

**Cultural Organizations: Managing Through Challenging Times**

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**9:45 AM EDT**

Jessica: At this time, let's begin today's M&T bank webinar, Cultural Organizations: Managing Through Challenging Times. Now I'd like to turn it over to our moderator for today, Janet Farrell, Group Vice President, Education and Not-for-Profit Banking Group, M&T Bank. Janet, with that, I'll hand the floor over to you.

Janet Farrell: Thank you so much, Jessica. And thank you everyone for joining us today for our discussion on managing through challenging times. I'm pleased to be joined by three exceptional leaders in the arts field as we examine how the pandemic has affected their operations, their fundraising, their client engagement.

I'd like to introduce our panel. We're joined by Aidan Connolly, who's the Executive Director at Irish Arts Center in New York City. Aidan began his career as a theater and concert artist and producer. He has both an undergraduate in English and theater and an MBA from Wharton. So an interesting combination for running an arts organization.

Jacqueline Copeland is the Executive Director of the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African-American History & Culture. Jackie has a lifelong passion for art, culture and history. She's an art historian, an experienced museum professor and has also been a university professor in all of these areas.

Our final panelist is Tim Nelson who is Artistic Director for the In Series in Washington, DC. Tim's career includes having founded the American Opera Theater and roles as a director, designer and conductor in various places in Europe.

And thanks to all of you for joining us today.

I'd like to jump right in and start our conversation by asking each of our panelists to tell us a bit about their organization and the changes that were thrust upon them with the closures related to the pandemic. Aidan, I know that the Irish Arts Center has a building project in process, so I'm guessing that the closures had multiple impacts for your organization. Could you walk us through some of those changes and challenges?

Jessica: Let's go ahead and move on to Jackie. We'll work on getting Aidan reconnected.

Jacqueline Copeland: Okay. Can you hear me?

Janet Farrell: Yes, we can.

Jacqueline Copeland: Thank you. Thank you, Janet, and thank you M&T Bank for inviting me and my fellow panelists to this webinar. It is a very important subject. First of all, the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African-American History is in Baltimore, Maryland. We are 15 years old. We are a museum that preserves, collects and documents African American history in Maryland with a special focus, of course, on the national (inaudible).

I would be really remiss if I didn't acknowledge that like all the other organizations, we are challenged because of the pandemic. We closed our doors on March the 13th this year. We have suffered a loss of all of our earned revenue, all of our earned income. All of our income from admissions, from the museum shop, from rentals, all of that. So that was a tremendous blow to our museum, and really any other museum that relies on earned income as part of their revenue stream.

When the museum closed on Friday, March the 13th, we had to immediately change our thinking about what a museum and how people engage with it. We have exhibitions, and I wonder if I could get that first image of the exhibition Freedom Bound. We had already installed an exhibition called Freedom Bound. And we expect people to come into the museum, to see the exhibition, to engage with it, to be in conversation, and that of course could not happen.

We're also a place, of course, where as a museum, we have the authentic objects, the real things, and we want people to see them. Oftentimes when we have school kids come they say, "Is that the real thing? Is that the real thing that I saw in my book?" "Yes, that's the real thing." So we want to show the authentic objects and we want people to engage with our exhibitions.

So what did we have to do? We had to pivot at that moment and go to virtual offerings. We began to develop programs for adults. We pulled the curtain back on the collections that were in storage. We began to hold programs, one of which was called Objects Revealed, allowing the registrar and me to talk about some of the objects that are not on view in our collection. So we are continuing those programs right now for adults. We even have children's programs, story times, and we just completed our African American children's book fair, which attracted 1,320 people, some from in Europe.

So it is our new normal. This is the way we are managing right now. And we're trying to focus on our strengths, our knowledge of history, Black history, systemic racism and how to support some of the issues that are in our nation and communities today. So I'll throw that back to you, Janet. I hope I answered your question.

Janet Farrell: Yes, thank you. Now Tim, I know the In Series does not have a physical theatre that it owns, and so you perhaps did not have those challenges. But certainly this affected your ability to provide live presentations.

Tim Nelson: That's right, Janet. In Series is a 39-year old community-based opera theater company. Most of the work we do is connected to issues of community betterment, social justice, diversity, equity and inclusion. And all that is grounded in a belief that opera is the culmination of so many art forms. Has within it the potential to make people's lives better in real, measurable, immediate ways.

