

## Timed Transcript for IMLS Webinar: Museums for All Informational Webinar

0:03

Hello, everyone, and welcome to "An Introduction to Museums for All for Prospective Participants."

0:09

My name is Helen Wechsler, and on behalf of the Institute of Museum and Library Services, I'm pleased to welcome you to this informational webinar about this national initiative, Museums for All.

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There are three speakers and you can see us here on your screen for today's webinar. In addition to myself, we'll be hearing from Brendan Cartwright, who is the program manager at the Association of Children's Museums and the coordinator for this special initiative. And for a participating museum's perspective, we'll also hear from Matthew Driftmier, who is the Guest Relations Coordinator at the Space Foundation Discovery Center.

1:02

To set the stage for more detailed information that we will be sharing about the program, I'll first present some general information.

1:13

Museums for All is a cooperative venture between the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the Association of Children's Museums, and it has the goal of expanding access to the nation's museums by offering free or reduced admissions for EBT card holders - EBT cards being electronic benefit transfer cards.

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Over the past six years of this initiative, which started in 2014, IMLS has been working closely with ACM to recruit museums as program participants.

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One of the strengths of this nationally branded program is name recognition, meaning that member museums are all united in this effort to increase access to those who might otherwise not be able to visit their site.

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Another strength is that the access provided by this program is not limited to certain days or specific times.

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Museums for All participants are dedicated to providing access to everyone during any normal operating hours, every day.

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We began the program as a pilot for children's museums, but since then, participation has been open to museums of all types, all across the country.

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We're happy that the program has grown and flourished, but there's always room for more, and so we're so glad you're here to hear about it.

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And now I'm going to hand it over to Brendan, who's going to talk more about the guidelines, and how you join, and what's good about it.

2:46

All right. Thank you, Helen.

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So, the goal of Museums for All is to be easy for all museums to adopt and potentially to adapt.

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We have a set of broad minimum guidelines that make it an easy-to-use program, ready out of the box to go.

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Those guidelines include offering a general admission rate of no more than \$3 per person for up to four people when one individual displays a SNAP EBT card from any state.

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This is an easy way to identify a visitor who qualifies as having a financial need in a minimally intrusive way.

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Museums have the freedom to decide what their admission price will be, like, free, \$1 per person, \$2 per person, et cetera.

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Just no more than three, and are only obligated to offer that price for a basic general admission.

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If there are add-on attractions, at your exhibits, you are not obligated to include them in your Museums for All offering.

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The Museums for All rate will be offered during all normal operating hours, as Helen mentioned.

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If you'd like, museums can adapt their offerings as well.

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They can include WIC or Medicaid or other forms of identification that they accept from Museums for All.

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They can include discounts on special exhibits or events and some museums choose to offer a discounted membership.

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And we've seen massive success for this program so far. In six years, nearly 600 museums have begun participating.

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This includes museums in 49 states.

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Come on, Hawaii. We want to make it 50.

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Also, in the District of Columbia and the Virgin Islands. We piloted the program in children's museums, as Helen said, and now every type of museum is represented.

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We have history museums, art museums, zoos, aquariums, multiple presidential libraries, and so on.

5:00

We've got museums in cities, in rural areas, large museums and small.

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And here's a visual representation of where there are museums participating in Museums for All.

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It looked maybe a little more interesting a couple of years ago, but right now, it's all red. Again, just waiting for that museum from Hawaii so we can color the map in completely.

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And in case you're wondering how your particular region is doing, here are the numbers for those. New England looks like it's lagging a bit, but we do have over 30 sites that are counted under the single banner of Historic New England, so that makes it a little more equitable there.

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Many states are doing well. Right now, California, Ohio, and Pennsylvania have the most participants.

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And as I mentioned, the Museums for All program was piloted in children's museums, which is one reason we see the large number of children's museums that participate. We've seen quite a lot of enthusiasm in history museums and art museums lately.

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Some of these museums are free admission anyway, but they choose to participate to really drive home their commitment to extending the invitation to every member of their communities.

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As you can see, there's been steady growth over time.

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With our latest round of reporting, we're almost at three million visitors that have used the Museums for All program to visit a museum.

