

FINISHED TRANSCRIPT

IMLS MUSEUMS FOR ALL WEBINAR

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>> Hello, everyone. My name is Chris and I am the senior adviser

in the office of museum services at the Institute of Museum and Library Services. We'd like to welcome you to this first in a series of informational webinars about one of our newest national initiatives, the museums for all program.

Museums for All is a cooperative venture with the Association of Children's Museums to expand access to the nation's museums by offering free or reduced admission for EBT, or electronic benefit transfer, cardholders. Over the next year, IMLS will be working closely with ACM to recruit museums as participants in this program. While targeted to children's museums during this initial pilot phase, any kind of museum is welcome to join at any time. Our goal for the pilot phase of the project is 125 participating museums, and we're hoping this webinar will convince you to consider enrolling your museum in the Museums for All program.

This webinar is intended to share basic information about museums for all, how it works, how it can benefit your museum and your audience, how it's worked in a number of other museums already, and how you can register to be a part of this exciting new initiative.

We're delighted and grateful to have the support of the Association of Children's Museums as well as a number of individual museums represented today by Jane Werner, the Executive Director of the Children's museum of Pittsburgh. Charlayne Murrell-Smith, Vice President, external relations and corporate development, and Kacy Hughes, senior manager of community engagement both of the Boston children's museum. And Sasha Karlova, visitor experience manager/arts director of the Zimmer museum in Los Angeles.

Each of these colleagues will be sharing their experiences with similar EBT admissions programs that they've already established at their museums.

But first all I want to introduce Brendan Cartwright, the program manager for special initiatives for the Museums for All program.

>> Brendan: We're very excited to work on this with IMLS and is thankful to the children's museum of Pittsburgh, the Boston children's museum and the Zimmer children's museum who provided valuable guidance in the creation of this program and are graciously joining us today.

One of the value statements of ACM is that all children deserve access to a high quality museum experience.

Several of our museum members have undertaken a variety of programs to increase access within their communities. ACM and IMLS saw an opportunity to turn these disparate programs into a unified national

initiative, Museums for All.

Museums for All are meant to prevent the financial barriers for low income families from attending the museums. As such, there are some participating guidelines that museums must agree to. They must offer a general admission price of no more than \$3 per person to at least -- to any visitor who displays an electric benefits transfer or EBT card. That price would be offered to at least four people in a group or family, including the cardholder. This price point would be offered during all normal museum operating hours, allowing the families to choose the best time for them to visit their local museum.

Museums can charge what admission up to \$3 they would want to offer or if they would like to offer free admission. Some museums offer free membership, as well. And as long as a museum meets these minimum guidelines, they are free to exceed them in any way they wish.

There are many reasons for participating in Museums for All and our panel will share their reasons in just a few moments. But most importantly it affirms that museums are meant for all members of our community and that participants are committed to expanding their outreach. Museums for all is a unified national initiative, and participants will have access to free collateral and branding opportunities to help make it a success. The program is continually growing and expanding, and the more museums that participate, the stronger the program will be.

It's very easy and free to register. Just go to www.Museums4All.org, the number 4, or email info@Museums4All.org. And so we can learn how this project is doing, we ask you to send us the number of visitors you've had using Museums for All on a quarterly basis.

>> Chris: Thanks, Brendan and now we'd like to hear from our museum presenters to tell us about their experience with similar access programs targeted to EBT cardholders. As Brendan mentioned, the Museums for All initiative is intended to be a unified, national, branded program. But it's not an entirely new concept to connect with EBT cardholders to expand museum opportunities for communities. Our guest speakers will be sharing their experiences with similar programs, the lessons learned and the benefits for both their museums and the communities they serve.

To begin we'd like to reintroduce Jane Werner from the children's museum of Pittsburgh.

>> Jane: Thank you, Chris. The children's museum of Pittsburgh is to provide innovative museum experiences which foster joy, creativity and curiosity. We see this as an extension of our mission. We had a

similar program for a number of years along with a number of other access programs. We provide four free days per year. We provide reduced admission for schools with 50% free or reduced lunch. We have a program with tickets for kids, which is a local organization who provides free admission for underserved communities. We have family memberships for our head start families. We have two head start classrooms right here in the museum. And all of those families get free memberships. We also provide free admission for NAEYC members.