And as you said, we're itinerant, which means we move each production to a different location within Washington, DC where we're headquartered. And that's intentional because we believe that that gives us the opportunity to fit the piece to the community in which we'd like to be having that conversation. It certainly doesn't make our lives easy.

DC has a very competitive real estate market particularly for people looking for theater venues. But that's a challenge that we take on because we think that's important to our identity as an organization.

That has meant the calculus with both cancellations, shutdowns and also how to reopen is made more complicated for us because we have to -- we are obliged to each venue that we use, and we have to have a conversation with them. We have to reset our work as an organization to meet certain standards, depending on which venue we're talking about. So we have a 100-seat venue that we work in where we can get at most 30 folks in under the mayor's new guidance. And that price point may not work. But in a 250-seat theater that we use, we might be able to get 60, 70 people, and that could make a price point work. So it just makes our calculation more difficult.

On the other hand, as a small organization, an organization that doesn't have a space, an organization that doesn't have the overhead of owning its own venue or of having agreements with -- collective bargaining agreements and such, we were uniquely able to weather the immediate aftermath of the shutdowns. And that made us start to have internal conversations as an organization as what does it mean that the table's now flipped. And the large organizations with abundant resources, but also with abundant financial liabilities, were unable to produce and were sort of forced to just figure out how they were going to survive the next three months. We didn't have that problem. And to be able to think about producing and relevancy is a privilege. But if there's anything that the awakening of the 21st century has taught us, privileges come with responsibilities.

So it gave us the challenge of some cancellations, but it also gave us the opportunity to have conversations about how do we take responsibility for being able to produce now that we're one of the sized companies that could easily weather.

Janet Farrell: Great. Great. And I know that In Series has done a number of online presentations pretty much weekly with a cocktail hour following. We've enjoyed a few of those. And let's see if we have Aidan back. And Aidan, as I said, Irish Arts Center has a building project in process. It also is a teaching organization. So I imagine that the shutdown affected you all a bit differently.

Aidan Connolly: Indeed, and thanks again. Can you hear me okay, Janet?

Janet Farrell: Yes, you're good.

Aidan Connolly: Good. Well, thanks again to everybody at M&T and great to be with my panelists and everybody watching.

Yes I'll come to construction in a second, which is obviously a pretty interesting thing to endure during all of this. But I guess the enduring lesson for us has been just about the importance of values. And so as we confronted the crisis initially, we really focused on the well-being of our people, our team, our artists, our audiences. Like so many organizations, we shut down public programming in early March. Our staff began working from home. And we were doing our best to just ensure that everybody's personal situations are safe and stable. And doing our best to keep in touch with that can be challenging, especially as that was not seeing people every day. So we're trying to attend to that as this endures.

Of course we needed to focus immediately on business continuity like everybody did. Today, notwithstanding keeping information systems moving, access to files, ensuring our ability to communicate, ensuring that money can keep moving, all of those things that

you had to make sure are stable and sustainable.

And then you really learn the value of your board. We started convening weekly calls right away with our executive committee. Those calls are continuing to this day. We have another one this afternoon. And I really can't adequately say how valuable that's been just as a leader, because so many of our board members had been through the 2008 crisis and had really, really great lessons, which I kind of distilled to we will find a way to get through this, it may get worse before it gets better, and watch your cash flow. So those sort of continue to echo as we progress.

I'll get straight to programmatic continuity. And as you mentioned, we're a multidisciplinary organization across a range of artistic disciplines. We also have an education program. I think almost within a week or two, we were able to get 40 spring classes moved online, which is a real tribute to our team and to our teachers. Demand was really robust in a way that was just really inspiring, I think, to the rest of the organization as a first step. I think we ended up selling out three or four different sections. Of course the opportunity emerged with classes online to expand beyond geography. So I think we're now in 15 states with our classes. So that was really great.

As that was happening, we began a working group of our programming and marketing team to start looking at ways that we could redeploy the roughly 85 artists and freelancers displaced by COVID and find ways for them to be part of a digital programming set of frames. So we began something called At Home with Irish Arts Center. Like a lot of performing arts organizations, engaging with our artists, giving them an opportunity to be commissioned to create new performances from their homes.

