently offers reminiscent kits, or suitcases full of themed artifacts: they take or rent these out to senior citizens homes or schools. These are ways staff can go visit and interact with the community. For seniors, “it’s a social thing for them because they can talk about those things that impacted them or bring up stories or memories for them, and there’s a kind of healing16 in being able to revisit those memories in some ways” (Angela Fetch Muzyka, August 14, 2017). These types of kits promote social well-being alongside the museum’s focus of self-sustainability. A key strategy is to piggy back off the town’s idea of staying a town, being inviting, and staying family-oriented. They had to be honest

16 There have been numerous writings on the importance of lifelong learning, object handling, and museum visiting as a type of therapy and mental wellness tool for seniors, particularly those that may suffer from loneliness as they get older (Ander, 2013; Rhoads, 2009; Zipsane, 2011). By bringing in these objects, seniors have a chance to remember and to socialize.
about what they could and could not do, rely on the flexibility of patrons and staff, and encourage staff to adapt to new roles as well as their previous ones.

**Utilizing a social mandate**

Out of the three case study museums, the Multicultural Heritage Centre is the only one with a strong social issue agenda within its mandate. Food sustainability is a focus of the museum and they work it into all aspects, from marketing to programming (Melissa Hartley, August 14, 2017). Jennifer Burns-Robinson, one of the Organic Master Gardeners, was a strong proponent of this message. She saw the museum as a community hub that promoted social well-being through food sustainability in the local community. She had many goals for the institution and the local farmers of the area: “My thought was to create a food hub out here. We have loads of local producers out here but if you ask anyone, they have no idea. This is a really good central location to have farmers bring in produce and people coming to buy it here” (August 15, 2017). A large part of this outreach is the Organic Master Gardening program that has run out of the museum for the past ten years. Many of the staff believed that a museum was a good place to instigate social movements about food security and sustainability. Burns-Robinson further offered that programs and events focused on local farming would help prove the value of the museum to the surrounding communities.

**Strategies and opportunities for community awareness**

**Participating in official organizations**

A way that the Crowsnest Museum keeps their name known to potential granting bodies is through volunteering for such bodies, such as the Alberta Museums Association. According to the AMA’s 2015-2016 Annual Report, the AMA breaks up its grants into three categories: institutional grants ($210,391), professional development grants ($56,131), and operational staffing ($605,611). According to the report, 68% of funds went to small museums, and 47% of funded institutions were in rural areas (see Figure 19). It is not noted in the report how many applications they received that same year.
The Crowsnest Museum Director volunteers his time to be on the AMA board and works within the system to understand the system. He told me:

I bought into the AMA instantly. It’s the grants. There’s three grants a year, we hit them and we’ve been successful every time. Over $50,000 a year. It’s two $12,000 grants and one $25,000. How are we best suited to get those grants? I needed to take the courses, so I could speak the language they wanted to see. I tell all museum staff… be a juror. I was also a panelist at the Recognized Museum Program. The year after, we had to write a Recognized Museum Program [the accreditation program through the Alberta Museums Association]… it just made sense to me. I’ll go see what everybody else does and I’ll go do it right. You do all those things and you become very active in the AMA and the other board members will see it. (Chris Matthews, August 1, 2017)

**Local media and communications**

Using social media does help Crowsnest Museum reach out to audiences younger or further away, but “old” media still works in the Pass too. The staff firmly believed that kids dictated where they wanted to go by using the Internet. Lately, advertising and marketing were becoming focuses of the museum; for the new exhibit, they hired a social media consultant to push
promotion and create branding, even making coasters for local bars (Chris Matthews, August 1, 2017). Despite these advances the museum still believes in older forms of media to reach people as effectively as possible; the director writes history columns for the local newspaper (see Figure 20) and staff plan on hosting a radio show on the local radio station. Radio in smaller towns is still a main method of communicating local information and promoting events.

Figure 20: An example of an informative outreach newspaper article written by the Crowsnest Museum Director.

As the Director reiterated, their open mandate and creative mentality helped when it came to feedback, even if negative:

I don’t think there’s anybody we can’t reach . . . I don’t think there’s any member of the community, any shape or form, we couldn’t design something for or we couldn’t reach out to or bring in. Some people say, “Oh you don’t have this or that.” It’s a negative statement but a positive thing. You know, “Can you help us with it? Do you
have artifacts? Was your family involved?” Then they’ll jump on board and help.
(Chris Matthews, August 1, 2017)

Sometimes, all creative outreach takes is a phone call and a staff and board willing to take risks. There was one event that most staff members brought up as a great outreach success. Melissa Hartley, the Executive Director of the Multicultural Heritage Centre, called CBC Radio in Edmonton to make a pitch for one of their morning shows to come to the museum for breakfast and to cover the town of Stony Plain. The radio show, which rarely left Edmonton proper, agreed. Debi Mills (August 16, 2017), board president, spoke about the event with pride:

We got such great feedback from it. It was interesting. I was sitting having breakfast and a couple I know came in and said we live in Stony and we kind of forgot, haven’t been here in fifteen years, we heard it on the radio, came over and had breakfast. Those kinds of things, you need to be creative in getting a new audience. Our regulars know about us but it’s a new audience we need. That was a brilliant move because for weeks and weeks after people heard about it from CBC Radio.

Sometimes you just have to ask and then they will say yes or no, and if they say yes, it’s a win. She [Hartley] did a thing where the two mayors of Stony Plain and Parkland County came and our local radio station did a thing on the patio where they [the mayors] made signature cocktails. You came out on a Saturday afternoon and your mayor was shaking up your drink. I mean there are all sorts of things you can do, but you really have to have some great brainstorming sessions to come up with ideas.

The staff at the Lac La Biche Regional Museum & Discovery Centre still used familiar media to reach their key audience, such as using the newspaper to solicit artifacts or have a “mystery artifact” column, which had been met with mild success. Everyone enjoyed looking at the photos of the artifacts, for example, but rarely gave the requested feedback.

