

Essential Questions Series Live Q&A Summary: Chippewa Valley Museum

Question 1

Jenn Edginton: The last time we spoke was really almost at the beginning of this this merger, right? We were just hearing some of the opportunities, some of the challenges that came with having 2 different meetings with 2 different identities under one umbrella. And so that was the Chippewa Valley Museum, as well as the Wisconsin Logging Museum, and when we spoke last there were some challenges of the Board Staff and budget right. Those were kind of big ones. It also sounds like you may have had a name change which is exciting since the last time we spoke, so we just wanted to kind of see how's it going. Where are you in the process? How have things shaken out? What's still on the horizon to figure out?

Carrie Ronnander, Chippewa Valley Museum: Well, that's a really big question, Jenn, so we will try to keep it. I did list all the things that have happened since February and noticed that it's actually much bigger than I expected you know, cause when you live in it, it's happening. Just keeps rolling along. But to back up as far as our name, Eau Claire Association of Museums, that's actually the legal name we had when we last spoke. That name isn't really loved by anybody, the Logging museum or Chippewa Valley Museum, or our constituents. And so it's just kind of this legal name, and sitting there, and so we're doing business as Chippewa Valley Museum as we try to make sure the Logging Museum side of things feels like it's part of the bigger picture, so there's that.

We've done like the big organizational things are pretty far in the process. Things like updated bylaws, incorporating both organizations. Approving a mission. The Board did that about a month ago. I think it was just happening last time we spoke. And values, those big picture items, strategic plans have merged. The budgets have been merged but not approved yet. So those big things, and then at the smaller level operationally, which feels bigger when you're living it. It is through our staffing of both sites for school tours that now we know when we're gonna open the Logging Museum for the season, because it's a seasonal museum. We know what our hours will be, we know, whatever admission rates will be mostly, to know who's gonna be staffing there. We're not quite sure, with all that. (Rachel's laughing at that, because we're opening the day after Memorial Day and it has been nice to really know what we're doing.)

Olaf Lind: We've been working to get the networks connected. So that's something. We recently changed to an It phone system. Wi-fi phone system. And so it's fairly important to be able to page across the whole organization that we're on the same network. So we're about 90 95% to the point where we can connect the 2 networks via fiber. Even though we're next door to each other, that's been an interesting adventure. But you know, thinking in terms of how to get your server and telephone structures working correctly.

Question 2

Sara Phalen: I'd love, and you know a couple of us come in the chat here that you made that list is so important to have that time to reflect and to think back when days goes so fast. And, as you said, like, we're approaching Memorial Day which is I think a little jarring for all of us to think about. I know in our

conversation the first time we had talked a little about public perception, and that the public was always a little confused about paying 2 fees. But you are right next to each other, and you know there seem to be a little bit of an overlap. I wonder if you are. Reflect on that list of what you all have accomplished. Have you, or have you yet communicated to the larger public? You know some of the transparency behind. Behind this merger process, which can be a rather large challenge.

Carrie Ronnander: What's interesting about our organizations that are location and Eau Claire, is that publicly the vast majority of people think of us as one location. And so that piece hasn't been difficult to, you know communicate. We spent decades saying, No, we're not the same, and that message was never really picked up by most people. So now, when we go out and people say, Oh, I just love going to the Logging Museum, and they're talking to me. Or they're talking to Olaf. We can say, that's great. We're opening in a month. So that's been fun.

There are other decisions like that, like pricing admission rates. So we had lots discussions about whether we are going to change admission rates, or what kind of ticketing process we're going to have. In the past we had a separate ticket fee for both locations, and you had the joint option. We are gonna continue to do that because we did get enough feedback that people say, well, I just wanna go one place. And so, we're gonna experiment the summer. But what we're doing is raising the individual tickets prices a little bit more than we have before, so that the joint ticket price we'll seem more attractive. And so we'll just kind of see how it goes this summer.