We also have a really great archive. We've filmed everything over the last decade or so. So we then commissioned some artists that we had previously programmed in earlier seasons to film new introductions so that we could go back and re-contextualize some of the work that they had done for us previously. So that's been really great as well.

So the net effect of that, we wanted to just show our audiences and our stakeholders that we were okay and even better than okay. We were resilient and nimble and finding opportunities to grow during the crisis while we managed. Really important to keep the community connected and keep them -- we all need and still need that content that has nothing to do with the doomscroll of Twitter or the headlines we're all confronting every day.

Janet Farrell: Right.

Aidan Connolly: And show our audiences and stakeholders that there are different ways we could fulfill our mission.

So in terms of construction, my gosh, we felt really great. As you know, Janet, we're 17 months into a \$58 million capital project that was more than a decade in the making. We're on time, on budget, healthy contingencies, and here comes a global pandemic. So that creates huge challenges. Work was shut down for the better part of three months. Thankfully that has now resumed. And knocking on every piece of wood I can find here in my apartment in Jackson Heights, New York, we're hopeful that we'll be able to get the project finished within the next several months, and most importantly ensure that our workers remain safe through that process. So that's where we are in all this.

Janet Farrell: So Aidan, sticking with you for a minute here, I know that the Broadway League, so the Broadway Professional Theater has announced their shutdown until January of 2021.

What are your plans for when you think you may reopen? And of the avenues you've talked about -- online classes, art archives -- will those continue once you go back to being live again?

Aidan Connolly:

Most assuredly they will. Again, every crisis creates opportunities, and we've learned a lot of new things like I know my colleagues on the panel have learned, and so many of my peers in the industry and our teams have learned new things. And that will be fully integrated into our program moving forward. One thing we know for sure is that when we are able to do in-person classes again, we know we want to augment that with online classes because we're in 15 states. Let's get to 50. So I think that there are going to be opportunities (technical difficulty).

(Technical difficulty) some version of normal, I think that we have to be humble in all of this. And I know I've been following what's been happening with the Broadway League, and obviously they're responding to the environment as they see it. From our perspective, we're fortunate in that we've been able to maintain really great programmatic and business continuity online. So we're going to lean into that while we continue to diligent - - most importantly ensuring that the environment for our staff, for our artists and for our audiences (technical difficulty) is safe (technical difficulty) into the fall of '20 and even indeed into the spring of '21. Once -- see how that plays out. We're going to get to a place where we can (inaudible) as long as it's safe and sustainable.

As regards to the new building, as you know, this project has been more than a decade in the making. And we really want to make sure that we've got a planning horizon that makes sense and that we feel we can (technical difficulty). So working with the board, working with our stakeholders to really identify the best time frame, it's not going to be any earlier than 2021. When in 2021 I think remains an open question. But that's just something we have to continue to look at (inaudible). We can say, okay, we established a planning horizon that we feel like we can stand behind with a straight face while maintaining a sense of humility, that even that could change.

And then build a nice long runway that gets us from here to there. Because we know at that moment, we know it's going to be really, really important. We felt like our project was important to begin with, but now we think it'll bring on some really added significance for folks here in the city of New York, but sort of part of our global Irish community. And we really want to make sure that we are healthy in terms of our human and financial capacity to ensure that we can sort of start that new chapter, be a part of the recovery and do so successfully and sustainably.

Janet Farrell:

Great. Thank you. And I know we're all looking forward to that, to the opening of the new space. It's going to be really wonderful.

Now I know Tim, at the In Series you are also building, but you're building a virtual opera house. You announced early on that your entire 2021 season would be online. Can you talk with us a little bit about what the In Series is doing?

Tim Nelson:

Sure. We made that decision I would say in the first days of April, so it was pretty immediate. And there was a lot that went into it. And some of that was economic and strategic planning. A lot of it was an abundance of the desire to -- at In Series we speak about our patrons and our artists as family. So we felt to be true to that, we really needed to show love in our concern for their safety and particularly for the safety of our staff and our artists. I also wanted the security to be able to plan a season that I knew we could produce and not to be constantly having to guess will we cancel, will we reschedule. I didn't want to play that game the whole season.