**Collections/exhibits**

A different form of increased community awareness is to use the collections in different locations, which both the Crowsnest Museum and the Regional Museum & Discovery Centre did frequently. Crowsnest Museum staff created mini exhibits in the community for a variety of buildings: the sports arena, the curling club, a restaurant, and the Bellevue Mines. Michelle Cavanagh, the Collections Manager, told me: “It’s just one way of bringing the museum to the community. I took a look around and saw what the mine was not talking about and made a little
exhibit for them about the mine. We had one in a restaurant. You look at spaces. Then we say if you want to know more, come to the museum” (August 2, 2017). One of the best ways for the museums to increase awareness seemed to be by utilizing its archives to connect not just to locals but anyone who was interested in learning about their family history in the area, as shown in Lac La Biche:

One of our biggest things is trying to determine what they would feel would add value. I would hope that they would see the fact that their story is preserved, their story is protected. I think that different people that I talk to, some people don’t really care about where their roots are. Some people really do. We’ve had a ton of people come look for things in the archives, researching their family or something that happened in the community. There are a lot of people that appreciate the fact they can find that and who their families were and what they might have done. (Shirley Klyne, September 19, 2017)

At the time of my visit to Lac La Biche, they had a variety of exhibits up: at a senior’s home; two at a recreation centre; and one at Portage College 17. They changed these exhibits about three to four times a year. Updating exhibits had been a slow step-by-step process. The Lac La Biche Museum still utilizes dioramas, which, according to Bitgood (2014), can be a more immersive method of generating visitor attention than other types of exhibits. Still, the staff have been utilizing paid student summer jobs to update some of the exhibits with more experiential aspects. For example, in the back of the museum is an exhibit about an old ship, with a large model taking up most of the space and text panels discussing the historical river and lake journeys in the area. It was a student employee who created the knot-tying station to learn and practice a variety of knots, as well as the fur clothing photo station. These interventions are small cost-effective steps toward more interactive visits. Despite the museum being rather new, museums of this size can still lack the necessary funds to create more immersive types of exhibits. A lot of what they currently use are donations or cases that were already in the basement from its previous use as a meeting space.

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17 The Museum of Aboriginal Peoples’ Art and Artifacts is located in Portage College in Lac La Biche, Alberta.
Employing the museum as a social space

One idea that was brought up by several staff was the idea of the museum as a social space. This is increasingly common in museum studies literature, where museums are envisioned as hubs of dialogue and as a place to gather. Visitor research studies exploring museums that transition from more scholarly to more social spaces goes back several decades (Handler, 1993; Silverman, 2009). Staff at the Crowsnest Museum lauded the idea of the museum as a social space and that, having carried out programming in the past that utilized this concept, found it gratifying and helpful; new visitors were reached, and social connections were made. One example focused on a past programmer’s work. This programmer created programs for evenings when people were done work. Some were about love letter writing and used historical love letters as inspiration, another on quilting, and some even on techniques like how to take pictures with a smartphone. There would be wine and socializing. As Michelle Cavanagh said, “We get the community to come in here, not just for the artifacts but for the social aspect . . . We are using it as a social space rather than just a museum. I think a lot of museums are tending toward that, the more progressive museums” (August 2, 2017). There would be a small cover charge for the guests, usually around twelve to twenty people, but it was enjoyable for staff and visitors. Different people would attend those events than attended the museum as regular visitors (Alicen Montalbetti, August 3, 2017), and it created opportunities for contemporary community building focused on current interpersonal relations.

So, it was a historical focus, we learned a little bit of history . . . we communed. We talked. We had fun. We had drinks. They all left there and hopefully they went out into the community and talked about the museum and what a cool thing we did . . . It was beyond that, it was more just… sharing an evening and having a good time. You were in the space and while people were there they were looking around. So, I guess what I would see as a successful outcome is that more and more people—if we ran those things—is if more people took part in those and talked about it. (Lori Prentice, August 1, 2017)

Engaging potential school groups

One tactic the Regional Museum & Discovery Centre had worked hard on was to work with schools and get younger kids involved in the museum. In the past year, they had twenty school tours and created different exhibits that were experiential, including a knot-tying station and a fur clothing dress-up spot where they could get their photo taken and added to an album. As Victoria
Holota stated, “the museum has excellent elementary student programming. Our programs are designed around their social studies curriculum and further tailored to what the teachers would like from the experience” (September 28, 2017). This may seem like a standard museum activity, but for small museums—especially those with only a few staff members—creating consistent school programming and then advertising it well enough to get a response can be a time-consuming and arduous task. Both staff members were pleased with how the school tours were going and hoped to continue these visits into the future and get young children engaged with the local history.

The Multicultural Heritage Centre was also increasing its focus on school groups and school boards, not just in their local community but reaching out to nearby counties as well. Reaching out to teachers and schools as a main audience was key for future programming. The education programmer created information packets for every school in the county and neighbouring counties, as well as school districts in Edmonton. When I visited, the museum was working on social media strategies that specifically targeted educators (Meggi Mah, August 16, 2017). The staff attend teachers’ conferences, where they deliver a pitch to educators to bring their kids. In the six months preceding the employment of the education coordinator, there had been no education programs due to staff cutbacks and restructuring. A goal was to get teachers and parents interested again:

It’s finding ways to make those connections, build those relationships, and keep continuity. When teachers retire, they move away, lots of new young teachers are coming to the area and they’re not from here. They would especially not know where we are. (Meggi Mah, August 16, 2017)

**Cultivating positive feelings in the community**

One way to keep people aware about the museum and its work is to never underestimate positive feelings in the community. In the same way that the Crowsnest Museum holds many events with the simple goal of good word of mouth, a similar sentiment exists for the Multicultural Heritage Centre. Good feelings were what “inspire people to visit and support” (Meggi Mah, August 16, 2017). One of their events that leads to these good feelings is their annual Valentine’s tea. As already stated, it is an event that takes resources from the museum but, as Hartley told me, the value you get from the community and their appreciation is priceless. The senior’s tea, which
honours those senior couples married the longest, is one of the town’s traditions. There was one elderly woman who claimed she refused to divorce her husband so she could attend the tea. That kind of statement from someone in the community told one of the staff members about the worth of what they do, or at the very least, she joked, that they keep marriages together.

**Strategies for collaboration and partnership**

**Fundraising**

The importance of familiarity for the Crowsnest Museum is exemplified by the staff descriptions of the Crowsnest Museum’s annual Harvest of Memories fall fundraiser dinner and dance that draws in approximately 200 people. Fundraising for this event—and for other museum objectives—is conducted by the board members on a personal and face-to-face level, as is most of the museum networking in the community. As Lori, a board member, stated, she often had to ask people she knew since high school for donations: “[I will say] Look, I know we went to high school together and where you’re working, we’re in a position where we need some of your help” (August 1, 2017). These personal connections make or break fundraising opportunities. All board members and the director stated that they go out to the businesses face-to-face and interact with the owners. Staff noted that business partnerships were important to the museum, not only for money donations but also in-kind work and word of mouth referrals. By giving businesses their actual business as individual customers and as an institution, local businesses were more likely to become involved, particularly in events like their fall fundraiser:

> I think it helps to have a lot of businesses involved. By giving them work throughout the year, when they see your face come in, they’re happy to donate because they’ve seen you in the store. If they’ve never seen you and then you ask them to donate… You have to build that relationship. We don’t just go to one hardware store, we go to them all. (Chris Matthews, August 1, 2017)

Partnerships throughout the community were viewed as the most rewarding strategy for overcoming a variety of obstacles, such as outreach and funding opportunities. The Lakeland Interpretive Society board in Lac La Biche fundraises to keep the museum running and working towards becoming more independently sustainable. For example, the museum has its Annual Portage La Biche Rendezvous in June in conjunction with the Lac La Biche Canadian Native Friendship Centre, the Antique Society, the Lac La Biche County, and the Lac La Biche Mission Historical Society (see Figure 21). The Rendezvous is a loose historical re-enactment from the
Lac La Biche Mission Historical Site to McArthur Beach in the town of Lac La Biche, with exhibits, games, and activities once everyone arrives. Lac La Biche county has a strong Cree and Métis presence, including Beaver Lake Cree, Heart Lake First Nation, and the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region 1. This event is a way for different heritage groups in the district to come together.

