DISCOVERY Ep.16 - (English)

[00:03:09] Hi, everyone, and welcome to Knight Foundation Discovery. I'm Chris Barr, director of Arts and Technology Innovation at Knight Foundation. On Discovery, we talk about things that impact the arts and culture in our communities. And today, we'll be discussing a recent report that Knight Foundation released on digital readiness and innovation in museums with my guests, Kate Alex Haley Goldman, principal at H.G. and co lead researcher on the report. And she's going to help lead us through some of those findings. And Loic Tallin, an expert associate partner at McKinsey and Company, where he focuses on digital strategy and transformation, and previously as chief digital officer at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Welcome to you both.

[00:03:54] No. So I just want to get started a little bit and talk about.

[00:03:59] From the Knight Foundation perspective, our interest in releasing a survey like the one that we'll be talking about and the work that we're doing with museums around the countries and specifically in the communities where we focus. I also wanted to do a little bit of housekeeping. This is being recorded and folks will be able to access the conversation afterwards. And you can ask questions throughout the throughout the conversation, in the chat on whatever platform that you're. You're watching this on. So feel free to ask questions as they come up and we'll do our very, very best.

[00:04:39] It's hard in the short amount of time to get through everything, but we'll do our best to answer some of those. But we're always available on email, social media, etc. to answer anything that we don't get to who will try to be accessible as we can. Before we dove in to some of the findings on the research, let me just say a few things about the work that we've been doing so Knight Foundation as you know, as an arts funder in a communities around the country, we focus on a number of aspects of arts within those communities. And one of those is digital transformation and how we can help organizations reach audiences in the digital age. We've done this through funding, innovation and experiments within the field funding field based learning through organizations like him, CNN and others. And by funding, staffing and capacity building within institutions in our cities.

[00:05:39] And as we've done this work, we've wanted to better understand where the field is at large. Right. To build that capacity in order to understand not only how well the organizations in the cities that we love and care about are doing, but also where as a field we need to improve in order to reach the opportunity that we we might have with digital. And this was really what was behind some of the survey that that Kate helped us with and part of what was behind the the Matrix and research that came before it. We've been working for a number of years with organizations, taking them through human centered design training, helping them experiment in new ways and think through the processes really required to succeed with digital. And with this survey.

[00:06:40] We knew we needed some kind of benchmark, too, to understand where folks were at around the country and to hopefully guide us a little bit about where people might go from here. And so this is this is where I'd love to bring you in and talk a little bit about the report and some of the things that we found. I should note also, you can find this report online at Kafe, Dawg.

[00:07:08] If you go to our research section and it should be right there and it's packed full of data and information that hopefully we think is useful to the field. Sure. Thanks, Chris.