But the main reason was we wanted to figure out how we could turn this into a unique opportunity. We say a lot at In Series that we believe opera matters, but that begs the question -- or we make opera that matters. But that begs the question, doesn't all opera matter? And we don't think so. But we think opera doesn't matter in spectacular ways. It's spectacularly racist. It's spectacularly misogynistic. It can be idolatrous. It wastes human capital and spiritual capital and moral capital. But underneath all that, we believe it has the potential to do real good in the world if it can get past the way it's been made, the structures in place. And all of a sudden those structures don't exist. They're impossible.

So we thought there was a unique opportunity here to do something that would allow us to explore what could be the next phase in opera's journey and to use technology to do that. So we're, in two weeks we're opening a virtual opera house without walls. And this is an online platform for streaming content, mostly streaming content that would function in the same way a performing arts center does. So you'll enter into the space. There will be an experimental black box for some of our -- where we're trying new ideas, experimental ideas. There'll be a mainstage theater for some of our more full length, traditional productions. There'll be an educational annex for all of our outreach work. There'll be a live studio where we'll stream live performances or artist talks. There'll be a lounge even, a bar where folks can gather and have a social experience or a watch party. There's even a backstage entrance for subscribers.

And the idea behind this is to use the year as a year of adventure. So we're going to make radio operas. We're going to make video game operas. We're going to make animated operas, short form operas. We're just going to play with the form and see what rises to the surface and is meaningful and has resonance.

And a big part of this --. So I'm an opera guy, so I'm a bit of a snob. I love the human voice in its raw form. But once we started to do the calculus of how many people we could reach with this art form and in a real way, in a meaningful way, not by just saying we're accessible and hoping people show up at our theater, but becoming guests in their house, then it was a no-brainer for me that this was the way to go.

And then the question of monetization, which everyone's thinking about, again, we didn't want to have a whole year of trying to figure out how to sell this thing and make money. We wanted to use it -- if we're going to be guests in people's home, let's use it as an opportunity to be abiding guests. So we're offering the service completely free to everyone. We've also made a deal with DCTV, which is the public television stations here in Washington, to air all of our content so that for the one third of DC residents that aren't reached by the internet will still have an access point to as many of those as possible.

Janet Farrell: This sounds fascinating. I really can't wait to experience some of these. Video gram opera is a completely new concept to me. I'll be interested to see that.

So Jackie, I know every jurisdiction has different opening parameters. And we are -- we're almost, if not quite at the point where the museum could be thinking about, okay, what does it look like to reopen post-COVID. What are your key thoughts about how things may be different as you reopen to the general public?

Jacqueline Copeland: Thank you, Janet. Yes, we are different from my other two panelists. One doesn't have their building yet and then the other is a virtual, they travel around. We do have a building. It's an 82,000 square foot building. It's a traditional museum. I think, like my fellow panelists, we are most concerned about the safety of not only our staff, but all the

visitors who come inside the building. So we've had to make adjustments to the physical space. Our mayor has said we can open, but we have to be at 50% capacity. Still, we have a very large footprint.

We've had to make adjustments to the museum in terms of putting protective gear, sneeze guards and shields at the visitor services desk and our museum store. And all of that takes time. And of course hand sanitizers everywhere. Again, we are really concerned about how we -- that our visitors feel safe and that they trust us to keep them safe.

We are thinking like some of the organizations in Baltimore of opening around Labor Day, actually. Thinking about the Wednesday after Labor Day. We hope that people will come. I think it'll be a gradual process until they can feel comfortable coming out. We will require masks to be worn. So that's just one of the requirements.

We will have our exhibition open. Our permanent collection, which is really kind of a circular space, will have directional signs on the floor like you've seen in perhaps grocery stores. You go this way and you exit that way. We will have people coming in our entrance, one entrance, and going out a different entrance. So we are making some changes to the physical space.

The other thing I guess I want to say is that like my other panelists, it's a challenge, but it's an opportunity to really think about what this museum can be in a virtual space. And how we can engage not only the people who walk through the door, but who can engage with us online, and that's been a tremendous opportunity for us. So in many ways we've expanded our reach, and for that we're really grateful. I hope that answered your question.

Janet Farrell:

Great. Yes. And that's a heartening thought from all of you that this has been an opportunity where you have all been able to expand beyond prior geographic or location boundaries.