![Figure 21: Paddlers at the Annual Portage La Biche Rendezvous in 2017. Source: Lac La Biche Region.](image)

The museum also hosts different fundraising events throughout the district with other entities, such as the Lac La Biche Mission, Alberta Parks, and Beaver River Watershed Alliance. Some of these events are purely outreach and community engagement, but fundraising events, such as the Rendezvous, are integral to the survival of the museum.

**Working with businesses**

Collaboration with other local businesses and associations comes up as a natural response to obstacles like staff and funding limitations. For example, Siobhan Rasmussen, the programmer at the Crowsnest Museum, would attend meetings in the art studio across the street, called Creative Minds; everyone in the area who was artistically inclined was invited. As she said, “I go because I want to learn about the community engagement happening there. So that’s how I’ve met most of the other people and other programmers from areas like Frank and Pincher Creek” (August 2, 2017). Partnering with businesses was a way to reach out to people the museum might not
otherwise attract. As Lori Prentice (August 1, 2017) said:

We had a lot of events going on one weekend, with Canada 150 and the Alberta Police Barracks opening on the same day... We had different groups playing music, one night a group of fifteen fiddlers. They didn’t know about the venue [the museum grounds] and wanted to play there in the future. That’s fifteen people we didn’t have before.

Reciprocating with businesses is also an important funding model of the local museum. Events, programs, and support structures such as sharing of spaces or materials, are all done in partnership with businesses. For example, in the Crowsnest Museum, events are held in other business spaces so the businesses can make money too (Chris Matthews, August 1, 2017). When grants come in, Chris Matthews, the Executive Director, encourages the businesses to bill him so they can direct that money toward growing strong businesses relationships, despite the local town mentality of trying to give him discounts. To him, it is all about support.

The Multicultural Heritage Centre partners with businesses for programming sponsorships, and education programming in particular. One such program is called City Slickers, where they bring kids in for a day to learn about farming and sustainable food production. Without the sponsors, the entire event would not occur. As Melissa Hartley said:

We put the whole thing on. We try and get sponsors and bring it and engage the people who have local businesses related to farming. We’re engaging the farmers, the kids, the schools, the mayor always comes and introduces people. It’s a one-day showcase that we can’t ever make money off of. If we don’t have sponsors, we can’t put it on. (August 14, 2017)

When asked if all their events must have sponsorship, the answer was mostly yes. Even something as casual as their Valentine’s Day Tea for seniors had sponsors for the snacks and coffee. However, even though it is not a large event, it is an important one to the museum and the community. As Debi Mills, board president, said, “these are the people that built this community and they’re important to us and we just want to honour them. We have to choose what we can do though because we can’t do everything [for free]” (August 14, 2017).
At the Lac La Biche Regional Museum & Discovery Centre, Klyne discussed the importance of partnering with businesses to tell local stories: “They [local businesses] all have stories to tell too. There’s a lot of long term businesses where there might be two or three families that have operated the business, so those stories really need to be told. It takes someone with the time and desire to convince them of the benefit” (September 19, 2017). At the time of my visit the Aurora Theatre, one of the oldest theatres in the town of Lac La Biche and built in the 1940s, was about to be demolished. A tinge of nostalgia and the importance of local business history seemed to exist in all the conversations I had, whether they were interviews or simply chats in coffee shops. Businesses were also supportive in terms of donating silent auction items and giving sponsorship money. Sometimes the museum had been surprised at the popularity of some of their partnered events. Klyne continued:

Two years ago we did our Stones and Bones Presentation. An archaeological company came up [Time Tree Archaeology]. They wanted to share their findings… we rented the room upstairs which normally holds 25-30 people comfortably and we invited people, put an ad in the paper, if you have an artifact, and you want them to look at it… well we were overflowing. An absolute surprise. That was an opportunity we missed because we weren’t prepared. We thought we’d have a couple people… It was very successful. (September 19, 2017)

**Reaching out to townspeople**

Reaching out to members and invested townspeople was a method of dealing with some of the limitations of the facility, for example, limited space for object storage. As mentioned earlier, the Regional Museum & Discovery Centre has one member who owns a transport company who donated a decommissioned trailer, so they could store objects in there until they are able to get more storage space. Partnerships outside of the museum and in the local community were also seen to make or break efforts of the museum to reach out in new ways, though participants observed that it was sometimes difficult to prioritize and cultivate new partnerships; it took a self-conscious effort to develop partnerships that worked toward future goals rather than just pursue immediate strategies in isolation:

It’s a hard thing to self-examine or to look for, to not stumble on. You just want to go do your thing and you have a good idea and a little bit of money and you go. But sometimes it’s hard to step back and look for a partnership where you can have a
successful engagement strategy for something. (Chris Matthews, August 1, 2017)

It also important to reach other audiences through locally-focused partnerships or actions. For example, the board of the Crowsnest Museum also publishes books on local history that are sold in bookstores in the Pass and outside of it, including copies mailed to old residents of the Pass (Lori Prentice, August 1, 2017). The previously mentioned Hillcrest Mine Disaster Anniversary memorial park is another way the board integrated their work into the community in a locally meaningful way. There is some overlap between museum work, the Historical Society, and the Crowsnest Heritage Initiative; they all work toward similar goals in different ways throughout the Pass. A lot of the members of the board are members on multiple others. This also helps to keep board members engaged in the community in different capacities and aware of local culture and events.

When it comes to collaborations, the MCHC prioritizes partnerships with local organizations rather than regional museums. As Melissa Hartley told me, they had a laid-back attitude of waiting to see if anyone wanted to reach out and work with them. She would prefer if they could start reaching out and seeking collaborations for ideas such as traveling exhibits. Locally, however, they partner with agricultural businesses and farmers of the area for their farming and food sustainability programming. At the time of the interviews, the museum was talking about partnering with the library and increasing ties with similar institutions to focus on cross promotion, event coordination, and complementary programming (Meggi Mah, August 16, 2017). One staff member had a strong belief that working within the community was more important than working with other museums outside of their geographic area:

"The connections culturally in the community are more valuable, I think, [than collaborating with other museums] because that helps us have our finger on the pulse of this community and helps us make decisions for this community. (Angela Fetch Muzyka, August 14, 2017)

Like the mentality of staff at the Crowsnest Museum, creating and maintaining relationships was important for the survival of the museum and an important part of their job.

