



How COVID is  
**Reshaping**  
the **Cultural**  
**Space**

CALLISORTKL™



***The Post-COVID Museum of the Future explores CallisonRTKL's views on how museums will operate –and museum design will evolve – now and in the future.***

*Kirill Pivovarov, senior associate vice president, considers the future of our cultural spaces.*



## IMAGINING THE MUSEUM OF THE FUTURE

As a result of COVID-19, many museums around the world are currently closed — and it's estimated that more than 10% of them may never reopen. With many cultural organizations relying on a specific number of annual admissions to maintain operations, prolonged closures and reduced visitation present significant challenges.

But as we consider the future of our cultural space, museums may have a special opportunity to offer visitors a meaningful experience — safer and sooner than traditional retail/entertainment venues. To drive visitor traffic, an effective response must be informed by evolving visitor expectations.

The global pandemic is one of the greatest disruptions of modern life which has made the injustice and inequalities in our societies more obvious and very raw. Today, perhaps more than ever, we need to remember the role and purpose of culture, education and art in our lives. Our hope is that as we recover from the global pandemic, we will be able to transform this world and create a better future -- including a better Museum of the Future.

As we carefully examine the short – as well as long-term — future of our shared environments, museums may have an opportunity to offer visitors a meaningful experience through culture, education and art.

This series is based on CallisonRTKL's research across many different sectors, as well as our first-hand experience assisting the National Museums with several major renovation projects during the pandemic.

*As a result, we discovered evolving visitor expectations, shifting patterns of human behavior and environmental and technological transformation. These include:*

### **ALTERED HUMAN BEHAVIOR**

People continue to struggle to adapt to new social distancing rules. In this environment people need to FEEL safe to fully embrace the IRL visitor experience.

### **REDUCED INDOOR MUSEUM ATTENDANCE**

Annual visitation is no longer a measure of relevance. Museums must develop new cross-channel ways to engage their audiences and redefine the measure of success.

### **ACCELERATED DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION**

The pandemic forced more transparency, and dramatically increased need for direct, two-way communication through digital platforms.

### **RE-ENVISIONING THE CULTURAL SPACE**

Today's uncertainties drive debate about the future of our built environment. Do we need traditional office space? Is retail space obsolete? How will our cultural spaces look?