And beside the effects of the pandemic, there's obviously another current going on right now over the past few months with the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, on top of so many prior deaths. We really have witnessed a historic and eye opening moment for the country and an awareness of ongoing racial injustice. So we've seen many, many organizations pledging to dismantle systemic racism, to try and become aware of it, even, and their unconscious biases. I know here at the bank we are undergoing a lot of very candid, vulnerable and deep conversations and looking at our own organization and what we need to do, because this time it must be different.

So Jackie, your organization obviously has always focused on African American history. But this time must feel especially charged for you and your team, and yet perhaps allow you to really be part of what is shining a light. How will you change -- or maybe not change. Maybe just emphasize different parts of your collection or your outreach?

Jacqueline Copeland:

Thanks, Janet. Yes. As you say, we are a museum that has always had a mission to celebrate the histories and the stories of African American peoples. Some of the stories are very difficult and not celebratory, but we tell all sides. We look at the museum as a safe place to discuss unsafe ideas. We have lots of programs that allow people to express their various thoughts.

But we look at this as a moment of strength for us. This is what we do. This is what we know how to do. And we look at ourselves as being a resource for M&T Bank and other organizations because we have our history. We know the history. I know that when we were in the June 19th, Juneteenth episode and people said, "Well, what is Juneteenth?"

Well, of course we've been celebrating Juneteenth. This is well known in the Black community. But our history is not a history that is often known. It has often been erased in our schools and not taught. Even the teachers don't know the history. So that is a component that we are going to focus on, continue to focus on.

We look at ourselves not as a community center, but a center for the community. A place where we can discuss our history, discuss science and education and where we can grapple with issues that are really facing us now.

One of the other things that we did -- I'm going to just tell you one more thing. There's an image that I included in the presentation. It's a large poster. It's about 4 feet wide by 8 feet tall of George Floyd. I don't know if you have that on the screen. But we decided that the museum is as much about today and tomorrow as it is about what happened yesterday. So we made a concerted effort to collect the protest signs that have been used all around Maryland to put them in our collection, because we had not done that in the past. We had an uprising five years ago around Freddie Gray. We had nothing on our collection about that. But we do now have objects and ephemera, including several of the posters that local artists are creating that will be in a local park called Patterson Park, and the organizers of that have donated a few to us. And that will be part of an exhibition.

So what we have gotten from the pandemic, again, challenges, but opportunities. Opportunities to be flexible. We're going to have a small exhibition that showcases some of these protest signs. And everything that we're doing now in terms of exhibitions will go virtual as well. So whenever we open our doors, people will come in, but they will also be able to see it online.

Janet Farrell:

All right. Thank you. And Tim, you have already highlighted that traditional opera, European opera is primarily a creation of white composers and librettists, and in many cases is racist and misogynistic. How is the In Series responding to this heightened awareness of racial injustice and the need to be part of the change?

Tim Nelson:

Right. So I think this is something that anyone of conscience working in opera has to first admit and then wrestle with it. It is a white space. And there's nothing about the art form that necessarily makes that so. And opera in some form is practiced in cultures all around the world, but opera as we know it as a western form is white, and that has to do with a history of using it for political control and oppression. And that's of course our responsibility as a white establishment in opera. It's our problem to deal with and to fix.

And it's something that's already been a part of the growth of In Series and our turn to focus on issues of social justice in the last couple years. In the slide that's up now, the first picture is from a production we did this past year of the sort of space making that we're trying to do and re-exploring the cannon to bring out other voices that have been silenced and erased, as Jackie said. This is from a production called Stormy Weather where we commissioned a local playwright of color to rewrite the Shakespeare's Tempest from the perspective of the unvoiced and the voiced enslaved African characters using the music of Billie Holiday. And that's representative of a lot of the work that we had been doing and a lot of the work that we had planned to do this year, in fact, a similar production of Magic Flute also to be rewritten by Sybil Williams.

Part of what we were also planning for this coming season was the creation of what would have been the world's first emerging artist program for exceptional young singers of color. And this was to give them performance opportunities, but also to give them a space to curate their own growth as leaders in the next generation of the opera industry.