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The visitor numbers have taken a bit of a bump this year due to the shutdowns, but people are still using this program.

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A similar program to Museums for All is Blue Star Museums, which gives free admission to military members and their families during the summer.

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Around 2,000 museums participated in that program, and Museums for All, which runs year-round and is aimed at helping families with financial need, is close to 30% of that total, so I'm pretty proud of that.

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One phenomenon that we've been begun tracking are Hub Cities, or cities that have three or more museums that participate in Museums for All.

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As you can see, many big cities that you might expect, like New York, LA, and Chicago are on here.

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But there are also places like Greenville, South Carolina, Missoula, Montana, and Springfield, Illinois. In a Hub City, museums can work together to really strengthen their Museums for All offerings.

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They can also recruit other museums to join or at least demonstrate the benefits of joining.

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We've seen that in places like Richmond, Virginia, San Antonio, Pueblo, Colorado, and Grand Rapids.

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We'll talk a little bit more about Hub Cities later and also hear some firsthand accounts about recruitment.

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So, to register for Museums for All is very easy.

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We have a dedicated website, [www.museumsforall.org](http://www.museumsforall.org), and there's a button to register there.

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The actual process should take less than five minutes. It's free to do.

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We provide support materials, like access to branded collateral, a group site. We do virtual hangouts, we do webinars like these, and more. We'll also send you a window cling to use at your site, and there's a searchable map on the website and all of the participating museums are listed there.

9:12

Some of the other resources that we provide include previous webinars that have been archived, infographics that you can use on social media, press release templates, examples of every state EBT card, and staff training recommendations.

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We periodically create and add more resources. So, please don't be shy in telling us what you'd like to have.

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We're in the process of creating some resources specifically for those Hub Cities that I mentioned, and something that will provide even more benefit to getting that designation.

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So, now, you've seen some of the background of Museums for All, gotten an idea of who is participating and what kind of support is offered, and now Helen will let you know about why participating in this program can be valuable to your museum.

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Thanks, Brendan. We've talked a little about the value, but I want to again hammer home a few more really important parts of Museums for All and why it can help your institution.

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So, there are so many reasons to participate, but most importantly, it affirms that museums are meant for all members of the community and that participating museums are committed to equitably expanding their community outreach.

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What's great is that this effort typically fits easily within museums' mission, vision, and inclusion plans.

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Also, Museums for All is yet another way to increase community access to your research, to your collections, to your programs, your exhibits, and to reduce those barriers.

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Additionally, we make it easy for you, as easy as possible, to participate with all the tools that Brendan talked about – customized collateral, press releases, branding opportunities, so it's kind of ready to go off the shelf.

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Another benefit we're beginning to understand, and we're going to talk more about that, is the power of participating among multiple museums in a single city.

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Forming these hubs is allowing museums to market the program jointly and thereby offer a menu of rich opportunities to families in their communities, to work together to build new partnerships with social service organizations and other community based organizations, and to have a louder and unified voice when approaching municipal leaders or local funders for support.

12:02

These are just a couple of quotes from participants.

12:08

The first one you can see from the San Diego Natural History Museum is talking about the benefit of marketing as a group of institutions.

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And the second one I think is touching because it deals with our current situation and with a couple that, you know, up until COVID-19 would not have been Museums for All visitors, but now is and are grateful for the opportunity to be able to do that.

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But better than these quotes written on slides, I'm going to now turn it over to Matthew Driftmier, who is a real-life person who can tell you the real-life benefits for his institution and why they've joined.

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Take it away, Matthew.

12:52

Wonderful. Well, thank you, Helen, and again, thank you to Helen and Brendan and all of IMLS for inviting me to speak with all of you today.

13:03

Again, my name is Matthew Driftmier. I run the Guest Relations Department for the Space Foundation Discovery Center right here in beautiful Colorado Springs. We're an interactive and immersive space museum and science center.

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I'm really happy to be able to share our experience with you all today.

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So, we have only just recently joined Museums for All. We joined back in August.

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We had been looking into Museums for All and some other kind of similar accessibility programs.

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And then when COVID happened this year, we really started to look at all the different ways that we can open up our museum to as many people as possible to really extend our reach and to show that we're here for the community during these very interesting times.

