

Controversy and local politics

Hi Nina, I just wanted to build on what you were just talking about.

Have you got examples of how the museum has dealt with the situation where you've identified a contemporary issue or an issue has been brought to you which is facing the city that might be controversial, or just is controversial?

You know, how do you deal with the issues that arise from that?

Yeah, I think, you know, a lot of museums are doing a lot of good work around this and, you can look wherever you want, it's OK.

Yeah (laughs).

I can see you either way it just depends which way your head is facing.

So, yes and we are trying to do more with that on the history side

It's interesting being a museum of art and history, that it's kinda easy to get people started with creative practice and getting their hands

on art in different ways
and the way were looking at history
is really around civic action
and so, we've started doing
some programming around future-casting
we are trying this thing called Past-Future,
its actually an exhibit module.
We take an issue that is very hot right now
and we look at what was this issue
you know, what was the history
of this issue, and then invite people to kinda
do some future-casting about where is it going.
And so, you know, trying
to root it in history but then also invite
other opportunities for people to engage.
The other thing is;
there are many ways we've been using some
of the public spaces in our museum
to do things like public forums.
But also one of the more interesting
things that happens here is
our city council, their offices
are really lousy, they are very small
and so, it started with one
and now there are more
city council members
who actually hold office hours

in the lobby at the museum.

So you will often see people

on a couch talking to the Vice Mayor

and one day they are talking

about a planning issue

or some issue about downtown,

I don't know, dogs or something.

They are having those conversations in the museum.

And so, it becomes a place

for that to happen even if

we are not programming it.

We have had, definitely had some

experiences with controversial topics

and honestly, what we find

is as long as we are creating

opportunities for lots of people to have a voice,

whether that's through talk-back walls or

through programming,

we haven't really had issues about it.

The funnier issue we have being in a small town

is that everybody is connected.

So, you know, for example,

I live with a woman who runs a major

social service organisation

in town that works with a lot of poor people.

And there has been opportunities

that come out of that.

There are also, I'm always
careful politically about, kind of, you know,
my husband is on the board
of the homeless service centre,
I mean there are these varieties
of interactions and kinda thinking about those things.
One of the ways that's really changed for us, is around
facility rentals, where we basically decided
we will be a place for anyone
and if you want to have
a campaign rally you can do that here.
If you want to have a fundraiser
for your event, as long as it's not
intentionally promoting,
you know, hate in some way,
you can do that here.
And that we have to keep our
pricing scheme really consistent.
So, while there are lots of people,
for lots of reasons, we want
to give discounts to, we don't.
Which is an interesting thing to realise
about being inclusive sometimes
means being fair in this weird way
that is actually not as supportive
as we want to be of some of our partners.
And so, there are those kinds

of complexities that happen
that are more about just being in a small town
and the politics of a small town
than they are about the issues themselves.