Olaf Lind: There's also a lot of research out there that we looked into on, you know, bundled pricing versus not bundled pricing. Looking at psychology of, you know, when people are going out to cultural events, are they looking at psychology of, you know, when people are going out to cultural events? Are they looking for a deal sort of price like lowest pricing? Are they looking for an experience sort of price? Nobody wants to feel like they got a budget experience. And so, you know, you find an awful lot of research that says, the psychology of bundling is people are really quite happy, even if they only go to part of the bundle. They're much happier, having been able to have gone to the whole thing, even though they paid a little more, and then we wanted to make sure that when we were setting pricing, if you're going to do that bundle that we were setting. I looked at symphonies. I looked at other types of cultural things to see how they were setting their pricing and what the best practices were.

Sara Phalen: Interesting. That's an interesting perspective. I'd like to follow up Rachel, if you don't mind sharing a little from your perspective, since I know that was kind of lost its name a little bit in the merger. How, you know, are you communicating to your stakeholders that were maybe just your stakeholders that maybe were tied to logging specifically in a different way than the global message that's being sent out, which I know is a concern whenever mergers are on the table.

Rachel Lange: It sort of in the beginning, before I transitioned into this new role back last year, we very intentionally made sure that we were communicating with those stakeholders that we were making this change and that Wisconsin Logging Museum while it is losing its name is not losing its identity. And so we also were very intentional with choosing board members from the logging museum to join the Chippewa Valley board when we combined to make sure that voice of the logging museum was still heard, and I stepped away from that leadership role. So from early on, we were like I said, very, very intentional, making sure that everyone understood what we were doing and that it was a good thing, and that the Logging museums board and leadership were all very behind all of these changes that we are making. So, when we received really positive feedback, which was really, really encouraging cause, I

know early on I was pretty nervous like, how is this? Gonna look to other people, and it turned out to be really, really good. So, I've heard almost nothing but good things.

Question 3

Jenn Edginton: That's great. Thank you for sharing that perspective as well, because even with small name changes right, it can confuse the public. It can kind of lead to "am I supporting the same organization?" So that's truly an important thing to navigate in this water of mergers and what does the new future look like? And speaking of that, the last time we talked was a little bit about you know what you were thinking for staffing over the summer right? Your seasonal staffing plans. So, can you talk about it? Are you trying out a new model? What does that look like? How are you staffing in new ways, or are you returning to kind of old favorites that might work? What is the plan for this summer?

Carrie Ronnander: Yes, and yes, so well, first some history. A logging museum had a full-time director, which was Rachel, and then a half-time admin assistant year-round, and then over the summer, they would hire seasonal museum assistants to staff the log museum on the weekends, so that people who are not working 7 days a week. (Rachel did not enjoy doing that for some reason.) So they did that. Then occasionally they'd have volunteers come in. But there was always somebody paid to be operational staff over there.

So now that we had school tours start coming in, I think March first is when our first school tours arrived and were going to both locations. So, we made the choice that we would have to have a museum staff person, professional staff, always on site whenever there's a school tour there, in addition to a paid museum assistant who was the actual guide for the tours. So, there is average 2 people over there now for the summer. What we're doing. We have connected with those who were up there last summer, and 2 of them are very much interested in working again this summer, but then taken on shifts that might have been there before. Rachel might have been present, or the assistant was present, so there was always a museum assistant or operations person onsite. So, we've got most of our hosts. We do have one individual who said, Yeah, I'm on Wednesday through Sunday. Sign me up. But then he's going to Europe for a month, so there's a bit of a gap there. So now we're looking at that. We have some interest in filling another position, so I'm pretty sure we can have one person over there, you know, whenever we're open and hopefully find some volunteers to also support that individual.

I'm a little nervous to be honest; we're very used to it. The Chippewa Valley Museum always having 2 people on site, used to pre-covid on weekends only have one paid staff, and then maybe 2 volunteers. Since Covid, it's always 2 paid staff and whatever volunteers. Right now we're secure with one with our backup staff at Chippewa Valley Museum checking in, you know, going back and forth to each location. They're about, I don't know, 200 feet distance between the two. On a nice day, it's not a bad walk, so that's a general plan. Still waiting to see how it actually goes.

