

# Rethinking resources: Shifting museums from industry to community with MUSEUM-UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS

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## Shifting funding, shifting focus

Changing times, both in terms of funding and information dissemination, require that museums shift financial and content models to stay relevant and extant. Museums are changing from places where information is stored to places where people voluntarily gather for social and learning experiences. Outdated funding models called for expensive traveling temporary exhibits that strained budgets and limited local creativity.

## Supporting local economies

Museums have a responsibility to balance supporting their local economies with supporting the museum industry. By making use of local designers and builders, museums become local economic drivers.

## Museum-university relationships

One way that museums can leverage local talent is to form strategic relationships with universities, especially those with strong programs in creative technologies. The Science Museum of Western Virginia and Virginia Tech have formed such a relationship and jointly hired a liaison to facilitate it.

## Goals

Virginia Tech and the Science Museum of Western Virginia are both interested in expanding and enhancing community-based science education. The two organizations formed the relationship for mutual benefit.



**BENEFITS FOR THE UNIVERSITY**  
 Access to community audiences  
 Access to information about those community audiences  
 Improved Broader Impacts = more grants  
 Internship, volunteer, and service opportunities for students  
 Authentic science communication experiences  
 Outlet for academic and artistic work  
 Authentic problems to solve for class projects  
 Liaison for networking, questions, and concerns

**CHALLENGES FOR THE UNIVERSITY**  
 Understanding realities of the museum in terms of funding, timelines, priorities, and power structures  
 Geographical separation  
 Translating cutting edge research to museum audiences

**THRILLS FOR THE MUSEUM**  
 Locally sourced exhibit design and fabrication  
 Three new Virginia Tech exhibits  
 Four additional exhibits in the funded pipeline  
 A new app for the Pollinator Garden  
 Local experts involved in museum programming  
 Increased recognition for museum staff  
 Strengthened creative community

**BENEFITS FOR THE MUSEUM**  
 Funding for new exhibits  
 Fresh exhibits at cutting edge of research  
 Programming content for camps, camp-ins, and expo days  
 Speakers for STEM Tavern series  
 Access to academic, technical, and design expertise  
 Volunteers and interns  
 Crowdsourced design solutions  
 Stronger community network  
 Liaison for networking, questions, and concerns

**CHALLENGES FOR THE MUSEUM**  
 Understanding realities of the university in terms of funding, timelines, priorities, and power structures  
 Geographical separation  
 Navigating academic credit systems

**THRILLS FOR THE UNIVERSITY**  
 Outlet and audience for three new Virginia Tech exhibits  
 Four National Science Foundation grants funded  
 Experiential learning opportunities for classes and clubs, in terms of volunteering, design problems, and education  
 Museum staff serve on panels and lead workshops for university students  
 Strengthened creative community