"You don’t ever want to let a relationship go in any way. You always want to maintain good relationships, especially in the times you’re not asking for something."
… If you partner with other people and work with other groups, you can better meet the needs of the community. I just did Picnic in the Park with FCSS, different nursing homes, and the Pioneer Museum. We took isolated individuals who can’t usually leave their homes and we had this picnic where they get out and we have entertainment and dancing or chair dancing and they come and do a tour of the museum . . . If I hadn’t worked with FCSS I wouldn’t have networked in the same way. I wouldn’t have necessarily met more of the seniors’ homes, met some of the directors to set up future relationships, maybe get them interested in the reminiscent kits. And we saw what the community needed from us. (Angela Fetch Muzyka, August 14, 2017)

The museum also takes part in a Cultural Roundtable, run by the Town of Stony Plain. All the groups that provide cultural services to the town have a quarterly meeting to touch base and see what they are providing for the community and to bounce ideas off one another. When the museum went for certain project grants (such as for Alberta Cultural Days) they applied for the grant based on the collaborations with the people sitting at the cultural roundtable. Some staff believed they spend more time with these groups than the AMA, for example, whom they only talk with to discuss funding options in the coming year.

Reaching out to other institutions

Another method to deal with limited staff and time is to be sure to develop reciprocal collaborations and partnerships with similar institutions (Friesen, 2012). For example, the Crowsnest Museum runs a program called “Connecting Communities” where staff bring archival photos to seniors’ homes and work together to collect names, details, stories, and to bring joy to the seniors. They are joined by someone from the library who comes to assist with the technology (such as an iPad) that enables seniors to look more closely at photos (Siobhan Rasmussen, August 2, 2017). This collaboration between the museum, the library, and seniors’ residences helps the museum enhance its knowledge about the collection, creates ties with the library and the seniors’ home, and creates a valued experience for the seniors.

Lac La Biche Museum seemed to do more collaborations with museums than businesses. The museum tended to share information and policies with other museums and had help from High Prairie (three and a half hours to the west) to Fernie, BC. They also worked with the Mission, the local Antique Society, a small museum in Plamondon twenty minutes north, and one in Rich
Lake thirty minutes south. Portage College also has a museum, so they discussed plans with them. Shirley Klyne explained why she believed museum relationships were important:

I certainly think it’s beneficial because, again, museums play a much different role than they did when they were just the display space. The more ideas we can glean from each other, then everyone can tell a unique story and there will be more opportunities for people to come in and enjoy. If we don’t talk to each other we’ll never really know [what is happening elsewhere]. (Shirley Klyne, September 19, 2017)

Staff admitted that within their county there are some barriers and siloes that could be broken down for better conversations within their field. They hoped that moving into the future, the museum would continue to reach out to others not only in the county but outside of it, for behind-the-scenes work but also for exhibit sharing, event partnerships, and more. One staff member pointed out that partnerships could be an opportunity to engage with groups and institutions that they have had difficulty engaging with in the past, and that the museum had already begun to do so: “For example, we frequently partnered with the Mission and recently partnered with the Lac La Biche Canadian Native Friendship Centre for one of our summer events and a research project on Indigenous history in Lac La Biche” (Victoria Holota, September 28, 2017). It is well understood that partnerships with non-museum agencies are important for museum relevance, particularly with agencies that address social, health, or community development needs (Halpin, 2007). It is the face-to-face engagement and interaction aspect where local museums can flourish in their smaller communities.

It was also normal for the Crowsnest Museum to help other groups and other non-profits in the region. Michelle Cavanagh offered, “If they need help with something, we help. If they come in and ask, we help with that. That is what we do” (August 2, 2017). Collaborations with other museums did not always appear as an obvious solution to any of the concerns that the museum faced, however, the Crowsnest Museum did find that regional museum collaborations helped to create a cohesive local focus and support system. Every month the leaders of the three main sites in the Pass—Bellevue Mines, Frank Slide, and the Crowsnest Museum—meet to discuss what sort of events and plans each institution have. They work together in creative ways. Frank Slide, as the institution with the most funding, sometimes needs images for their exhibitions; Crowsnest Museum, which also serves as the archives, sells them the photos they need. They send visitors
to each other all the time; they buy each other’s books. If people arrive at the other sites and ask about genealogy, they are pointed in the direction of the Crowsnest Museum. They avoid overlap by not talking about each other’s subject areas: Crowsnest Museum does not focus on the Frank Slide, and the Frank Slide Interpretive Centre only focuses on the slide itself (Siobhan Rasmussen, August 2, 2017). Other board members agree that this cross-communication and cross-promotion helped open different communication channels between institutions when it could be easy to become closed off and introverted. As Chris Matthews said, “I think we’re the healthiest we’ve ever been and looking at helping out everybody” (August 1, 2017). It is that mentality of openness that has slowly begun to change the previously fractured heritage sector in the Pass.

The weekend I was in the Crowsnest Museum visiting, they were preparing for the Doors Open Festival, a Pass-wide festival where all institutions opened their doors for free and where public events, markets, concerts, and hikes were held. These types of events required all institutions in the Pass to work together. For example, Chris Matthews told me “The Doors Open festival is run through the Heritage Initiative, the chair is a Frank Slide employee, I’m always there, a board member is from Bellevue Mines, the Conservation Society runs hikes, the Coleman Community Society is a giant farmer’s market, and everybody puts it on together” (August 1, 2017). This supportive approach extends to newer small museums in surrounding areas. For example, in Fernie, BC, just over the provincial border, the Crowsnest Museum helped with policies and procedures and loaned several artifacts and contextual resources for a traveling exhibit to their new museum. This also happens to be the same museum that Lac La Biche had been in contact with. They also provided management information for a new museum in Sparwood, BC. Sharing that kind of information and help is no loss for the museum, as it is cost-free and helps to make positive connections.

