

5.8 A Shifting Landscape for Rock Art Funding After 2020

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Apart from the devastating consequences of Covid-19 on people's health and lives, the pandemic lockdowns have resulted in the closure of schools, businesses, and cultural and heritage attractions. Travel, and therefore tourism at those heritage sites which depend on it, will feel the impacts for years to come. Main revenue streams like entry fees, guide fees, and gift shops have turned to a trickle following the precautions which have closed the gates and doors to museums and rock art sites. Diminished resources for heritage institutions and museums will put stress on local communities whose livelihoods have been linked to tourism revenue. Additionally, if the financial motivation to preserve heritage dissolves, the front line of protection can also weaken, putting the future of those resource generators themselves at risk. The situation exacerbates an already perilous funding situation for many rock art sites and raises new challenges while also offering some original opportunities.

Funding for the arts, in general, has faced unique challenges. Institutions have been forced to look at other options to buttress their finances and, certainly in many cases, to simply survive. Even as in-person visitation gradually comes back to life, adaptations that emerged from the past year will likely need to endure, including greater reliance on donors and a mix of in-person and online events.

And, like the rest of the world, the philanthropic sector was also shaken by the pandemic. Many foundations and corporate funders have hit the pause button while they consider their missions and priorities, which are being recalibrated to either redirect funding or finding ways to make more funding available for health and, following history-shaping events in 2020, for issues related to social justice. In an interview in June 2020 Darren Walker, president of the Ford Foundation, stated, "There's never been such an existential challenge to the future of the non-profit sector." He then announced that the Ford would borrow \$1 billion so that it can substantially increase the amount of money it distributes. Four other philanthropic organizations pledged to increase their giving by at least \$725 million: the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, the W.K Kellogg Foundation, and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. There is new funding available—will heritage bodies succeed in finding meaningful links and angles to mobilize these funds?

The Mellon Foundation, the largest supporter of arts and humanities in the US, announced a quarter-billion-dollar commitment in 2020 to fund projects confronting the past and shaping the future by challenging the narratives behind America's monuments. Rock art can certainly be considered as monuments. Could this be an opportunity to recalibrate the narratives about some of the continent's oldest rock art monuments— for example, their significance to Native peoples—through installations, research, and education?

There will likely be more interest in supporting activities which foster new ideas, new ways of thinking, and incubate ideas and innovations in the face of ongoing and new challenges. Projects which invest in local economies and communities should also find funding partners receptive to meaningful pitches. Going local also means finding ways to bring heritage to the people.

Covid-19 has forced many organizations to accelerate the digitization of their products. At the same time, for many, the past year has demonstrated an increasing appetite for digital spaces and experiences. Even after reopening, there will be an expectation of ongoing digital content from the public, requiring investment in expanding existing digital products and creating new channels. The digital sphere removes geographic boundaries: this

also represents an opportunity to use digital products and experiences to attract new types of customers. Take for example the Metropolitan Opera in New York, which had lost approximately \$60 million by April 2020. But there was some positive news to accompany this: emergency funding in the tens of millions, 10,000 new donors, and free past performances drew hundreds of thousands of viewers and 15,000 new paid subscribers to its on-demand video platform (Woolfe 2020).

Going digital also means being digitally prepared to raise funds. According to the Chronicle of Philanthropy (Theis 2021), small groups—those making less than \$1 million annually—expanded their online fundraising in 2020 by 22.3%. As donors turned to digital donations, the share of total charitable revenue from online giving jumped sharply, from less than 10% in 2019 to roughly 13% in 2020. Future success will likely depend on finding ways to boost online donations, generating income from virtual events, and making online purchases from gift shops possible.

Out of absolute necessity, grant makers have been forced to relax requirements in terms of spending and reporting during the pandemic. Additionally, some of the biggest philanthropists of the year embraced general, rather than restricted, support in their giving. A long-term shift in this direction would be welcome.

The good news is that while the fundraising climate may seem dire at the moment, humans are still wired to give. Donors want to help solve important and urgent problems. To be relevant and successful, it is necessary to ensure that those of us working with rock art create understanding among supporters of the medium for how they can help address urgent needs connected to the challenges we're all experiencing, even if it's not through providing direct Covid-19 relief.

References

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