Question 4

Sara Phalen: And are, as you talk about the volunteer recruitment. You know, how has that been? What have your volunteers said. Is anybody at the museum like, Hey, we're doing this new thing to create

efficiencies, and anybody wanting to chip in a little bit more? As you know, I think we're all struggling with that in the world, from the museum perspective, that maybe we shouldn't be relying on volunteers as much from a financial perspective of, or, maybe we actually need to rely a little bit further. But then also people's habits have changed, and structure, and, like you said, somebody's like, I'm all in but I'm going to be gone for a whole month. Have you seen any shift with that because of this merger? Or as you look at these new structures?

Carrie Ronnander: Not a lot. A lot of our recruitment up until the spring has been focused on getting folks in here to break the front desk. So we've had interest there, but the Logging Museum had seen a really steep decline in volunteers the last couple of years, so they really only had 2 volunteers at the time of the merger. Both of those individuals are interested in coming back. Both of them attended a joint volunteer dinner. But they were also very clear that they're volunteering at the Logging Museum side. That they're not interested at all about what happens over here. They might want to come, see what we're doing. But they want to be over at the Logging Museum side. So we're still saying that when people have an interest, it's very clear where they want to be.

The other interesting thing is that we are getting a lot of volunteers really interested in research. And that's always kind of been the case, right? But lately I will say library volunteers are through the roof. Now I can't do it anymore. I love the help, but I cannot supervise more volunteers. But again, that's a different type of person. They're not the ones who really want to work with the public, as you all know.

Olaf Lind: Can I ask a question? I mean I the from what I'm seeing in general, the sort of split in our volunteers is fairly generational. There was, there was a period, I think, where there was really strong identity, separation, and I think that you know, in younger generations there's so much change in volunteerism, you know, but I think their perception is also going to likely be that it is a single location. Do you feel like that's true, Carrie?

Carrie Ronnander: Right, they do like the big opportunities we have. We as an organization, have to figure out how to harness it. That's one of the biggest unknowns right now, because we haven't had the capacity. But all those other things we've been doing to really focus on, we were just trying to get the place open and staff specifically a bit of focus on how volunteers can help shape programming and shape the experience over at the like museum. There's a lot of room to grow up there, and we're just at the beginning of those discussions.

Question 5

Jenn Edginton: The last time we talked and it sounds like you've had so many wins and milestones and accomplishments. I've hoped you've stopped to pat yourself on the back to give yourself that like, hey? We're doing a really great job, which we often don't do during these processes. But we really need to right that should just be something we all bring into our practice. Fill our buckets, fill our staffs buckets to make sure that we're all doing and focusing. So? What have been some of the stronger lessons learned throughout this process? While you're building these lists while you're having these reflective moments. What is standing out is a lesson that you've learned.

Carrie Ronnander: I think I wanna reiterate what Rachel said the last time, to slow down. It's some of those organizational pieces and discussion. It was good that this happened at a slower time of the

season, you know, for the Logging Museum. They closed to the public in early October. And they didn't open until May. So you know, there's no way we could have done this over the summer last year, because just all the things going on. But yeah, I think that's the bigger one. A really big lesson. It just was reinforced over and over again, as you've been trying to get some of the projects done is make sure you have a third party who can help steer that ship, I mean, there's been a number of times where I just haven't had the capacity to think about the values discussion I know we need to have. So, having a other person who can send materials out and get people around the table and to coordinate the conversation. That is really the thing. It would not have happened if I had been left on my own, it took Rachel, all of board, to keep it going.

Olaf Lind: I think another thing to I mean it sort of goes without saying, but it's good to remind yourself there's gonna be a lot of input that is, you know, contrary to you know, to each other, right? And so you'll get important people. You'll get important volunteers that believe one thing strongly, you'll get really important board contingent that believes another thing about that strongly, and then you'll have the staff that believe yet again, another thing about that particular thing strongly, and it, you know, it's sometimes hard to listen to all of those things. So, take a deep breath. Listen to what people are saying, and then, you know, you make the best decision that you can for the organization to move things forward, and you just have to be ready. You have to be okay with doing that. And you know you try to put out as much information to the public to sort of say this is what's going on. We've had really good responses from people overall. And then you, you know, try to keep the information. Yeah. The more I think the more that people are aware of what's going on, sort of internally, the better things go. As long as you're keeping. It doesn't have to be super granular down to the last detail. But just so people feel included but that means that you have to listen to their opinions as well. So, keep people included, listen to their opinions, and that takes a whole lot of energy.