**Collaborating with local governments**

One strong viewpoint at the MCHC was finding a variety of revenue streams through different programming, their kitchen, and self-sustainable programming. This had been their focus over the past several years and set the museum apart from other heritage institutions, not only in the area but the rest of Alberta. The revenue streams the museum now utilizes support their focused mandate of sustainability. Before the shake-up over the last two years, museum board members
found that their programming and partnerships had been almost too diverse, in that they stretched themselves too thin and answered any call for help without thinking of the overall strategic goals of the institution. They called in the town manager to come in and do an overview with them, where they laid everything out to seek help in simplifying their work. As Debi Mills said:

Diversity is great but if you become so diverse that you’re only an inch deep that you don’t even know who you are anymore, you’re just doing things to grab grant money, that’s not good either . . . There had come a point where there was a lack of vision and a lack of management . . . When the town manager came in and came back with a beautiful paper on sustainability and told us, “moving on this is what we need to do.” Actually working with the town of Stony Plain has been a very positive thing. (August 16, 2017)

By teaming up with the municipality—which the museum had a tenuous relationship with in the past—they managed to find a new solid direction for the museum, based on their previous programming, available space, gardens, and resources. The new mandate of self-sustainability with a focus on the agriculture of the area is a distinct focus that holds many opportunities for the museum in the future. By working on the relationships with the county and the town and creating open dialogue, board and staff were beginning to see healthier relationships emerge between the entities. Now the museum has the mayors from Stony Plain and Parkland County involved in many of their events, rather than the nearly non-existent relationship they had several years ago. To be economically sustainable, Mills confronted the need for community support. She observed that this is hard work, a different kind of work than looking for grants but that personal contact and commitment were essential:

I feel like that’s been a bigger challenge, that takes more work than writing a grant proposal. Pounding the pavement, going to businesses, going to friends and neighbours, and saying will you lean into this? That takes more courage than writing a grant proposal and sending it off. That takes a lot more work. (August 16, 2017)

Just before the week I drove to Lac La Biche, the museum had gotten the approval to move to a new permanent facility in a different building in town that is currently not being used and is still owned by the county. It had been a stressful month leading up to my arrival, with many meetings and presentations on why the move was necessary for the museum. This move, Klyne told me, will be significant in many ways but also because it will help in applying for grants through the
AMA, which requires museums to have a permanent facility. The basement that currently houses the museum is a short-term contract. The collection of artifacts and the archives is held in trust by the city, so it is not that the museum is a municipal museum but they—the museum, run by the Lakeland Interpretive Society—help the city preserve the collections the county owns. Shirley pointed this out in our conversation and how stressful it was waiting to see if the county would help in relocating the museum to continue to preserve the collection. She had gone to many meetings to point out the necessity and that, if they did not, the collection would be left up to them to figure out. It seemed a precarious situation to be in until they knew if their contract would be renewed; as a new museum the roles, functions, and needs were not yet completely understood by all involved (Shirley Klyne, September 19, 2017).

Strategies and opportunities for board, staff, & volunteers

Utilizing the mandate

In addition to putting effort into large civic events, creativity is a value in the Crowsnest Museum, for events, programming, budgeting and more. Siobhan Rasmussen, the museum programmer, pointed out that there was no official budget for programming. She just ran it past the director and they decided if it would work. Director Chris Matthews discussed the creativity that they had, as a non-profit small institution, as a boon and perhaps an area where they had more opportunity than larger institutions. Having an open vision statement—“The Crowsnest Historical Society and Crowsnest Museum & Archives will be a leader in and catalyst for the preservation, protection, and portrayal of the cultural heritage of Crowsnest Pass” (Crowsnest Museum Website, 2017)—allowed for a wide range of creative exercises. If it succeeded, that was good to make note of and if it did not, that was just part of the small museum life. Matthews said in the interview, “I have such a broad mandate: be the catalyst for history in the Crowsnest Pass. You bring a craft to me that will bring in twenty kids, do it, we can make it fit. That’s the thing . . . I’m allowed to be more creative. I see that and feel that” (August 1, 2017).

Staff at the Multicultural Heritage Centre talked about the importance of their social mandate and new niche focus in Stony Plain and staying true to this mandate by bringing what they had to a higher level as opposed to always looking for new ways of bringing in money. As Jennifer Burns-Robinson, who worked for the Organic Master Gardening program hosted by the museum,
told me, “we were given this land and this area to increase our educational opportunities available to the community, to do things in a more studied way and not so haphazard” (August 15, 2017). The Organic Master Gardening program is a college course held on the museum grounds, where students work with the gardens and orchards and graduate with a certificate. In the end, rather than grant chasing and applying for money if it did not add anything to their bottom line, the Multicultural Heritage Centre was focused on what they could do with what they had, on tightening their concentration, and making sure the funding went exactly where it needed to go.

Staff & board changes

When the Crowsnest Museum was almost forced to close in 2012 due to an unstable financial situation (Massey, 2012) swift changes needed to be made. A new director was hired and a new board was created by willing community volunteers. They banded together to do their best to save the museum. Through promotion, face-to-face canvasing, and resolve, they succeeded in keeping the museum. Only now are they admitting that they are more financially stable than before. This steady increase in financial stability told the staff and board that the community wanted them; monetary and in-kind donations were a vote of confidence (Chris Matthews, August 1, 2017).

Inadequate funding models and a slowed-down local economy also meant that the Multicultural Heritage Centre had to get creative. After a near closure several years ago, the board decided that it was necessary to cut back on staff, combine roles, and hire a new director, who has been there since 2016. One of their main methods to combat a lack of funding was to scale down their operations; the new mantra was to do less and do it better. A lot of the previous grants that the museum applied for were tied to specific deliverables that created a lot of extra work with no focus. Melissa Hartley, the Executive Director, explained the scaling back:

I’ve tried to back off from that and tried to scale things down and 85% of any business is salary. So if you scale down people and try to have a greater level of excellence you basically have to do less and do it better. Some of the things we were involved in… hundreds of initiatives. If anyone called and asked if we wanted to do this, we would jump onto it if there was some funding attached to it without looking at what the real costs of that were. (August 14, 2017)
**Being proactive**

The Crowsnest Museum participants talked a lot about being reactive to all the different pressures, financial and otherwise. Now that they survived a near closure and are on more stable ground, they discussed focusing on being proactive rather than reactive:

> How do we fix ourselves and be better suited and better prepared and transparent? if you volunteer on the board, this is what it entails, this is the committee we need you on… Being better at being proactive. We very much said as a board this isn’t a negative statement. We did good work. Look at what we’ve done. We’re stable. So now is just the time to keep working. (Chris Matthews, August 1, 2017)

The Lac La Biche Regional Museum & Discovery Centre, only three years old, has no plans to slow down. If anything, it sounded like more partnerships, more events, and more outreach were some of the main goals of the museum for the coming year, alongside the hiring of a new director. A key goal is looking to diversify voices and perspectives in the exhibits and work more with local First Nations. In the museum field more broadly, there is a growing acceptance of the idea that no one subject can be understood from one perspective, and that the interpretation of the museum itself has inherent biases (MacDonald, 2007). I witnessed this, particularly in talking with Lac La Biche staff, who were aware of the challenges and some of the disconcerting perspectives in their displays, or the lack of multiple perspectives more generally. Museums tend to heroize their local history (Weil, 2007), when instead there is an opportunity to present diverse opinions and even critiques.