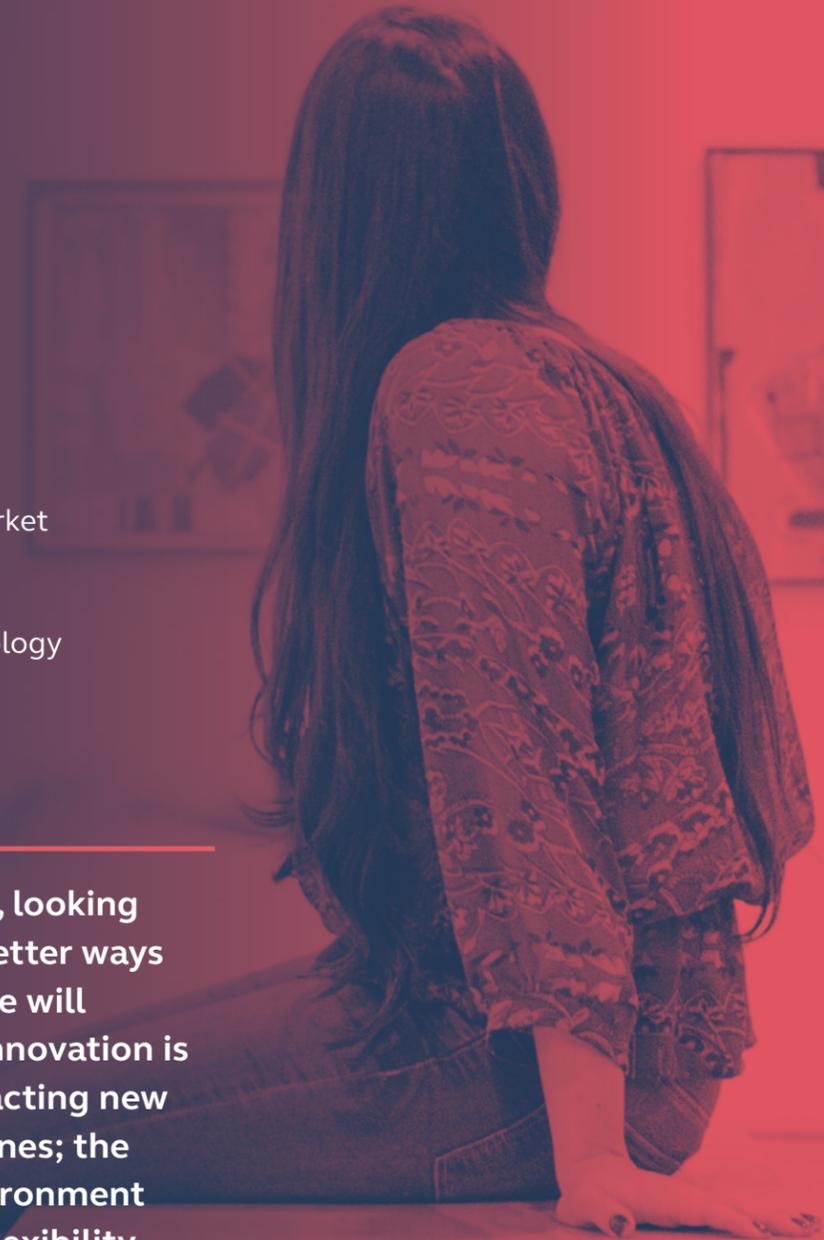
### **PEOPLE ARE SOCIAL BEINGS**

For millennia we gathered on the market squares we migrated to the cities, we gathered as a community to worship, celebrate and protest. Neither technology nor pandemic will abruptly change human nature.

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**People will never stop learning, looking for beauty, and searching for better ways to understand ourselves. People will return to our cultural spaces. Innovation is key to COVID response, to attracting new visitors, and to retain current ones; the future of our cultural built environment will be driven by adaptability, flexibility and visitor engagement.**

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*Protecting the health, safety and welfare of visitors as well as communities.*



## NEW POST-COVID VISITOR EXPERIENCE

*From its first-hand experience assisting the National Museums in Washington, D.C. with several major renovation projects during the pandemic, CallisonRTKL has found that visitors will expect a number of new experiences, including:*



### SMALLER GATHERINGS AND A MORE INTIMATE EXPERIENCE

It's a fact that museum visitors will need more social distancing to be — and feel — safe. A less-crowded gallery space will create moments of having space and program to yourself. The visitor journey should take full advantage of these special moments. While larger institutions offer ample space, smaller spaces can also thrive by being careful about pathing and timing of visitor access. Temporary and new construction, re-designing public spaces, uni-directional circulation, changes to the museum programs and new visitor policies can help with social distancing.



## SPENDING MORE TIME OUTDOORS

Outdoor spaces and programs could be made safer and more flexible than the interior spaces. Plus, outdoor spaces offer special opportunities to engage with the public. For example, museums could work with municipalities and neighborhoods to allow programs to spill into public spaces.



## CONTINUED SOCIAL DISTANCING

These expectations can be addressed by temporary and new construction, re-design of the public space and uni-directional circulation, changes to the museum programs and their visitor policies. While larger museums are much better equipped to address short-term public concerns than high-density entertainment venues, the smaller institutions -- those located in historic buildings, and programs focused on interactive experiences -- will face challenges similar to in-person retail.



## MUSEUMS TO KILL THE QUEUE

Waiting is unacceptable when being in proximity to people over time can be dangerous. Instead, museums can stage access and manage uni-directional customer flow.



## A TOUCH-FREE EXPERIENCE

While some medical research finds that the risk of transmitting COVID-19 by touch may be less than by airborne transmission, museum visitors will still expect a touchless museum experience. This can be achieved through redesigning museum spaces, creating new visitor policies, using PPE while in the museum, digital applications and changes to the museum programs.

If your pre-COVID programs were interactive and built around a hands-on experience, think of your converting your offering to digital. If you started out as a digital operation, how would your physical location be used? Most likely to complete the museum experience for the visitor. Focusing on digital, touch-free technologies takes of much of the operational burden out of the space and requires less visitor contact. Each Institution should review their current and proposed programs and evaluate health risks. Note that you may need additional storage space for cleaning supplies throughout public spaces.



