

Lessons from SARS: Emerging from Crisis AAM Webinar Summary

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AAM will post video and transcript later.

Toronto dealt with two major crises in 2002-2003: public service strike and SARS outbreak. The Ontario Science Center is a large museum with a large budget and audience, and functions like a public agency.

Strike lasted 8 weeks. SARS public health emergency was 14 weeks. OSC closed for strike as workers are unionized and is a public agency, but nothing closed in Toronto for SARS. SARS saw two waves in late winter and spring.

Three parts: Re-opening Museum, Re-assuring Staff and Visitors, Financial Recovery

1. Re-opening Museum

- a. Will be long, phased process. Staff only then open to public. Not all staff should return at once.
- b. Must focus on staff relationships.
- c. Allow staff time to reacclimate to work environment and deal with PTSD/ grief/ anxiety. Take time to be creative, welcoming, and supportive to staff.

2. Re-assuring Staff and Visitors

- a. Make cleaning more frequent and more visible to visitors: cleaning stations throughout the museum and visitor areas.
- b. Remember what everyone (staff and visitors) has gone through.
- c. Re-think touchables/interactives. Visitors may not want to participate.
- d. Shift to timed tickets, limit # of people allowed in museum at one time.
- e. Audiences will return at different paces. In this case, OSC saw decline in numbers in summer, but big bump in fall. May have pent up demand for school groups depending on situation in fall.
- f. For OSC the members came back first, followed by student/classes, then came the tourists but they were much later.
- g. Local audiences will be the first and most likely customers in the early stages; people will not want to travel far so they will be looking for local options.
- h. Know that COVID-19 may come and go in successive waves and be prepared for that

- i. With the SARS outbreak it took the city of Toronto nearly 3 years to fully recover its tourism base.

3. Financial Recovery

- a. There were Toronto wide recovery efforts. Alliances made between all sectors- combined ticket sales for multiple entities. Promoted travel to Toronto/rebranded city.
- b. Work with and help community partners. Remember that you are part of a community and what the community has gone through. What can we do for our community? Free entry for healthcare providers?
- c. partner with local businesses that were hit hard by the shutdown, look for inventive ways to engage different parts of the community
- d. Took several years for city to recovery financially.