With COVID and with the change in our resources, we felt as an organization that something this important that needs abundant resources to be fully behind it that we wouldn't be able to have this year, we postponed that a year. So a lot of the conversations we've been having were what do we do with this year instead. We had already selected these young artists. We wanted to give them the same opportunity, if not an amplified opportunity, from what they would have had. So because we're not producing six live productions, we're producing 20 virtual productions, they'll participate in many more artistic experiences and also creative experiences where we'll try to give them a space to narrate their own artistic wants.

But part of that was also the realization that with this year, we could ask them to identify mentors in their community that they would want to have voiced representation with their own voices in designing this program. So instead of us starting a program this year that we designed, the idea is now that they'll, with the community leaders they choose, design the program that we'll inaugurate the following year and going forward. So again, it's looking at the situation, both the health crisis, but also the tragedy and the awakening that's come out of it as an opportunity to do our work better.

Janet Farrell: Great. That's really exciting. I think, again, very exciting and very needed program, particularly to keep opera relevant.

So Aidan, people might not think of the Irish community as being particularly tied in to the African American experience here in the States. How -- what elements does the Irish Arts Center and the Irish culture bring to the crisis that we're in right now and to answering those questions of racial injustice?

Aidan Connolly: Yes. Well, it's important to remember that Ireland, the Irish population has (technical difficulty). So Ireland is increasingly a modern European country. The Irish (technical difficulty) world to (technical difficulty). And indeed, that includes many of our black and brown family, friends and colleagues. So actually a really huge and important consideration for us.

I think as a New York City institution, perhaps we are certainly tuned to the important importance of (inaudible) values. That's obviously not limited to New York City, but I think as a New York City institution, we like to think that we have been really tuned in, and indeed that our programming has reflected (technical difficulty) significant theatrical voyage to England and then to Ireland and presenting that in partnership with our friends uptown at Classical Theatre with Irish artists, as well as --.

That's not really what's important (inaudible). We have found that in the wake of the George Floyd and so many others, that is it's whatever we think we're doing in this space, it's time for us to (technical difficulty) introspective about that. And then need to have been (inaudible). So I gather there's a problem with the connection.

Janet Farrell: Yes. You've been cutting in and out.

Aidan Connolly: I might just (inaudible) move on to somebody else for a moment.

Janet Farrell: Yes. So we've caught most of it, but I'll give you a chance -- if you dial in, I'll give you a chance to kind of come back to that question. But at this point I will move on to the question-and-answer section. So for the audience participants, there is a Q&A little tab at the bottom of your screen, and you can enter your questions. If we don't get to all of the questions, we will make a very valid attempt to provide answers back to the email that you used when you registered.

But I do know that one of the questions that had come in before was the idea that with what you're doing, technology is a key issue. We're talking about live streaming. We're talking about building a virtual opera house, having classes online. Tim, I know you've had some interesting experiences in the area of technology. How do you try and find it, fund it, test it, use it?

Tim Nelson:

Yes, I think first, these are not times for the weak of heart. And when we know a technology isn't working, I think it's important within the correct space to try new technologies. That's something that we've tried to (technical difficulty). And we have found that patrons and audiences are very forgiving at that. They're very understanding. And they respect and respond to the need to search out a better way of doing things.

Something that really interests me is that our conversation about doing a virtual season started with the presumption that technology can innovate the art, which I'm sure is going to be the case. And whatever comes out at the end of this, it's going to be different and better than where we started in ways we can't predict now. But the opposite is also true. I think the art is also going to innovate the technology and going to demand of the technology certain changes that just like we should have been doing some of these things all along, they should have been developing these ways all along.

And one for instance I'll give is when we open this new website -- and I know nothing about web design. And we hired some young, brilliant, wonderful designer who was willing to take the one thing we wanted, which was to create something that wasn't like anything else, to heart. And he's created a site that doesn't respond or act in any way like a website that you or I have seen. And in that way, the art is also serving the technology, and there's this wonderful symbiotic relationship.

So I think those two things, realizing that what we're doing has the power to demand of technology to do better as well, and also that we're going to screw up and there's space for that. And this is a particular time when people are going to let us screw up and want us to be exploring how to improve.

Janet Farrell:

Great. That is great. And I think, yes, that is one of the challenges with this technology and perhaps the thing that makes us all the most nervous.