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We actually ended up packaging Museums for All within a larger program aimed at opening up accessibility to the Discovery Center that we call the Community Access Program, which has two halves to it.

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The first is Museums for All, which is our daily admission part of community access, to give folks kind of an introductory, you just kind of want to try things out way of accessing the museum.

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But then, we've also paired that with a reduced cost membership option, as well, which, in addition to being open to SNAP beneficiaries, is open to just about every form of assistance program out there, everything from foster home families to free and reduced lunch participants at local schools.

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We felt that Museums for All was really a great complement to give us a kind of two-tiered system to increasing accessibility to the Discovery Center.

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Then, the other primary thing, we saw a lot of folks saw this as a difficult program to participate in, because they didn't know how they were going to pay for it, but we decided to take the approach of,

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All of these guests who are coming in off of Museums for All, they are a population segment that we believe would not have otherwise come to the museum, and, therefore, they are additional revenue that we would never have had otherwise.

16:03

So when we started to look at it that way, there was really no reason why we couldn't participate in Museums for All.

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It also helps with our grant proposals. We've got some wonderful folks in our philanthropy departments who are excited at this prospect, because, all of a sudden, we're going to start having new numbers and new metrics to show how we're really expanding our outreach and how our donors are really getting more bang for their buck when they decided to donate to the Discovery Center.

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We're currently at the \$3 rate, which is the maximum allowable under the Museums for All program.

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However, we hope that by the time we reach our one-year anniversary with Museums for All, that we will have worked with our largest donors and major sponsors to actually sponsor this program so that we feel we have the flexibility of not needing that \$3 per ticket. As I'm sure a lot of you are feeling the crunch with admission numbers.

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We do hope for the day that we can make that free, because, honestly, we'd love for the entire museum to be free all day, every day. But unfortunately, we have lights to keep on and we've got salaries to pay.

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So, we're seeing this \$3 rate is kind of an intermediate step, as we ease our way into the program and really start to feel things out.

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I did pull a couple quick numbers for you guys, just so you could quickly see how it has already had an impact with us in just in the short amount of time we've been participating.

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So, basically, through last week, Museums for All admissions have accounted for 2% of all of our general admission rates, and that also includes special events and activities, things like that as well.

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But when I looked at our numbers just from a discount point of view, looking at Museums for All versus all of our other discounts that we offer at the Discovery Center, that number jumped up to 7% of all the discounted admissions.

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For those who aren't aware, Colorado Springs is a large military town. We have a lot of major bases here, including the United States Air Force Academy.

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So, nothing was going to outpace our military discounts at the Discovery Center, but I was very pleased to see how quickly Museums for All has been taken advantage of and has quickly become one of our more regular discounts that we're seeing.

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We're super pleased at the results already, and we have no reason not to expect it to continue to grow, as folks are looking for economical ways to get out of the house, and to have some safe and clean, cultural resources to take advantage of.

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So, thankfully, the response has been overwhelmingly positive, not only from our own guests. You can see that second quote right there.

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We're getting a lot of folks who, just like we predicted, they never would have been able to attend the Discovery Center had they not had the opportunity to come on a Museums for All rate.

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In fact, we're seeing that a lot of folks taking advantage of this rate have only heard about the museum, period, through our advertising that we're doing with local government and private partners, who work with folks on SNAP benefits.

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And in a matter of weeks, we went from having no museums and attractions participating in Museums for All in Colorado Springs to two.

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So, shortly after the Space Foundation Discovery Center joined, our neighbors down the road, the Garden of the Gods Visitor and Nature Center, which is a gorgeous city park that is world renowned. They loved the idea so much that they joined us in participating in Museums for All as well.



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Already, it's spreading and I hope that we'll be able to announce some more participating museums in Colorado Springs here shortly, based off of what we've been talking about. It's been that overwhelming of a response from everyone we've been talking with.

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Usually before I get halfway through my explanation of the Museums for All programs, I'm already seeing smiles and nods that yes, we definitely want to be part of that, how can we help, can we put some flyers out, all of that good stuff.

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So, like I said, our experience has been very short, but already, it's been an overwhelmingly positive for our museum, and frankly, we wish we had done this sooner, with all of the wonderful benefits that we're seeing, and all of the smiles that we're seeing on the folks who are using this rate coming in.