Rachel Lange: Yeah, and just like one last little thing for me, I think that the other big piece of advice like for anyone thinking of something to do, doing something like this is, be patient with yourself and be patient with your staff and be patient with everyone because this so many things are changing all of the time. And it's so easy to get frustrated with yourself that, like I need to have this done, I need to have that done. We need to be here, and sometimes that's just not what's gonna happen. And just being kind and patient with yourself and with everyone around you, I think, is a huge part.

Question 6

Sara Phalen: That's awesome. Rachel, and I think even those of us not going through could maybe benefit through from that mindset absolutely. Charity had dropped in a really interesting question. I think definitely Pre 2020, we heard a lot when people wanted to change something about like, well, this is how we've always done it. I wish I could say we don't still hear that anymore, but I think we do. Has there been anything that, as you all have looked at? You know what this new merger looks like with this new coming together? Looks like that you've said, Okay, like we have always done X. But maybe we should leave it behind, like, maybe that's not something to bring into this new entity. Having. I know you may be, aren't there yet? Cause you guys are all doing a lot. But so anything like that you decided to leave behind.

Carrie Ronnander: What am I gonna say?

Olaf Lind: Fourth of July.

Carrie Ronnander: Yeah, so we're not, you know. Leaving behind the Fourth of July. For 27 years, the Chippewa Valley Museum has celebrated, had a big family fun event on the fourth of July. Always the fourth. It was obviously heavy volunteer lots of all the museum staff are almost all museum staff were call and head of, you know, run the event, and it went from 11 to 4. But you had to be there by 8, and you were there until 6, and you're and it's Upper Midwest, Wisconsin, and July Fourth, so it could be raining at 65 or humid at 90 and a lot of it was outdoors so that effect, you know, heads, Covid issues because it could bring, I think our peak time was like 2,700 people were on our grounds, and I'm not that big of a museum. So, I felt like a really big crowd. So, the Fourth of July has worn people down, and volunteerism hasn't been present. You were able to do a modified version of it. The last couple of years, the logging museum had started about 10 years ago. It'd be 11 years ago a really significant event called the U.S. Open Chainsaw Cham Championship. 4-day event. Yeah, it's a 4-day event. It's 8-foot logs that have that people from around the world, their international carvers that came in and carved these magnificent pieces over the course of 4 days. It happens in the second week of August. So, you have Fourth of July event on one side and another one on the other side. 4 days, very labor-intensive, so I'm looking at this. After lots of discussions internally, we decided to retire the Fourth of July and focus on the U.S. Open Chain. So, because the benefit of the U.S. Open Chain, it makes about \$25,000 over the course of 4 days, compared to a very, very modest benefit from the Fourth of July. It's more of a community event, you know, giving back to the community.

In fact, my own spouse. My own husband has told me that I've made a mistake. So that's fun. But you know I so we've had these discussions at home. But then there, we've got other people who have been willing to give us feedback have said, Oh, that's pretty brave of you, but tells you what people support this July event. I mean, there's people that come in here every year and they bring their grandkids, and that's just what they do. So that's probably the biggest thing we've left behind.

And you know I don't know what the whole future is for the U.S. Open Chain. So, we from the CVM side don't know what this whole event is like. Rachel did experience it last year, and I don't know what she wants to have that level of intimacy again this year. We're still in the process of seeing what works. Yeah, this is like, as far as having both museums open at the same time. It's going to be a lot of review at the end of the summer. What really didn't work? What should we alter for the next season?

