



MEMBERSHIP ADVISORY

Managing Your Museum's Pandemic Response PART 1: Activating Your Emergency Response

This resource has been developed to help you ask important questions and take the first steps to begin implementing your emergency response to COVID-19. These are the basics only. There are many more things to consider in an emergency, and the advice of Public Health Authorities should always take priority and be followed. Please consult with experts you have in your museum, community, and network, and monitor public health and emergency response networks regularly.

If you have emergency protocols in place, activate them as appropriate. This tip sheet assumes that you might not have those protocols in place or that they need a retooling to deal with a pandemic response.

Tear-Out Forms and Templates referenced in this resource are published in [HELP! An Emergency Preparedness Manual for Museums](#) and available free online in the [Alberta Museums Association Document Library](#). Click on "HELP! Resources."

Information about emergency response aid to non-profits and museums as employers will be made available as it is released and is not generally included here.

The following steps are not necessarily consecutive. Prioritize your response as is prudent in your situation.

STEP 1: Monitor and follow the advice of Public Health and Emergency Response Authorities

Pandemics are quickly evolving. Credible information sources should be closely monitored as your museum makes decisions to protect the safety of visitors, staff, volunteers, and their families. Information regarding current recommendations relating to COVID-19 can be found online at [Alberta Health Services](#), the [Government of Alberta](#), and [Health Canada](#).

STEP 2: Call together your Emergency Response Team (ERT) and authorize them to guide the museum's response

If you already have an ERT, you have positions identified; add other expertise relevant to this emergency as required. If you do not have an ERT, you will need people to fill the following roles:

- Team Lead
- Communications
- Health and Safety

- HR and Volunteer
- Public Events and Programming
- Security

In larger museums, this might mean one person per role. In smaller organizations, it will mean two or three people filling all of these roles.

This team should be empowered to make decisions for the museum. This may be outside the museum's usual authorization processes. Talk openly and early with the museum's authorizing officers about decision-making authority.

You may not need a dedicated Collections Lead for a pandemic response, but if you are closing your facility, ensure collections staff are consulted on the implications of any corresponding HVAC system changes and critical conservation issues if staff are not going to be at the museum. Consider also the impact of increased cleaning protocols to collection items and take steps to protect the collection.

If you have a copy of HELP! An Emergency Preparedness Manual for Museums, see the following sections: 1.4 Emergency Response Team; 2.1.1 Authorizing an Emergency Response Team; and 2.1.2 Appointing an Emergency Response Team During an Emergency. Use the [CCI Incident Management Team Builder](#) to identify roles relevant to the pandemic response.

STEP 3: Get your internal communications information and resources in place

- Gather emergency contact information for your ERT – see [Tear-Out 1.2 Emergency Response Team Contact](#)
- Do you have an emergency contact list with at-home information for your staff and volunteers? If not, see [Tear-Out 2.4 Staff & Emergency Volunteer Contact List](#). Include email and cell phone information so staff can be contacted digitally.
- Ensure your communications staff have remote access to media lists, social media accounts, and internal communication documents, logos, lists, and technology. Assign someone to monitor public health authority websites and social media. Identify how they will report back to the ERT.
- Having remote access to internal documents is critical if staff are being asked to work from home or to self-isolate. If this is not already in place, set up a Cloud storage account (e.g., Dropbox, iCloud, Google Drive, Microsoft OneDrive) and upload key documents. Take the advice of your information management staff or service providers regarding security of information protocols.
- Ensure programming staff have access to contact information for rentals, special events, and booked programs. If the museum needs to close quickly, this information will be needed to communicate about cancellations, and this may need to happen remotely. See [Tear-Out 2.2 Vital Records Locator](#), especially Section 4: Information Technology Records and Section 5: Business Continuity Records (Communications, Programming, Special Events, Fund Development).

If you have a copy of HELP! An Emergency Preparedness Manual for Museums, see the following sections: 2.2.3 Organizational Preparedness: Procedures and Systems – Contact Procedures: Chain of Command; 3.1.2 Community-Wide Disasters and Notifications; and Tool 3.1 Crisis Communications Checklist

STEP 4: Decide how you will meet and communicate

Normally you would establish an Emergency Operations Centre within the museum or offsite in an emergency. If the museum is remaining open or partially open, you will likely want to do so. Equip it with communications technology, a message board, and supplies to manage your team, including health and safety supplies and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). In a pandemic you should have a digital space to coordinate your response remotely, even if you decide to stay open as that decision may change quickly. Use systems you already have in place if possible. If you need to set up new accounts, project and team management sites like ASANA, Trello, Slacker, or any messenger app (WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, etc.) might be helpful. Ensure that you can share information and documents.

STEP 5: Develop a Crisis Communications Plan

- Develop holding messages to use while you are making decisions. Holding message examples include:

Out of an abundance of caution, the Community Museum and Archives is closing to the public while we assess our response to ensure the safety of our visitors, staff, and volunteers. Please visit our website for further information as this situation evolves.

or

The safety of our visitors and staff is our priority. As we assess the implications of COVID-19 on our operations, the Community Museum and Archives will be open with reduced public programming. We will provide details and follow up with impacted parties as further information becomes available.