## CLEAN AIR THROUGHOUT THE MUSEUM

Like any other public space, museum visitors will expect an improved HVAC system and reduced risks of airborne transmission. Which means that museums need to tell a better story about BOH operation, building systems, cleaning efforts, and make it part of the program. Visitors need to know the full scope of the effort making their experience safe.



## MOVING PEOPLE

Visiting a museum is a physically active experience. However, people also need places to sit, rest, talk and take in the experience. Post-COVID visitor journeys must be re-mapped to consider new optimal occupancies, new durations of the visit (no one wants to be rushed through enjoying an exhibit), and opportunities for minimal-contact rest areas.



## A CHANGE IN TRADITIONAL AMENITIES

Without a doubt, change is difficult. For museums — where people go to relax, enjoy culture and time together — there will be some significant changes.

Like most public-facing institutions, museums will need to be transparent about their operations, building systems and cleaning efforts. Many of the potential short-term COVID response solutions inevitably will result in reduced amenities, altered visitor experience, and reduced revenue streams. High-density theaters, museum retail, food service, and vending may need to be temporarily closed or replaced with technology or digital experience.

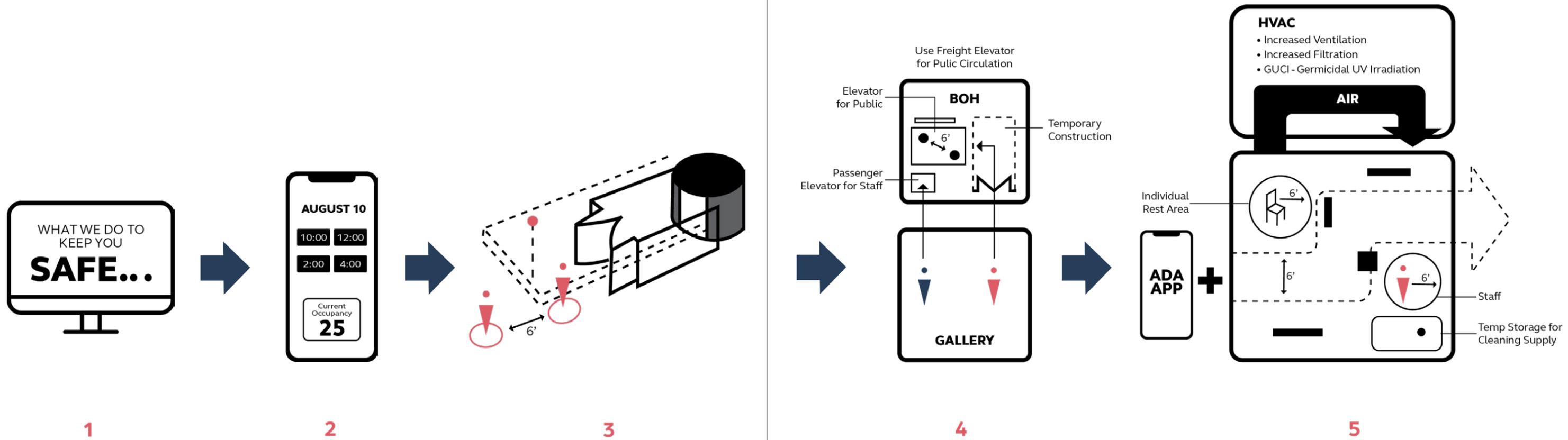


## PAYING ATTENTION TO NON-GALLERY SPACES

While museums want to preserve the visitor experience and make them feel safe, the non-gallery spaces such as vertical transportation, public stairs and restrooms will need to be carefully mapped to limit human contact and protect museum staff and retail.

## THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE IS ALWAYS CHANGING

*This was happening before COVID and definitely post-pandemic. As museums start slowly open up, they need to adapt to the new visitor expectations.*



**1 WEBSITE**  
 Museums need to tell a better story about BOH operation, building systems, cleaning efforts and make it part of the program. Visitors need to know the full scope of the effort making their experience safe.

**2 TIMED ENTRY**  
 Technology could help schedule visits, monitor occupancy, and merge physical and digital experience.

**3 TEMPORARY CONSTRUCTION TO KEEP QUEUE OUTSIDE**  
 Museums need to examine all circulation bottlenecks, starting with entrance. Low-cost temporary construction could help keep queue outside and provide touch-free controlled entry.