And I'll just talk a little before I start the slides that go over the key findings with this to give you a little bit of a sense. So this is a report where we worked with a m to contact individuals at all of their member institutions to be able to look at, but really focus at art history and science institutions with some bit of zoos and aquariums. We get responses from all 50 states and this data set and a few international with this dataset really focuses on the US folks at that point in time. It's kind of a funny data set, right, because there is that response bias. Yet still, it gives us some really interesting beginning insights. I would say, into where digital literacy is within the museum sector, where that sense of innovation is within our within our field. So this framework that Chris is talking about draws from other sectors, including business, sex, Durrs journalism, et cetera, that have different ideas about digital innovation. And one of the things that intrigued me most about working with night is that roots in journalism and seeing an industry devastated by how our society has evolved. Right. And we're at this inflection point in museum work and thinking about how digital intersects with that inflection point and then with the pandemic gives us some thoughts about where perhaps we want to emerge when we come out of this pandemic. I will say that all they get data was gathered pre pandemic. So, you know, we have to have that little bit of a lens on it when we go through it. Now, if we could go into since it's just so short, the first really key finding is that size has a huge impact on when it comes to digital readiness. As you might imagine, most of the institutions in the United States are smaller institutions. We defined small as those institutions with a budget of five million annually or less and very few staff members. And that brings us to this slide where you can see how the impact of low budget and low numbers of staff, understandably, is low numbers of staff that are directly dead dedicated to digital. So I am and it's a little bit small, but on the far left hand side of this screen is that we are those numbers on we have only one individual or no individuals dedicated to digital within our institution. We can expect that number 60 to 62 percent, a small and medium sized and 62 percent of small institutions have no digital. 18 percent of medium institutions have only one or less individuals dedicated to digital. And that that particular finding has implications across all of our other findings. If we go to the next slide. One of the other pieces is about digital strategy. Now, as we all know, digital strategy has been hotly debated within the field, whether it's important to have a digital strategy, have a strategic plan that incorporates digital. And we asked all of those different elements here. But as you can see, a third of the institutions that we talked to had no digital strategy at that point in time. And twenty nine percent didn't have a digital strategy formalized. Yet they're discussing it. They're in the process. So that brings us to two over half of the institutions who don't have a digital strategy in play going forward from that. We want to talk a little bit about outcomes and how digital projects go through here. So this and I should have added a little bit of title. These are the institutions that don't track outcomes or KPI eyes anyway. So that's 40 percent of art institutions, 46 percent of history institutions. That's a really large number, considering that we're all thinking about outcomes is not necessarily a size dependent issue. Right. You this is you do not need to have robust software and hardware in order to be very intentional about who you're going to be reaching and how you'd like to carry that out. If we go into the next slide, we can talk about how the here we go. We can see the actual numbers on the far left. So of the small institutions, forty five percent. But even the large institutions, 14 percent are not measuring outcomes or defining goals or KPI eyes with within this. Feasts. And that seems rather shocking given our environment. But being in the museum culture, we can all see how this happens. Right. That there's this slow erosion of goals and outcomes out of time. So this sort of peace in terms of knowing whether we're having an impact with what we're designing is is is really not there in the same way that it should be.

[00:12:44] We go to the next slide.

[00:12:47] The interesting thing about this data set is that it's primarily leaders who answered. I would say, you know, and I'd have to recommend go away from the camera. But it's a high number of leadership individuals that answered. And not surprisingly, they rated themselves as very high in support for digital projects. Very few people said that they were not. If we can just go back one, if the very few people said that they were not ready for digital to be in their galleries. It was not that they were hostile to digital, but they might be unknowing about digital. Nonetheless, they had a very high rate of interest within that.

[00:13:31] We're into the next one. We can talk about audience research.

[00:13:36] And so we asked about a range of audience research types from just from gathering anecdotal data to getting basic feedback like zip codes on to community based evaluation itor to formative evaluation and then strategic and impact evaluation. So what you can see here is that there is a range of different pieces that people are doing. About half of the institutions are collecting some sort of basic feedback within this. But if we go to the line below that much lower numbers of of institutions are involving their community in any strong way. Finally, there's very few institutions that actually look at the impact of their work. As evaluators know, science museums are almost always we being the charge there in that they're are looking at the change in interests and behaviors and et cetera, that their work pushes forward. But still, it's a fairly slow number, small number in terms of impact. And if we then talk about project management. So project management is really intriguing piece in my experience, something we don't talk about often enough with the in museum organizations. And you can see here we've broken it out. The Gray Bar represents that there are little to no formalized project management practices or roles. So that varies across institutions. But institutions in total, about a third have no project management. Those are some of the top findings that we have through here. And I'm aware that our time is limited. So I'm going to stop at that point and open it up to I believe Allelic is going to give us some commentary on where we're at these pizzas.

[00:15:33] Wonderful. Thank you so much, Kate. And we do want to get a look in the conversation here. And there's so much to unpack. And I think one place I wouldn't be interested in starting is around the gold tracking around the impact and even identifying our success metrics. And if we could start there with some thoughts about the challenges there and and and despite the sort of how daunting that might seem. How should people think about approaching that particular challenge?