Currently a lot of the museum’s hopes rest on the new facility: once they move, they will be able to conduct more programming, host larger events, invite speakers and other organizations into their space, as well as have the board actually meet at the museum and create a feeling of ownership and affinity between the board and the museum itself. Despite the paradox of a new museum with dated exhibitions, the goals of the museum aim high. There is a drive to participate with the community and the desire to be important to Lac La Biche County and its residents, evident in their plans and community-focused exhibits.
Despite the importance of a small museum being engaged outside of its walls and in the local community, the Multicultural Heritage Centre staff noted that they could not do as much as they used to. They had to change their strategy to pick and choose what they could participate in, particularly with the staff cutback. They sought—and continue to seek—ways for their community to be invested on a long-term basis, recognizing that “if we don’t have the community behind us we will become extinct” (Angela Fetch Muzyka, August 14, 2017). The goals of the museum center around reaching out to the community in more concrete ways, such as creating focus groups to find out what the community would like to see the museum doing more of, as well as more partnerships with a variety of community groups. As Debi Miller, board president, told me: “[Success is] Partnership. I feel we are moving towards that now. We are working hand in glove with the town of Stony Plain, in particular” (August 16, 2017). Several staff members have goals of changing the exhibitions in the museum portion of the building. Staff are looking for it to be more dynamic, so visitors do not feel like they have seen it all when visiting. As Melissa Hartley told me, “We want people to think in addition to the programming there’s interesting exhibit changes going on other than in the art gallery but in the museum, itself” (August 14, 2017). According to some staff, to attract younger audiences, they need those exhibits to change and be different and focus on local social issues: “There’s this sort of social engagement piece and then it becomes this reason to stay and become invested” (Angela Fetch Muzyka, August 14, 2017). Along with this is the goal to seek out different collaborations with museums, particularly to gain and share resource such as traveling exhibits.

Discussion & Conclusion

The role of the museum in the community has changed dramatically over the decades. As Ivan Karp (1992) says in the seminal *Museums and Communities*, museum and community relationships are complex, and the idea of communities and engaging with them, as a museum, is an active relationship. How do museum experiences become a community issue, and how do museums accommodate communities? Communities are complex entities, and people often belong to many communities simultaneously and in these myriad relationships, the museum must find its role, be relevant, and seek value (Crooke, 2008; Karp, 1992). There is a growing civic interest in social change, and to remain relevant, museums can begin to implement a variety of strategies that can generate a greater level of shared communication with visitors (Wood, 2009). In response to this growing interest in social well-being and change, museums feel both an
economic and a social pressure to adapt their strategies to these civic goals (Hirzy, 2002; Neilson, 2003). Since the 1980s, it has been posited that the work of the “new museum” will stem from the local community and its needs (Hausenchild, 1988; Wood, 2009).

My research demonstrates that the key to engagement is not to import urban concerns into a community but to focus on local concerns and values. Despite there being common strategies amongst the three case study museums, and similarities within the larger context of the survey data that includes museums of various sizes, successful strategies relied on local relationships and interests, such as having the local mayor come to events, or commemorating events that speak to residents rather than tourists. The survey data recalls John Cotton Dana’s thoughts as far back as 1917, and the question of museums’ goals. As Dana said, learn what aid the community needs and fit the museum idea to those needs. Crooke (2008) expands on this idea: “we can ask whether we are adopting greater community awareness because our concern lies principally with the needs of the community, or whether our interest begins with the museum and its development . . . If community-related museum policy does not have the community at its origin, is it flawed?” (p. 61). By surveying museums and talking with staff at three sites, it is clear museums want to go in the direction of socially-conscious, modern exhibitions and programming, but the question that is not answered is where these ideas and direction come from: are these goals based on the advice of the community, or from museological discourse and what is expected? It is subsequently important to consider why and how museums have the goals they do, and what they are achieving through them. Perhaps, as Candlin (2015) suggests, the role of the small museum is not to aspire to be the large museum, but to achieve its own goals in its own ways.

Stephen Weil believed that museums are places that can “contribute importantly to the health of human communities” (2002, p. 42), and that museums are safe places for debate and confrontation. There is a tension between listening to communities and listening to “the field” or profession. If local museum staff can balance this tension and try to see museums as Weil did, then this mentality could help local museums make further effective change within and for their communities by finding sustainable and creative strategies to not only stay open but create a space for their communities to engage in meaningful exchange and dialogue. Focusing on what the local museum can bring that other major museums do not can be one of the first steps toward long-lasting community engagement practices. As Weil (1999) stated—and as my research
begins to prove—the revolution of a museum’s involvement in social change and community engagement rests in the hands of both museum administration and staff: “The most important new skills of all will be the ability to envision how the community’s ongoing and/or emerging needs in all their dimensions—physical, psychological, economic, and social—might potentially be served by the museum’s very particular competencies” (Weil, 1999, 253).
Chapter 5
Conclusion

There are so many great memories. Just talking to people, you know? There are so many interesting moments with visitors. People are delightful, and people take the time to talk to you. You get to know the faces and names of those who visit regularly. It’s lovely.

– Angela Fetch Muzyka, Stony Plain Multicultural Heritage Centre

I was sitting behind the front desk, looking through archival material on the Crowsnest Museum, when an older woman ran frantically into the front room. The room is large and is made up of the gift shop, break room, and work desks. The woman is elderly, small, and she looks frail, but as soon as she began to speak I knew I judged her too quickly. Her voice was fierce for such a small person. I first thought she came in to yell at the museum director. I was shocked at first, until I realized she was upset about something else entirely: a new mining company was staking out land on the mountains and wanted to buy out her family property of over 100 years; all the other neighbours that had been defending adjacent properties had slowly agreed to sell them. She claimed the only other person left defending their land had just signed it over. It was now just herself, fighting to protect her family’s heritage against a large mining company that will make more jobs but destroy land in the process. She came for help. She came for advice. In the Pass, one of the places this lady thought of to help her in this quest to save her land was the local museum. I found that event particularly telling about the idea, or at least the potential, of the local museum for its communities: an advocate of sorts, there to protect, engage, and step out of its historic roles focused on preservation and education to extend out to the community in personal ways. This experience followed me throughout the rest of my thesis research and writing, reminding me of what the possibilities were for the humble local museum.

Key findings

Local museums in Alberta face many types of obstacles that can inhibit community engagement. Obstacles can be financial, operational (staffing, volunteering), exhibit-related, and communication and collaboration with communities. These can limit the ability of a local museum to connect to their communities. Current funding structures lead to suffering of basic operations and limit connections to local communities. It is vital to keep staff and volunteer
training consistent, affordable, and accessible, as currently a lack of both are related to funding constraints. Outreach tends to be more about marketing in smaller areas; community apathy and not knowing the museum exists are problematic and these obstacles are seen to be best dealt with by marketing and advertising as opposed to more personal programming, which staff voiced they wanted to continue but found difficult with a lack of staff. There is a need to create more meaningful connections, and this may also be related to the concern regarding outdated exhibits that do not tell the diverse stories of the area. There is also an acknowledgement that discussing sensitive issues in local communities can be difficult, not only because of potential community backlash and small-town politics but also because of collection disorganization and a lack of funds. Volunteer recruitment is another obstacle, as in these towns volunteer pools are very small. All the case studies felt they were isolated from collaborating with other museums; conference costs are too expensive for their staff, and there is a fear that larger museums may not understand the complexities of local museum obstacles and concerns. Some obstacles, such as a lack of First Nations and diverse perspectives, are important but staff and board were unsure of what next steps would be to increase these viewpoints in their museums.