**4 USE FREIGHT ELEVATOR FOR PUBLIC CIRCULATION**  
 Museums need to examine vertical transportation and consider the public use of large freight elevators.

**5 HVAC**  
 Gallery experience and program design have to take into account many different challenges: social distancing, ADA experience, staff safety, additional space for cleaning supplies and enhanced HVAC systems.



## REDUCED VISITATION = NEED FOR INCREASED ENGAGEMENT

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**The pandemic has ensured that in-person indoor museum attendance will be reduced for the foreseeable future. Annual visitation is no longer a measure of relevance. Which means that museums must develop new cross-channel ways to engage their audiences and redefine the measure of success.**

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### REDUCED OPTIMAL OCCUPANCY CREATES A DIFFERENT VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Every business and every organization is rethinking how much space they need as demand is uncertain. And museums must align their programs with new optimal visitor occupancies. The solutions include a combination of timed ticketing and entry, reduced occupancy load driven by the potential for social distancing, a high-performing HVAC system, creating uni-directional circulations and avoiding potential choke points.

Visitors will also be those from surrounding cities rather than out-of-state or international guests since people will prefer to travel short distances before they will get on a long flight. The major questions for museums is how the institution — especially in a dense city — stay closer to their visitors? How can a museum engage local and regional audiences? And just as important, how can a museum engage international visitors?

Some solutions to increase engagement are creating temporary remote exhibit spaces, traveling programs, augmented reality experiences and digital platforms. However, these must focus on local and regional audiences to maintain that critical in-person attendance. Visitor peace-of-mind is also vital. Cultural institutions should lead society by defining new safe ways to use our shared and cultural spaces.



## TO KEEP VISITORS SATISFIED, TAKE CARE OF YOUR STAFF

A museum's back-of-house space presents various challenges based on the institution program type. While museum BOH workspaces are unique, the emerging open office workplace de-densification solutions could be referenced for any shared occupancy space. This approach is phased and calls for substantial initial occupancy reduction. Other suggestions to ensure staff safety include:

- Bringing staff back in waves — start very small
- Allowing people choice and control of when they come back
- Providing staff with the things that make them feel safer — even if they are less effective
- Cleaning, cleaning, cleaning
- Establishing clear policies and training
- Committing to clear and honest communications

## POST-PANDEMIC FUTURE = DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION, TRANSPARENCY, AND COMMUNICATIONS

Long before the COVID pandemic, museums like other cultural and educational institutions, faced increased competition for visitor's attention. Museums have realized that they need to deliver compelling cross-channel experiences to connect with their audiences, to stay relevant and to compete with the retail entertainment industry. The pandemic has accelerated digital transformation by forcing people to further embrace digital platforms.

Visitors will expect their new-found convenience to continue even after IRL experiences become more readily available. The digitization of experiences has driven up convenience and effortlessness. This is not new, but this has accelerated exponentially in the past few months. Museums can use this time as a beta test for your cross-channel visitor's journey — it is OK if everything is not 100% right now —

customers will forgive you for going out on a limb. But it needs to be ready for prime time in a few months. Get ready now.

Among the new expectations, visitors want to be able to connect to both local and online communities to receive content. This is not just about presenting exhibits or online content — this is more about creating dialog. How can a museum leverage social channels to create a relevant conversation?

Additionally, visitors expect radical transparency with regards to an institution's ethics and beliefs, their interactions with the local community and businesses, the ways in which staff is treated and in the types of programs are offered.

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## KIRILL PIVOVAROV

Senior Associate Vice President

Kirill Pivovarov's knowledge spans public and private sectors and includes civic and cultural buildings, office projects, hospitality projects, technology-driven designs and mission critical facilities. His experience with high-profile projects and competitions has gained him national and international recognition. In addition to his design leadership role on complex projects, Kirill has special interest in integrated design processes, sustainability and low-carbon/zero-energy design.

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CallisonRTKL, a global architecture, planning and design practice, began over seven decades ago and has evolved into a cultural agency to advance positive outcomes in our local and global communities. Through a human-centric design approach, our team addresses the imperatives of resiliency, well-being, mobility and technology and their influence in the built environment.