And so we did -- we had a number of questions from the registrants and then we just had a question submitted which is that ultimately, how do you fund these? How do you monetize it, either payment for classes or payment for performances, and/or where have you found funders to help fund the investment needed in technology? I'll put that back to Tim because I know that's been a key part of what you've been doing. Why don't we let Tim go first and then we'll go to Jackie.

Tim Nelson:

Okay, sure. So we found that first of all, obviously a large part of our organization's income is contributed. And we found that donors and foundations alike really responded to optimism and to positivity and to trying to turn this around and, "Say what can we do? How can we make this an opportunity?" So our initial fundraising went up considerably.

And then as we built the virtual opera house and we broke ground on it and started to visualize what that would look like, and we knew we were starting to build it like a physical space, we thought why not approach it the same way any capital campaign would. And we approached all of the venues as naming opportunities and approached foundations and individual donors to support the building of that part of the site. So when we opened INvision in two weeks, the opera house has the name of the Logan

Foundation, and each theater is named after someone that made the building of that space possible.

We are offering all the content free, but we're also having subscriptions to the content, which would come with a limited number of subscriber benefits. But how we're articulating that is that, yes, we're very upfront. We're asking you to pay for something you could get for free. But you, by subscribing, are not only showing your faith in what we're doing, but you're also making the content free for someone else. You're doing what makes us able to give this to your neighbor. And we're hoping that that will have a powerful response.

And a year from now maybe we will have built a reputation where we can try to monetize it. But I've always wanted to see what would happen if an opera company for a year didn't have tickets and could really market their work towards the community they wanted to reach instead of the community they needed to pay for it. And so I'm looking forward to having the opportunity to do that this year.

Janet Farrell: Great. Great. Jackie, what are your perspectives on this?

Jacqueline Copeland: Yes. I just wanted to I guess say a little bit the same thing, actually. Technology, using technology I think has been a wakeup call for all of us. I don't know about my other two panelists, but we have not focused on technology because we're a traditional museum. And so for us -- and we hadn't invested in that, so it's really been a wakeup call for us. But we managed. I was really proud of the staff and the way that we have designed and produced a lot of these virtual programs.

It hasn't been easy. Some have failed. People expect that technology -- we can plan things, but technology will often fail. You'll have all the rehearsals and then the day of it'll mess up. But people are understanding. And I agree with Aidan that when they -- when our community sees us trying something, they want to support us. We're all living through these challenging times. We have found that we've gotten more support lately than we would have this same time last year. So I agree that I'm optimistic and looking forward to what innovative things that we can continue to do.

Janet Farrell: Great. Thank you. And I'm glad that you've both found audiences to be accepting of technology issues, because we've had one with Aidan. He's disappeared from the screen. But he is on the line. Aidan --

Aidan Connolly: Am I really there?

Janet Farrell: You are. We can hear you.

Aidan Connolly: Good. Good.

Janet Farrell: What are your thoughts around this important issue?

Aidan Connolly: Yes. Well, it's a great question. And I guess for us, as I said before, in terms of monetizing digital content, we were able to pivot pretty quickly, and our students were willing to pay the normal class fees for the online offering. Obviously we've been attending to ensure that that has been a satisfying experience for them. And the early reports back on that have been really positive, and indeed that's led us to create a first ever summer term of classes. So that piece has been helpful.

We have of course lost all box office revenues, like everybody. And in our digital

offering, we have in terms of the performing arts programming and visual arts programming, literature programming, we've been seeking to deliver for our audiences first and provide them with those moments of inspiration and stimulation, which of course we all need during this crisis. And also staying in touch with our funders and stakeholders to let them know what we're doing. Let them know how we're thinking about the crisis. Let them know how we're looking ahead to the future.

And we waited to embark on an aggressive fundraising campaign until we had maybe gotten about five or six weeks in, and then we sort of returned to our normal spring fundraising campaign, and that has been largely successful. So our focus has not been to try to sell the digital content, but more to use the digital content as an opportunity to expand our installed base, to build our eyeballs, and that's really happened in a significant way. And in a greater way, as Tim and Jacqueline have said, found opportunities to expand our visibility beyond what we might have otherwise. And obviously, as we look ahead to our broader audience development, we want to stay in touch with those folks. And obviously the folks who are here in the city of New York, we want to pull them in and build a deeper relationship with them over time.