The obstacles listed above that local museums face are substantial, in that they all have adverse effects on how the museum allots time and energy for community-focused endeavours and collaborations. My conclusions on the obstacles of local museums are that, despite a general understanding from staff and board that exhibits are often outdated, facilities are rundown, and there is a deep need for community investment in order to keep the museum running, the operational needs of the museum often swamp small staff numbers and take away from larger missions that may focus more on social issues, community investment, and the telling of more diverse local stories. The engagement and upkeep of community relationships is integral for the survival of local museums; to keep their doors open and remain sustainable, both economically and culturally, local museums need the time and resources to engage their communities with the work they are doing. Unlike with large municipal, provincial, or national museums, closure is a very real threat for small museums.

Strategies small museums utilize to engage their communities are born out of necessity and speak to the adaptations required in highly-localized and often economically-precarious contexts. The strategies that are frequently used by local museums to connect with their communities are
locally focused, involve stepping out of the actual building to participate in large town events or small community meet-ups, and being involved as individuals in the community. By focusing on the unique positioning of local museums to interact with their communities in ways that larger museums cannot, it may help local museums recognize the creativity that is available to them to combat the above obstacles. The necessity of making oneself known in the community and face-to-face work—whether it is visiting local businesses as customers or making the rounds asking for donations for fundraising events—is integral to the survival of the museums. Despite staff and board members not saying so explicitly, all strategies concerning programming, exhibits, and events focused on local stories, local people, and local concerns, rather than attempting to import urban topics into a more rural or suburban setting. Moreover, “engagement” and “partnerships” for small museum staff were frequently imagined in economic terms: they sought relationships with local businesses. Such an economic focus is not often the type of “community engagement” imagined in museum literature, where “communities” are of interest for their ability to diversify and augment content, not budget lines.

There is a disconnect between museum studies literature on community museums, which assumes that local museum community engagement strategies are the way of the future for museums of all sizes because local museums somehow have an easier time connecting with and getting their message across to their communities. However, based on my research, this is not the case; outdated exhibit design, staffing concerns, lack of funding, and community apathy are large deterrents that local museum staff are still struggling to deal with in a realistic and practical manner. The literature suggests that most museums should look to local museums when attempting to better connect with their communities; I believe that local museums serve a distinct purpose and must operate in a manner different from larger institution that cannot always be replicated, and perhaps should not be, by larger institutions. Steve Friesen’s idea that small museums are “string quartets, not orchestras” (2012, pg. 50), reminds us to recognize the practices of small museums as their own genre, with distinct kinds of potential—not as failed orchestras. While both ensembles perform music they are not, cannot, and should not seek to be the same. Likewise, large museums cannot assume they can simply adopt the strategies of community museums toward the same ends, as the literature suggests.
Future research

There are thousands of local museums across Canada, yet there is very little evidence-based research on how they are run, their operational obstacles, and their strategies to stay relevant and sustainable in local communities. This is especially so in rural contexts in a different and more urgent way than in urban settings. My case study work in Alberta is a first step in better understanding the complexities and nuances of local museum operations and community engagement strategies, but future research should look to similar-sized institutions across the country in different provinces to better understand the situation of local museums within the larger museological landscape of Canada. When we hear results from the State of Canadian Museums report by the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, it will be vital to have objective research being conducted to better inform not only federal government decisions and data collection, but also those of provincial and municipal governments, provincial museums associations, and more. It is these bodies that often aid in the financial survival of local museums in the form of grants or as parts of city or county budgets. We need to better understand the state of these different government funding models to assess if they help in the survival of local museums or if restructuring needs to occur.

An important aspect of this type of research is to study the same situation from the point of view of the communities and not just the museum staff and board members as has been done in my thesis research. By conducting something like focus groups on community engagement practices in these communities and their museums, it can help to lend even more thorough and detailed data about the overall situation of community-museum relations on a local level. It is imperative that museum studies scholars begin looking at these situations realistically through the voices and stories of those that make up these relationships and institutions, as opposed to projecting the overall direction and aim of the field into these local situations.

There is no real end to this work, but a goal is to create a more nuanced picture of local museum operations and the museum-community relationships that must exist on some level for a local museum to keep its doors open and act as a heritage institution in and for their respective communities. Community engagement is directly tied to the sustainability of the museum, especially in local situations when the reliance on funding from the government cannot be
assumed. To create enough research to help change or decrease the obstacles for local museums and make those who work with them aware of their particular situations would be a valuable addition to the field of museum studies in Canada, and to those who work in and for local museums and are passionate about continued work with their local heritage. Such a body of research could help to open the conversation about local museums particularly in literature, in the institution themselves, in governments on all levels, and in classrooms.
Interviews

Chris Matthews, Crowsnest Museum, 1 August 2017.
Lori Prentice, Crowsnest Museum, 1 August 2017.
Michelle Cavanagh, Crowsnest Museum, 2 August 2017.
Pat Rypien, Crowsnest Museum, 8 August 2017.
Rudy Pagnucco, Crowsnest Museum, 1 August 2017.
Victoria Holota, Lac La Biche Regional Museum & Discovery Centre, 28 September 2017.
Shirley Klyne, Lac La Biche Regional Museum & Discover Centre, 19 September 2017.
Angela Fetch Muzyka, Multicultural Heritage Centre, 14 August 2017.
Debi Mills, Multicultural Heritage Centre, 16 August 2017.
Meggi Mah, Multicultural Heritage Centre, 16 August 2017.
Melissa Hartley, Multicultural Heritage Centre, 14 August 2017.
References


http://www.crowsnestmuseum.ca/about-us


Lac La Biche Regional Museum & Discovery Centre. (n.d.) About the Museum. Retrieved February 7, 2018, from https://laclabichemuseum.com/about/


van Aalst, I., & Boogaarts, I. (2002). From museum to mass entertainment. *European Urban and