The EBT program is another extension of our access program.

It's wonderful and kind of a simple, practical and really effective program to make sure that everyone has access to our museum. It's over 10 years old. We've had this program soon after we opened the addition in 2004. We now serve over 15,000 visitors a year. That number has grown substantially. It represents about 5% of our current audience. We include both green and yellow EBT holders. Yellow EBT holders are those families that have a member who has a disability here in Pennsylvania.

And we started at a dollar admission for all of the EBT holders, and we just recently increased that to \$2 when we welcomed the yellow EBT holders into the program.

It's been a wonderful way of getting the community involved in funding. We actually started the Great Friends and Family Fund which is focused on individual donors to help pay for this program. And that's been a tremendous success. We also get funding from foundations, corporate foundations, the county, Allegheny county, has been very supportive of it. And, frankly, we started this program out of general operating. We did it because we really believed that we wanted it to be for everyone who wanted to come into the museum, that we should provide a way in.

So, our attitude in the beginning was: We're here, anyway. Let's let as many people in as possible.

In recent years, we've actually been working on getting the word out. This is more of a systematic approach. We've partnered with the county's children, youth and family services. They actually send notices out to the recipients of their services to let families know that we have this program.

We also have been working with family support centers in underserved communities and our head start program with the Pittsburgh public schools. We work with them so that everyone knows about our EBT program.

Of course, it's on our website. There are fliers and public spaces

including libraries and churches and anywhere that you can think that people might gather. Coffee shops. We do kind of a blanket flier. It's been a really great program. We found that the program is to be one of the best the things we do for families. It goes with our quarterlies that everyone should be welcomed at the children's museum and that there should be no barriers to access to the things that we provide and to really fulfilling our mission. So thank you.

>> Chris: Well, thank you, Jane, so much for sharing all that information about the EBT program and similar programs at the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh of the it's great work.

And now we'd like to introduce Charlayne and Kacy from the Boston Children's Museum to talk about their experience with an EBT access program.

>> Great, thanks, Chris.

[Silence.]

I'm sorry. It's not moving. Here we go.

>> Boston Children's Museum's mission is to engage children and families in joyful discovery experiences that instill an appreciation of our world, develop foundational skills, and spark a life long love of learning.

Boston Children's museum decided to offer an access program like Museums for All as we were contemplating raising admission prices in 2012. We wanted to make sure that we were also expanding options and improving access for all families at the same time. But we also knew that we needed to secure staff and leadership support and to make sure that the key state agencies administering EBT were on Board.

>> I think what makes Museums for All different from other programs we offered and are currently offering, it's more flexible, more sensitive and more inclusive. Our current programs include target sponsor dollar Friday nights and library passes. We found that while Friday nights are appreciated by many, but is not convenient for everyone of the it is pretty late for children. And some people do not like to travel on public transportation at night. We also heard a few comments as Friday nights as poor people's nights which is something we had not intended.

Library passes are again appreciated by many because they give you a half priced admission for up to four people. But even this discount is a cost barrier to some families. And it also requires advanced planning because you have to pick for a specific day.

Other things we've tried in the past are giving away free passes at events and free memberships to families who are involved in grant-funded programs.

We learned from these experiences that free passes have a very low return rate and are somewhat impersonal, and that free memberships weren't terribly successful. They didn't seem culturally relevant to the majority of the families to whom we gave them.

So coming back to Museums for All, at Boston Children's Museum, families can show their EBT card and get a \$2 admission price any time. This is an extremely flexible program that you can decide spur of the moment if you want to come to the museum, bring your card and very little advanced planning. It's also sensitive. You hand over your card like many people do as a credit card and our staff recognizes it. So you don't have to explain it.

Families with EBT cards can come at any time rather than times reserved for them. So it's literally a museum for all.

The program has been very successful since we implemented it in August 2012. It was first supported by the Boston Foundation and then in fiscal year '14 and '15 we received some support from the Highland Street Foundation. And as you can see from the graph, our EBTs have doubled in two years.

>> One thing that Boston Children's Museum wanted to make sure was that our Museums for All program was an invitation rather than what's the point of a charity? So we took advantage of our 40 year history of maximizing accessibility through a wide variety of admission programs and we learned -- we were careful to learn from our mistakes.