[00:16:19] Great. Happy to talk to that, and I'll start by saying thank you for inviting me to be part of this. And honestly, I guess I can say thank you to the Knight Foundation, to Kate and your team for doing this research. It's one of those research pieces that you read being like, oh, you instinctively feel some of these pressures, but try to see data proving out. Is is is really fantastic to go to that point about KPI. I think Kate said it really well, which made your point that having a having a target, having a go is not something that money makes easier or size institution makes easier. That's a mindset question. Ultimately, I think it ties to the project management one which Kate ended with us to touch on to that goal setting piece, how one of the challenges we had with digital learning and cultural organizations or generally is knowing exactly what to measure. And we almost get crippled by that being too much data or too many things to measure or people being in undecided about what is the most important piece to measure. And it ends up in dashboards that have 50 kepi eyes when no one actually pay attention to anything. I think the most the key thing is not to let the perfect be the enemy of of of the good. Pick two or three data points you think are reasonable starting point data points and just stick with them and commit as a team. And this is what we're gonna go up to and get that cohesion

right at the start of the project rather than part of the way through. And where someone might say, oh, our success criteria's page views as a post as opposed to sessions, perhaps whatever your KPI, your KPI is. I think recruiting is like getting that commitment right at the start. I think it's telling the fact that I think it's 78 percent of respondents, the survey said that they don't have KPI is worse on an ad hoc basis. Just suggest we don't know where our goalposts are when we're building something. So we actually don't know when we're being successful. I think that's something that's really important. We take on board and turn that around in our mindset. I guess if I can then just build on the last point, Kate, that the project management, once you know, it's something that I believe in as well. Like this. This process is ultimately. At the core of this is people this is a staff working in these areas, its talent and how they work together, Meshad language that they have to deliver projects becomes very important. And I think of ways of working around agile with teaching people scrum and getting that common language to deliver projects starts putting KPI at the front as well. I think if you if people start agreeing that project management language as an organization, I think they'll be very helpful. And that's something you see come out of this. There's so little of it could be another way of re stepping up where it's not actually a significant financial challenge or a size constraint. It's just an agreement among a group of people to work the same way.

[00:19:07] And I should note, again, right, that this survey was done pre pandemic. And so this is a snapshot of where this the fields stood in twenty nineteen. And we're experiencing a much different environment, obviously, right now. And out of that is coming, I believe, a lot of creativity and a lot of folks working in different ways. And I wonder if either of you could speak to things that you're seeing that look like folks starting to move in the direction of changing processes, changing the way they manage, work, communicate internally, etc.. Just anecdotally, thinking about how organizations are addressing this particular moment.

[00:20:00] Sure. I think early in the pandemic, we saw this great explosion of creativity or creativity mixed with fear or right in trying to figure out what we could do to continue to reach our audiences. And there were wild and wonderful programs that were occurring because we didn't know how to do that yet. And it was this sort of design thinking, brainstorming moment where in some ways where museums let their guard down a little bit about trying new things. In that attempt where we fell down there is I don't think we've had reflective conversations about what we feel like work. Right. So we went through the experimentation phase and then didn't have the reflection phase in that same piece. I will also say that the digital folks that I work with tell me that digital is more valuable than ever, obviously. Right. And more tasks within their institutions than ever. So I do see coming out of this a stronger reliance on digital, a knowledge that that is an essential model. Nice to have when you're incorporating those pieces in and seeing the divides between pre pandemic between institutions who were more developed in their digital innovation. What moved small institutions up was some amount of staff and some amount of skills moving from medium to large. The difference was that lack of strategy. Right. And so you could really see that what can lift up a small institution who is doing exceptionally good work in digital might be that small amount of staff and that small amount of strategy and measurement that would allow them to get to the next level. So that's sort of projecting into the future. But like you, I'll hand it to you.

[00:21:57] I think I would only build on what you said. I think those early phases. I think we at McKinsey, we gave a seminar in June to museum leaders about reopening.