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We really regret not making the this move earlier, and like Brendan and Helen said earlier, they really do make it very easy to participate. It's a quick form to sign up.

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It's really easy to make some quick flyers to put out in the community. Add it into your existing collateral and rate signs.

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We were fortunate, in August, all of our collateral, a lot of our marketing was turning over for our new year, so it was really easy that when we were getting ready to print off new runs of all our collateral, to just slip that extra rate in there, and the Museums for All logo, and you're all set.

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They make it so quick and easy, and the community has been so nice and welcoming. There's a great online community of all the Museums for All participants, and they've been very warm and welcoming. So, if for nothing else, come for the family aspect of all your fellow museums really kind of coming together to pull towards that greater community aspect for everybody.

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That's about all I wanted to talk about from our perspective from the Space Foundation Discovery Center.

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I'm always open to answer questions to get into some more details with anybody who's interested.

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So, my e-mail is up there. Please feel free to reach out anytime. Always happy to field questions, and you can also check our website out – discover space dot org slash community access – if you want to see a little more details on that two-pronged approach that we're taking to accessibility, both Museums for All and discounted membership programs.

23:21

Again, thank you to IMLS for allowing me to join them today to talk to all of you wonderful museum folks out there about this program. I will turn it back over to Brendan.

23:34

Alright, thank you so much, Matthew. It's always great to hear points that I want to make coming out from someone else's mouth, so you're telling me that we're doing a good job.

23:46

So, like Matthew said, sometimes museums or their boards can be wary of joining Museums for All.

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They see that it calls for some very deep admission discounts in some cases and worry that it will be a hit to their budget. It's very understandable, especially this year.

24:07

We took a look to see if that would be the case.

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We've heard one anecdote from Matthew, but in 2018, we engaged Aurora Consulting to do an evaluation of Museums for All and the experiences that participating museums were having with the program.

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The complete results of the evaluation are available at the website that's linked here, but we've got some pertinent findings for you.

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Only one of the museums that responded to the evaluation reported a decline in their revenues since implementing the program.

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Most reported no change, but over a third of the respondents said they saw increases in ticket sales and attendance, and 25% saw increases in development, revenue, and membership and program sales.

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Museums for All is a great opportunity to add new development streams, either soliciting funding that directly pays for the program, which is certainly encouraged, or finding grants and sponsorships that will help.

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It's a great program that helps the entire community, and there are often foundations or local banks or other funders that want to be a part of it.

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This is encouraged, but perhaps most importantly, we can see that there's no overall deficit to being a part of Museums for All, and often times, it can be a revenue generator.

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One of the other things that we try to do with participants in Museums for All is connect them with other museums in their city or area that also participate in Museums for All.

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We've found that museums can do really great things with a collaborative effort to promote this program within their community.

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As I mentioned, we've started calling cities with three or more participants Hub Cities.

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In December of 2018, we invited representatives from seven of these cities -- San Diego, Chicago, Akron, Missoula, Chattanooga, Worcester, and Grand Rapids -- to attend a convening so we can determine how museums can work together to get the most out of Museums for All.

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We've found that several opportunities for cooperation exist, and not just between museums.

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They can use Museums for All as an entry point to establish or deepen connections with local food banks or transit authorities in ways that can overcome other barriers potential visitors face in making it to the museum.

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These actions build trust within the organizations of a community, but also with the people.

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It shows that the museums are serious about their commitment to having everyone visit.

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The invitation that's being extended is real and genuine, and the museums are willing to put in the work on their end to make it happen. The museums are spaces for everyone, truly.

27:07

If all of this sounds enticing to you, just a reminder that it's very easy and free to register for Museums for All over at [www.museumsforall.org](http://www.museumsforall.org), or if you have any other questions, Helen we'll tell you how to ask those.

27:30

OK, here's our contact information. I would say number one is Brendan for any questions about Museums for All and how to register and all that sort of stuff. So, always go to him first, unless, of course, you want to hear something specific from Matthew about their experience.

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So, I think next Ashley's going to tell us how to, once again, ask questions or read us questions that might have been submitted in our questions box.