

Impact of change on staff

Nina, thank you very much
for your presentation.

I'm Régis Cochefert,

I work at the Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

You've just talked to us about
the journey of your board
and I'd like you to talk to us
about the staff journey.

How did it change the way they worked
and how what you have described has affected
their day-to-day responsibilities?

Were there some resistances?

Did they all leave, do you have a new board
and a new staff team?

So talk to us about what it meant
for the people who were there when you arrived.

Sure, thank you.

Well, one of the surprises to me
and something I was very proud of
for the first couple of years
was that almost our entire board
turned over in the first year
but we had no voluntary staff change
and we did because I came at a time
when it was financially...
you can look at the screen,

it's OK with me [laughing]

I see you...

I believe you're there [laughing]

We... because we were

in such a financial mess

I had that unenviable position of walking in

and laying off two people right away.

But after that really, we had a lot of people

who have a lot of creative energy,

who felt they'd been in the context

of this declining museum for a long time.

They wanted an opportunity to shine

and I tried to just present

as much clarity as I possibly could

about what the goals were,

what we were trying to achieve

and really just stand back

and let them... and make space

within the context of those goals

for people to be able to step forward.

And what happened over time was

it took a couple of years

before some people decided,

"Oh, you know what?

I see where this is settling and it's really not for me."

We had two people leave, but other than that...

and we have, obviously our financial

situation has gotten better, we've also grown our staff.

Our staff is very changed

but there was no mass exodus.

There were two people who left

and I would say probably because

they felt like this was not

the place for them any more.

But out of a staff of about ten.

A good example of how things have changed:

One of the first people I laid off

my second day here was our archivist.

With apologies to any archivists in the room.

I said, "We gotta focus on people not objects right now

and in the context of what we need to cut

this is where we're going to cut."

And I'd always assumed this was

a position we would bring back.

But what happened instead

was that our registrar, whose title now

is Curator of Collections,

she took over managing the archives

and she did an amazing job

of making space for some very professional volunteers,

both library graduate students, retired librarians

and local historical researchers

to be involved in the archives.

And so we got to a point

where there's more research
happening in the archives than ever before.
We do not have a professional archivist
doing original research
but we have our Curator of Collections,
Marla, who is empowering people
to do their own research
and we feel like right now
for where our institution is, that's sufficient.
There may be a time in the future where we decide
we really want to do a research project
that's rooted in the community whatever it is
and we need to hire somebody to do that.
But for now we've been able
to take more of that space-making approach.
And that leads also to the bigger question
about responsibilities shifting.
The biggest shift that's happened
is about the space-making concept
and the idea that, especially this is true
on a programmatic side,
I think a lot of people, myself included,
got into museums because we wanted
to make the thing, you know
I started as an exhibit designer and it's cool!
You get to use your creative energy
and you get to make the thing.

And what we have on our staff
are people who are very skilled at making the thing
but are more excited about empowering
and creating opportunities
for lots of other people to make the thing.

And so, for example,
our community programmes
are these huge festivals
that involve anywhere from
20 to 100 collaborators per event,
who are all co-creating
around a particular theme.

And so what we found is that
being able to have our programmers
instead of creating the programming,
they're more like festival curators;
they are creating a theme,
they're finding the people
to produce within that theme,
they are encouraging them
and kind of tutoring them
in the direction we want to take.

All of that kind of approach that's
more about leading and facilitating
and less about making the thing.

That has been so huge to our work
and so much so that we just hired

a new community programmes person

whose entire background is in community organising.

And he's worked in environmental groups, in political groups.

He's never worked in an art and cultural space

but we know that he has the skills we need

which are the ability to go out

to find collaborators,

to ignite and to celebrate their passion

and to really work with them

to create something great

within the museum context.