[00:22:09] Almost now seems like the world has changed so much since June. I mean, we were just laughing at the reopening was the main topic. And so much has changed in that time. And I think it forced museums, cultural traditions to be more agile is obligated that agility. And I think that was a reactive phase. But now I look, organizations think what will be the business model behind this in the business model institutions as being signified QC disrupted right now. And whilst there's that moment where if if it lasted for a short moment in time, that could have been a digital bust, per say, to cover a gap. And now the question is, longer term, what does this look like as a business model? If people are really leaning into digital as a main platform and that's conversation like I, I, I hear more and more, I think it's a I think it's an important one to be having. It's almost one which is, as should have happened for the earlier, about needing a pandemic to provoke it. I think institutions had them where with digitizing that collection and they're getting that content online. And then they became a little bit more, I hope, audience focused and was like digitizing that audience. And I want you to kind of get into digitizing that business model. I think those that's the conversation. I see people going along right now. And there's a lot of focus on that business model component.

[00:23:21] The other interest in seeing some it doesn't directly address one of the questions in the Q&A, but what it's a fascinating point at this point because the audience research baselines have been wiped away. Right. So the people that are coming to our institutions, that mix of local, regional, international is not the same as it was before. For some institutions, that's an exploding growth in local visitorship. And for other institutions, it's a very different story. But not only has the mix of visitors changed, but the motivations for why we are going has changed in the context around that. So people who are seeking different types of experiences and they're engaging with different, you know, mixes of people or less mix of people when they do this. So the research that I would have done a year ago is not necessarily valid in an institution as they get to know perhaps even the same visitors who have now different characteristics. And I think coming out of the pandemic, then it becomes very important to be in touch with what who is visiting your institution right now and what their needs are and how those needs are evolving.

[00:24:38] I think that's a really wonderful point, Kate, and it makes me think about starting points. Right. And so where, where and how do you start to do this work? If you haven't been doing much with digital within your institution, there can be a knee-jerk reaction that no one that's great for the Met and the like, but it's not really what we do.

[00:25:05] Meanwhile.

[00:25:09] Where do we start? And I think you point to one starting point, which is start with the audience, right? Understand the needs of the folks that you serve. Work on that first before you ever start designing solutions that meet those needs. And I would also sort of say that's a perspective that Knight Foundation holds as well, that understanding the folks that we're we're producing work for is vitally important.

[00:25:39] Two.

[00:25:40] There might be some easy spot and look in our conversation earlier this week. You talked about the kind of decisions, even basic decisions about Web sites, about social media, etc., that the folks are thinking about right now. And you talk a little bit about starting points there and shifts in mindset that organizations might make as they're approaching those decisions.

[00:26:10] Sure. I think.

[00:26:13] Wherever we I see this and that, the data shows this idea that 50 percent of institutions have one or less organization, one less person working in digital in your organization, and that's when you could. If I'm right on that break, I assume that may even be high ultimately, because more justly minded organizations maybe answer to the survey. Even if it is 50 percent. The idea that each of those institutions with one or less person is going to crack this on their own. I find difficult to believe. I just I don't see how it's humanly possible, no matter how talented the people in those institutions are. So I actually think right now we need to look at how those institutions like rethink actually how this institutions work together, how they collaborate to build solutions, or see how funders fund impact in that area to obligate that kind of collaboration. So it's a team of people maybe working across most institutions. I'm also very conscious of those organizations where there is only one person working on a digital working in digital. When that person leaves, you then see a drop away again. There's no continued transformation. I think if we start rethinking how they how rescue working in digital in these small organizations and then start thinking about good conversation, about our case, about what our KPI is or what our goal is in using digital, I think we'll find Baraa tools which are accessible even. It can be as simple as making sure your institutions Google Maps profile is entirely up to date. You'll Google for Father's Day. Your social media presence is up to date. And even those kind of areas maybe should arrive before you even think about building your own website, because those may reach your KPI in terms of reaching new audiences or getting people engaged with your content. I think people great. Quickly go towards the platform. Can if we think about how we work and we think about our goals, I think we'll have more success.