In this case, we surveyed the comfort of EBT cardholders in advance of starting the program to ensure that they were comfortable with using their card as a form of ID as they entered the museum.

And we also trained our cashiers and staff to make the transaction and entry process as smooth as possible and to make sure that there was no deference in how our EBT cardholders were treated relative to other visitors.

We also encouraged word of mouth and promotion about the program both within the media and by the state agencies that were connected to the EBT program. And we couldn't be more excited and thrilled to continue to participate and encourage other children's museums to do the same.

>> Chris: Thanks so much Charlayne and Kacy for sharing your insights and experience at the Boston Children's Museum.

Now we'd like to introduce, by jumping over to the West Coast, Sasha Karlova and hear from the Zimmer Children's Museum in Los Angeles so she could tell us about their long term experience with the EBT admissions program.

>> Sasha: Thank you, Chris. The Zimmer Children's Museum is in Los Angeles. We're a small museum. Only about 10,000 square feet. Our mission is to make a better society through interactive learning, creative self-expression and art experiences for children and families. We are dedicated to teaching people about the big ideas of global citizenship, community responsibility, and cultural sensitivity.

Through the power of play, children will learn about human values such as respect for others, helping those in need, generosity, and creativity.

Access at the Zimmer started when we opened in 1991, actually. We've always offered subsidized field trips and free or discounted memberships to the museum based on need.

Then in 2005, a partnership between the Los Angeles County Arts Commission and the Department of Public Social Services started a program called free fun for families to offer free admission for families with EBT cards. And the Zimmer was an early adopter of this program.

The program offered little pamphlets that gave information about organizations and cultural institutions that offered free admission.

Then in 2011, we formally launched what we call our we All Play initiative. Under this initiative, we offer free admission to all EBT and active military families, subsidized field trips for title 1 and head start schools. We continue to offer for free admission Sundays a year off then alignment with alignment with the Smithsonian museum day live. And also another four free admission days for our families with our children with special needs.

We also offer scholarships for our camps and classes as well as discounted memberships for families with what used to be called I'm sorry, I can't remember the name right now, it's Medical. So we still do that.

And then is a chart that shows the increase of visitors with EBT cards from 2007 to 2014. With the launch of our we All Play initiative, EBT admissions increased significantly. In 2014, we saw nearly 4,000 visitors with EBT cards visit the museum, which accounts for about 6% of total visitors that year.

Benefits of free admission. We are always hoping to serve more people in our community. And we want to see our numbers grow. Being

accessible helps us reach that goal. To jump from 2500 people with EBT cards to 4,000 people in one year is a significant part of that growth. Accessibility also gives us leverage for funding. Our We All Play initiative and part of being Museums for All helps us tell a better story and this accounts for our current foundational support.

And of course accessibility aligns with our mission. We want to teach children and families about global citizenship and community responsibility, and being accessible to all members of our community is an important part of that.

As we've been implementing accessibility through We All Play and Museums for All, staff training has been very important. We do about quarterly what we call sensitivity trainings where we often incorporate role play to demonstrate uncomfortable or sensitive situations.

We want to make sure that all visitors to the museum feel equally welcome by both our front desk staff and our play guides out on the museum floor.

When a visitor asks what the cost of admission is, our staff always include "and free for families with EBT cards."

We also include on all of our signage that we now offer free admission for EBT cardholders. We also partner with organizations who serve families with EBT cards, sometimes by just giving them stacks of flyers to get the word out about this program.

I know they mentioned before, we also partner for our free admission fun days with organizations such as Smithsonian magazine museum live. We keep our visitors engaged by both doing formal and informal evaluations about our programming as we are serving such a diverse community, and that community is growing, we are expanding our language immersion classes, and we are now offering four different languages in our classes. And our public programs are also always evolving to serve communities of different interests.

So thank you so much. We love being part of Museums for All.

>> Chris: All right. Thank you very much, Jane, Charlayne, Kacy and Sasha, for sharing all of your experiences. And hopefully you all listening have heard some good stories that make you excited to try Museums for All for yourself. I'd encourage you to register right away. It's simple to do and there's no cost to join.

Once again just visit www.Museums4All.org to register. You'll have access to our free branded materials. And we're happy to answer any questions you might have. That goes for all of us here.

We hope you're as excited about this program as we are. Thank you for listening.