Appendices
Appendix A

Survey Questions and Responses

1. Since when have you worked in your institution? (date)
2. What is your role in the museum? – added multiple choice
3. How many visitors did your institution receive last year?
4. Please describe what you believe your museum’s community to be.
5. Do you believe your institution is engaged with your community?
   Y   N
6. Do you believe community engagement is important for a local museum? Why or why not?
   Y   N
7. Please list past programs, events, or relationships of your institution you believe fall under the idea of community engagement (both inside and outside of your building(s)).
8. What would you like to see your museum do more of in the future, if anything, to engage your community?
   a. More events with the already interested public
   b. Diversifying our audience
   c. Participating in community events outside of the museum
   d. Partnerships with local businesses
   e. Focus groups with stakeholders
   f. New exhibitions and programming
   g. More school programs
   h. More socially conscious programming
   i. Expanding what community means to our institution
   j. Reworking policies and procedures within the institution
   k. Nothing
9. Has your institution ever held a working group facilitating community engagement/outreach?
   (1) What are your main sources of funding?
      (a) Government grants
      (b) City council budgets
      (c) Fundraising
      (d) Memberships and ticket sales
      (e) Events and programming (includes hosting weddings)
   (2) What percentage of your funding does each represent (per your institution’s budget)?
   (3) Is your annual budget: a) less than $50 000 b) $50 000 - $100 000 or c) $100 000 - $250 000 d) above $250 000
   (4) How many paid staff (part time, seasonal and/or full time) work at your institution? How many volunteers contribute to your institution?
   (5) What are some of your institution’s strategies for committing to community engagement with limited resources?
   (6) Do you think you effectively share these strategies across the province? Across the country? Why or why not?
   (7) What kinds of social change do you believe your institution has brought in your community, and why? If none, simply write N/A.
   (8) If you would like to discuss your responses further to contribute to the research, please provide your name and an email or phone number to contact you.
# Appendix B

## Data Accumulation Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Code Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FUNDING</strong></td>
<td>fund, grant, budget, salary, operating budget, donation, fundraise, money,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>resources,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BUILDING/MAINTENANCE</strong></td>
<td>roof, grounds, repair, maintenance, building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COLLECTIONS/EXHIBITS/ARCHIVES</strong></td>
<td>artifact, object, collection, storage, exhibits, records, genealogy, tour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PUBLIC OUTREACH</strong></td>
<td>event, program, school, visit, engagement, outreach, seniors, group, club,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>visitors, reach out, community, involvement (staff), known, attract,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>STAFF</strong></td>
<td>volunteers, job, role, salary, staff, training, professional, professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>development, summer student, intern, board member, board, recruit, teach,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>education, conference, AMA, run, facilitate,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OBSTACLES</strong></td>
<td>lack, absence, missing, competition, not enough, overload, busy, disinterest,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>challenge, difficult, hard, struggle, poor, obsolete, closure, seasonal,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>management, unfortunately, age, small, work, need, constraint, concern,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>trouble, economy, can't, obstacle, barrier, neglect, problem, static,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>STRATEGIES</strong></td>
<td>partnerships, network, collaborate, space, building, adapt, grow, develop,</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>help, contribute, strategize, share, hours, seasonal, strategies, share,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>event, reach, feedback, social media, advertise, market, potential,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>opportunities, change, creative, flexibility, restructure, forward,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>communicate,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT</strong></td>
<td>community, involvement, investment, donations (in kind), buy in, values,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>identity, belonging, relevance, access, family, story, event, numbers,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>commitment, more of, connection, interest, engage, relationship, program,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>age, interest, member,</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>GOALS or SUCCESS</strong></td>
<td>goals, mission, vision, mandate, success, relevance, education, outcome,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>profile, increased, passion, fulfill,</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SOCIAL CHANGE</strong></td>
<td>social change, well-being, impact, influence, effect, sustainability,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>transform, society, controversy, comfort, politics, political, environment,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>justice, fulfill, better, civic,</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Appendix C

Interview Questions

Interview Guide with Director/Manager/Board Member

Professional history

First I’m just going to ask you a bit about your background and experience.

- How long have you worked for this museum/on this board and in what capacity?
- Have you worked in other museums/boards? Which ones and in what capacities?
- Have you ever taken part in or run any kind of community engagement workshop?
- What is your educational or professional background?
- Have you ever studied museums formally (i.e. at college, university), or as part of professional development (AMA workshops, CMA professional development)? When and where?
- How did you find this role (board or director)?

Management Issues

As the director/manager/board member of the [insert museum name here] what are the greatest challenges you face in running this organization?

a) Operating within the provincial structure?
   b) Operating locally (with respect to municipal council?)
   c) Serving your visitors/community (expectations)?

How has the nature of these challenges changed or not over your tenure and why (your best estimation)?

How would you describe the focus of the work done by your staff and how has that focus changed over the past five years-decade, if at all?

a) How many employees do you have on staff?
   b) How many volunteers?
   c) Do you have anyone on staff who is specialized in programming/education/community engagement?
      i) Please describe their job role.

What is your museum’s funding breakdown (or do you have the sheets for it)?

a) How much?
   b) From whom?
   c) Where does it go toward in your budget?

Community Questions

What/Who do you define as your community?

How would you describe the values and goals of this community?
Would you say your museum has a good relationship with your community?
   a) What barriers may exist to hinder participation?

Do you see any opportunities in engaging the community?

What do you see as your museum’s relevance and worth for the community?

What do you think are some of the goals of a museum in regard to working with their community?

What are some of your resource limitations and what are some of your institution’s strategies for committing to community engagement with these limited resources?

Do you think you effectively share these strategies across the province? Across the country? Why or why not? Do you think they could benefit other museums?

What is your most memorable experience working with the community?
Interview Guide with Employee

Professional history

1. Can you please tell me a bit about your educational/professional history in museums?
   a) How long have you worked in this museum and in what capacity?
   b) Have you worked in other museums? Which ones and in what capacities?
   c) Have you ever taken part in or run any kind of community engagement workshop?
   d) What is your educational or professional background?
   e) Have you ever studied museums formally (i.e. at college, university), or as part of professional development (AMA workshops, CMA professional development)? When and where? Do you still attend conferences/workshops? Why or why not?

The job

2. How much time do you spend on:
   a. Programming
   b. Community Outreach
   c. Administration (describe...)
   d. Collections Management
      i. And how do you make these accessible to community? Some obstacles?
   e. Acquisitions (CD)
   f. Events

3. What would you like to see your museum doing more of and why?
   a. Possible follow-up question about community engagement aspect

4. What do you feel your museum does particularly well regarding the community?

5. As an employee of [insert museum name here] what are the greatest challenges you face?
   a. Follow-up: Regarding community?

6. Do you keep up with museological/public service theory for your work?

7. What/Who do you define as your community?

8. How have the values needs of your community changed over the last five years-decade?
   a. What are they now vs before

9. Would you say your museum has a good relationship with your community?
   a. Why or why not?
   b. What barriers may exist to hinder participation?

10. Do you see any opportunities in engaging the community?

11. What do you see as your museum’s relevance and worth for the community?

12. What do you think are some of the goals of a museum in regard to working with their community?

13. What are some of your institution’s limited resources and then their strategies for committing to community engagement with limited resources?

14. Do you think you effectively share these strategies across the province? Across the country? Why or why not?

15. What is your most memorable experience working with the community?