[00:28:01] I think we do have a problem in our field on pipeline. Right. So the smaller institutions can't get the digital project managers with those skills. And that requirement extends all the way up into larger institutions or more well-funded institutions who then end up getting folks outside of the field because that's where the larger population of these skills are, or they don't trust the skills that have been grown through the museum field. I think there is a pipeline problem in digital with museums and that that extends all the way through our field.

[00:28:41] I want to talk a little bit more about and this isn't really covered in the report, but look, sort of move this towards this conversation and the idea that we need to work together more as a field. Here we're talking about how well individual organizations have staffed and organized digital individually. We do have an aspect of partnerships here. And certainly there are partnerships with industry, with technology, with outside vendors.

[00:29:16] All of those things are part of the equation. How do you all think the field should be collaborating with each other?

[00:29:25] If we think about large scale projects like Tessa Toro and the ticketing side, etc., there have been successful attempts to think about technology that benefits a field. How should the museum field be thinking about this particular moment, especially as we know we're under-resourced. Right.

[00:29:49] And if we're under-resourced as a field, how do we pull those resources? Better to get where we need to be with technology.

[00:29:58] I will give it. I as someone who as I left the field, left a cultural organization a little bit ago, I bet that the one country I really feel in this area. I think the cultural sector was probably the most collaborative or is most collaborative sector.

[00:30:14] The amount of sharing which institutions on knowledge is incredible. The generosity that. Where I think the next step is actually it's building things together. I think because it's full of examples of really goodwill where good institutions came together to sold a software sheet that we were facing. You know, I look at Europeana, it's a slightly different model. But again, a group of organizations coming together and and faces the governments at that stage deciding to combine resources to achieve something and to get collections online. Now, I could look at what the company was announced recently around Hetman, creating a lab, the number of organizations to rethink what the visitor experiences think. Those formalizing those kind of collaboration's and trying to build something out of it, I think is the next step, rather, in the going beyond the very generous sharing and collaboration we really had inside the sector.

[00:31:04] And I just want to give a plug as well, thinking about knowledge sharing. There are lots of fantastic places where we see museum technologists and museum professionals, etc. coming together to share knowledge. We want to thank, of course, and for their support of this survey. I would also point to the emceeing and conference, which is happening in two weeks. This is a really important space for folks who are working within technology fields. And so that's virtual. And if you're getting anything out of this conversation, then I would say back to place for you as well and to make sure that you attend that. I do want to get to a few questions that are coming in.

[00:31:51] And and I would say a lot of those folks are thinking about the future. As you can expect. And.

[00:32:04] And so as we think about transformation and digital transformation and what the future looks like, and none of us are fortune tellers and predict the future. But what thoughts do you have about. The kinds of things museums might transition to in their digital thinking going forward.

[00:32:31] I think there's there's a lot unresolved in terms of digital interactiveness and how we're going to work with those in physical spaces. People feel safest with their phones. So some of the A.R. based experiences, kiosk based experiences, all of that that I'm working on now. There's a movement to controlling it on your own phone. Now, that is difficult to play in. In many ways, not ideal, but in some ways it also gives an amount of control to the user. We're seeing some amount of digital experimentation, especially with my colleagues in the theater sector. And those experiences are very interesting in terms of how can you make Zoome feel like a different experience within that? And then I would say the libraries that we've been working with, we Shinko just wrapped up a large project with the Urban Libraries Council. And looking at that, libraries have to be very responsive to what their communities and patrons need, and they are seeking that sort of input right now. Where are the communities broken and where? What is library's role to do that? And while I see some effort from some of the museums within this, it is still how are we going to emerge? We meaning the museum rather than we meaning the community from this. And so that mind set shift hasn't quite happened there. And while my work, every single institution I've worked with in the last few years has asked me about relevance until we make that mindshift moment. The relevance question becomes very, very difficult. I would say so. There is exciting opportunities within this, but I would say that we have a long way to go in the process of our thinking.