- As you make decisions about closing the museum, reducing services, or cancelling events and programming, develop key messages that tell your audiences what they need to know or do, and what they can expect regarding refunds, postponements, or modified access. Be honest, open, and upfront, but do not over-promise or set unreasonable expectations. It is okay to phase information as it becomes available.
- As much as possible, deal directly with individuals who have booked spaces, special events, programs, etc. Tell them how they can contact you digitally. You may need holding messages to reassure them that their needs are being considered as you await more information to be able to answer their questions.
- Tailor your messages to your audience but assume all crisis communication will be made public on some level.
- Have key messages for your staff regarding their reporting to work and safety.
- Have key message sheets for staff to learn and use with the public.
- Designate a Media Spokesperson.

- Develop media releases and social media messages for information you need the public to know.

If you have a copy of HELP! An Emergency Preparedness Manual for Museums, see the following sections: 3.3 Crisis Communications – 3.3.1 Communicating with Staff and Volunteers, 3.3.2 Crisis Communications Plan, 3.3.3 Designated Media Spokesperson, 3.3.4 Media Releases; and Tool 3.2 Media Interview Checklist

STEP 6: Decide if your museum will stay open or not

Regardless of whether you stay open or not, consider:

- Your Crisis Communications Plan
- Security response while the building is closed
- Cleaning and sterilization while the museum is closed – allowing enough time to pass to reduce the risk of virus spread on surfaces and ensuring appropriate Personal Protective Equipment is available should be your priority. See the Alberta Government’s [Respiratory viruses and the workplace: OHS information for employers, supervisors and the workplace](#)
- Ensure staff have good information about self-isolating, attending work, travel, and resources for their families. See:
 - [Government of Canada: Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\)](#)
 - [COVID-19 coronavirus info for Albertans](#)
- Which staff are working from home?
- Which staff may need modified responsibilities, or a move to part-time or reduced work hours?
- Do you need to consider layoffs? When? What resources are available to protect and support your employees? Monitor provincial and federal employment resources. See:
 - Government of Canada - Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) – Employment and Social Development Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/notices/coronavirus.html>
 - WCB, COVID-19 Employer Fact Sheet: <https://www.alberta.ca/assets/documents/wcb-covid-19-employer-fact-sheet.pdf>
- You will need a policy that is responsive to staff who are required to stay home and self-isolate because they are feeling unwell, have tested positively for COVID-19, have travelled internationally, have been in close contact with someone with COVID-19, or need to care for a vulnerable person such as a child or family member. These criteria may change as a result of school cancellations or other public service closures. Consider your compensation strategy, internal communication, and resources response. Provide guidelines to staff regarding these items.
- Are you cancelling non-essential travel for staff attending professional development opportunities or other work-related travel in Canada and Alberta? Note that non-essential travel for staff outside of Canada is not currently advised.

As long as it is permitted by public health authorities and assessed as a low risk for the public and staff and volunteers, if you are remaining open, consider:

- Where do you need handwashing signs or hand sanitization stations?
- Talk about what social distancing means in your museum.
- What events, activities, programs, and services need to be cancelled or modified? Consult regularly with Public Health Authority resources.
- How will you clean and sterilize public spaces such as bathrooms, eating spaces, gift shops, and programming spaces? Develop enhanced cleaning protocols and post messaging to inform visitors. Strongly consider removing or blocking access to touch-focused exhibit elements such as technology or programming materials.
- If some public spaces are closed and sterilized, consider establishing perimeters around these spaces so they do not need to be cleaned more often than necessary. Ensure such measures do not inhibit fire safety and evacuation plans.
- What museum activities include vulnerable persons such as the elderly, immunocompromised individuals, children, or pregnant women? They should likely be cancelled or affected individuals should be advised not to attend. If you have vulnerable persons on your staff or as volunteers, they should not be involved in public activities. Follow public health guidelines about staff and volunteers self-isolating.
- What public signage should be created about precautions and prohibitions? Post notices near entrances requesting that the following individuals not enter: those who are feeling unwell, have been travelling internationally, who have been in contact with a quarantined individual, or who are high risk or immunocompromised. Note that these criteria may change and will be difficult or impossible to enforce.
- What non-essential projects and programs can be suspended to minimize risk to staff, volunteers, and the public?
- Use digital or paper sign-up forms for staff and volunteers so that you know who is in the building and who needs to be notified if circumstances change or exposure occurs. See [Tear-Out 3.6 Work Site Sign-In / Sign-Out Sheet](#)

If you have a copy of HELP! An Emergency Preparedness Manual for Museums, see the following section: 2.2.3 Organizational Preparedness: Procedures and Systems – Business Continuity Planning

You might also find the following information useful:

[Tear-Out 3.2: CoSA Pocket Response Plan™](#)

https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html?utm_campaign=not-applicable&utm_medium=vanity-url&utm_source=canada-ca_coronavirus

<https://integralorg.ca/about-us/resources/covid-19-resources-for-nonprofits/>

<https://www.hrpa.ca/Pages/Resource-Centre.aspx>

<https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf>

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/mass-gatherings-risk-assesment.html>

<https://www.alberta.ca/coronavirus-info-for-albertans.aspx>

<https://members.museumsontario.ca/resources/news/item/update-covid-19-and-ontario-museums>

Do you have Business Continuity Insurance? Get in touch with your broker or agent and find out what you need to consider about making a claim.

This guide compiled by C. Willie, Editor of *HELP! An Emergency Preparedness Manual for Museums*, 2nd ed. (Edmonton: Alberta Museums Association, 2018).