But we've tried to approach fundraising with a real sense of intention, with transparency, but also a sense of humility and recognition that our funders are struggling, too, depending on what industry you're in. And so again, not retreating from the fundraising activity; indeed leaning into it. But just trying to be ever more mindful that everybody -- a spirit of shared sacrifice I guess is really sort of the sensibility we've been trying to cultivate in our fundraising. And that has worked to date.

Janet Farrell:

Great. Thank you. I think we have time for one last question, which I will address to Jackie. But before I do that, I will just remind all of the attendees that there is a button for resources. And we do have some resources from the American Association of Museum Directors. Also from two theater-related organizations and from the bank as well regarding -- primarily focused on COVID-related issues. And then there is also the survey that we would encourage everybody to take and provide us feedback.

So Jackie, my last question would be for you, and it's on something you touched on earlier, and that [Susan Newman], one of the attendees had sent in. What are the best things that a board member can be doing right now to be supporting their organization?

Jacqueline Copeland:

Yes. Thank you, Janet. That is a really good question. I think all of us, all staff and all of our organizations, but particularly in the organization that I work for, have our board understand that we are in a moment of transformation. I just want to make sure that our board and staff don't think that as soon as we get through with all of this, then we can return to normal. I'm not sure what that normal is going to be. So understand the moment that we're in, understand that for a museum like ours, we are a museum that focuses on social justice. That we (inaudible) embraces a diversity of people.

But my board especially, we are in contact with them on a regular basis. I want them to be an advocate for the museum. To understand what it is that we do, to believe in our mission, to know that we are an important contributor to the city, the state and the nation. Because so often African American museums are under-capitalized and under-funded. This is the time for them to be especially supported financially, to do some fundraising, to reach out to individuals that they know, to contact some of their corporate donors, and to help us visualize what the next 18 months to 3 years might look like. We don't know. We don't even know what the next month is going to look like. But at some point we need to figure out what our new normal is going to be and how we're going to survive and be sustainable.

We also need to address the institutional racism that exists amongst our organizations and get some additional funding to support museums like ours. So they play a big role, of course. And I think that role is visioning and especially fundraising, because that is their primary responsibility; the financial stewardship of the organization.

Janet Farrell: Great. And that is a point. I know there are a number of organizations very often related to a community foundation in a particular community or perhaps the United Way. Governance Matters in New York State has both training for future board directors and a matching service to try and match organizations and potential board members. And that there is a focus on building the diversity of the director pool, because I think that very broad, diverse set of insights in this climate has got to be very, very valuable as organizations look to expand their boards.

I think we have exactly two minutes left. So Tim or Aidan, Tim do you have any thoughts on a board issue that you would like to share? I know you've been doing some recruiting, myself included.

Tim Nelson: Well, I think what -- what I hear from Jackie and Aidan is that we're all doing really innovative work within our organizations, within our fields and our industries is groundbreaking. And I think besides the financial stewardship, as Jackie mentioned, being megaphones for that work. Using this as an opportunity to do their work better, to get knowledge, awareness and love of our organizations out there in the broader community.

Janet Farrell: Great. Thank you. Thank you so much. So there were a couple of other questions that came in, and we will address those to our panel and come up with some short answers or ways to get back with people. I did for example see [Gray Cliff] had a question for Jackie on museum guidelines, what they're doing in terms of opening. I'm afraid we don't quite have time to get into that right now, but we'll arrange that contact and that feedback.

I do want to thank all of our speakers, first of all. I think this was a very lively, a very frank and open conversation. I want to thank our audience as well for joining this second webinar in M&T Bank's Managing Through Challenging Times series. We appreciate your questions. We appreciate the candor of our panelists. And we do ask for all of our attendees to complete the survey, provide us feedback, let us know what other topics you would like to see us address. And once again, thanks to our panelists. Have a great day.

Jacqueline Copeland: Thank you, Janet, and thanks to the fellow colleagues.

Aidan Connolly: Thanks, Janet. Thanks, everybody.

Jacqueline Copeland: Thank you.

Jessica: This does conclude today's webinar, Cultural Organizations: Managing Through Challenging Times. You are now free to disconnect.