[00:34:29] And I hope I have another question here. And this one is one that's really interesting to me because it gets to something that I think is embedded within digital culture and that is collaboration, participation and co creation. And question from the audience. Do you find new ways that museums are reaching out to communities for digital content? Do those include things like outsourced exhibitions, et cetera? So so what are the opportunities? Right. You know, I think museums as sort of places where lots of expertize is held and where knowledge is shared with the public. What opportunities do the digital space help those institutions reverse that flow where knowledge is flowing into the institution from the community as well? Do you see. Do you see opportunities there for co creation?

[00:35:33] For I see opportunities for feedback. I would say co creation, I have a fairly high bar for co creation. You are not only proposing solutions, but you're defining the problem. Right. And we tend to hold that problem in a in a culturally dominant fashion of this is we've decided what the problem is and now we want to invite some of the community in to help us think about the solutions rather than sitting with our communities and figuring out how that community views the problems at stake. And then and then doing solutions. I would say the opportunity for feedback, though, has been wide and diverse. Right. And so the amount the chat based components, the public programs that are online. I think that that has brought museums and their visitors closer together in some ways in dialog that is happening in chat at times or discussions at times that we don't see happening in quite the same way in person.

[00:36:45] Great. Well, we're a little bit over our time, but I do want to do a quick final round. This is a lot to.

[00:36:57] Absorb.

[00:36:58] But I do think it's important that we know where we're at and we start to think about where we're going and as folks make the really difficult decisions that they have to make within their institutions, not just about digital, but also about the ways that they're addressing their community needs, the ways that they're thinking about social justice, the ways that they're thinking about shifting their programing and all sorts of ways not. And on top of that, just trying to get open again.

[00:37:36] What's one easy thing that folks can think about that that might make digital feel a little easier to approach?

[00:37:50] I will learn what my favorite phrases and digital and something my former team would go crazy, me just repeating it, just do the fundamentals brilliantly. I mean, do the fundamentals put in its digital? I mean, I want to.

[00:38:06] Isn't this big flashy gizmo SC augmented holographic thing? It's nice. It's just a way of exchanging information and connecting with people and doing the fundamental components of digital. Well, of building your digital presence. I'll go back to it like someone's Google profile, making sure that SVO is good. Page load time. Good visitor information. Doing that fundamental work? Well, I think it's the number one piece I would really push towards. And I know I. As we come out of as we hope we come out of the pandemic, you know, I think of the other the huge conversation to be us and globally being put up by the Black Lives Matter. Black Lives Matter movement. How museums are relevant and how and how inclusive we can be becomes a big part of how we work. I like

think that digital provides us the tools to really participate in those conversations. I think that's something I really hope becomes part of the mindset of cultural notations.

[00:39:06] On the.

[00:39:08] Kate, a closing thought on a practical level. I do think it is getting to know your visitors. And in developing some basic skills, possibly project management skills for the small organizations and for the large organizations really putting through that intentionality in in their strategy, that we should be seeing a movement towards that within within strategy from a from a more abstract point, I think that this is the moment that we can think about using our cultural capital for good. And that if we build up all this trust and respect, then we need to be able to spend it on the things that we believe in and that we need to be willing to to give up that sense of authority in order to be able to move into the next stage. And that means inviting outsiders out, outsiders to come to the table and talk to this. I many say outsiders. I mean, things like everyone from politicians to school teachers to children to the table, to be able to have a more robust conversation without that change in who holds authority, then I think it's a very difficult future. But we have such an opportunity at this moment.

[00:40:32] Wonderful. That's a wonderful place to end it.

[00:40:35] Kate Lowitt, thank you both so much for joining us today. I do want to remind folks, if you want to dig into the report, it's online at Kaif, Dawg. You can find past episodes of this program online at Kaif dot org slash discovery. I want to thank the folks helping bring this stream to your role. Justin and Grace, thank you so much. And our exit music is from the great Aaron Brown. Thank you all for watching. And thanks. Have a great week. For the conversation to continue, it's important to absolutely find us online. And I'll just drop in that bar at KFC Ford if you want to reach me or Hey, Chris Bar is the Twitter handle. Love to talk more about this stuff. Thanks so much, everyone.

[00:41:22] Thank you.