Olaf Lind: And some of some of the other driving things in that decision include that, you know, there was a high degree of collaboration with the local tourism entity with the chainsaw. So, we have a lot to do. But we're a host site. We can focus some more. We hope that we can focus more on some sort of mission based things and the local tourism entity is, you know, putting a lot of effort in resources into helping make that something that people you know, people are already coming from around the world to this event and so it sort of makes sense makes a lot of sense on paper and you know there's just some feelings, part of it that are that we have to manage on the end of, you know, people's attachment to the Fourth of July. You know public perception of things is also changing. So, you know you, you can look at. I mean I know, personally, I don't shop at places on the Fourth of July. I don't shop at places on Thanksgiving. I don't shop at places on Christmas. Yeah, I will. You know, I appreciate places that let their families, you know their employees, go and spend some time with their families. Every once in a while, you make your decisions, and then you figure out how to communicate it.

Jenn Edginton: I really appreciate that input, one of the things early on as a museum educator that, I was told was, basically you give up time with your family to start with other people's families, right? And that's that is the life of a museum worker, which is incredibly challenging because we want to provide these special moments and excitement for families that walk through our doors. But it's the same time we need to be able to kind of hope and also give our staff the opportunity to spend time with their own families, because that's important, too. So it is quite the balance and kind of on that.

Questions 7

Jenn Edginton: The next question is about making cases for letting things go and getting still some pushback, maybe from the outside. Be it an exhibit that has been up since 1984 or a program that's been going for multiple years. And you. It's hard to make a case. Why, that needs to happen, but it also is an opportunity to rethink models. Make things more sustainable, make our staffs more sustainable, right? So there's not as much turnover for other places where they can have the Fourth of July off. What is a way to get feedback on this experiment this year? Have you talked through any evaluation processes to look at what is the public thinking? What is Staff thinking about? Not having this big July Fourth.

Carrie Ronnander: Honestly, we haven't talked about how we are going to assess it. I also should mention that we had a volunteer dinner, probably in April, and about 3 weeks prior to that we did send a letter out to all of our members and volunteers communicating this decision about the Fourth of July, and the U.S Open Chain. Our stakeholders, once they're most invest in both locations, kind of knew what was going to come up so that they wouldn't read the paper on June thirtieth. I didn't talk about the volunteer dinner, and I expected more questions, but didn't get any. But it doesn't mean that there's not, of course, opinions out there. So, we do need to somehow do some more assessment after the U.S. Open Chain, really to see how that all goes, both those who work it and those who participate in it, because we'll have to have those kinds of that knowledge going forward into the next year.

Olaf Lind: And we also have sort of, I think, what we've communicated in a lot of ways. As a pause, because of the merger. And having to do the 4 day event in August. And we do have 2026 coming up, and it's not likely that we won't have a Fourth of July celebration in 2026. We're already having meetings at the Museum here with a group that's trying to connect all of as many local cultural entities as possible to sort of be able to do a united front. In Eau Claire, these are sort of the things that will be going on during 2026 or in the very beginning of that. So it's really sort of a squishy thing right now. And so we're working on How do we really understand it ourselves? And then how do we go? You know, Is it working with university classes, or we work with leadership groups from the Chamber? Who will, you know, put together surveys, and put those out, and in a greater way than perhaps we could do on our own. And so, you know, we're investigating what it is we can do to really try to understand how people really feel about it. And is it the type of thing where they'll let it go? Because they're invested in the organization. And they, you know, they enjoy having us here, and there's lots of other things to do. We have so many things to do here in the summer, so like this year, we will have a music event on the weekend before the fourth. So people will be able to come out and do something at the Museum around that time. So we'll see how all of that works out, and then figure out, you know, can we, you know, is the public okay with it? And if it isn't, are we okay with them not being ok with it? Or do we need to really work to fix it?

Sara Phalen: Those are great points, and I think you know, as you all were talking, and I think about some of the things we've cut. You know it's that balancing of the emotional reaction which maybe Carrie is what your husband's feeling, and hopefully that will go away a little bit because there are those traditions. I think, as in the museum field, I don't think we've always been great at communicating what it takes for a small staff to put on something. I do always think things like this are a great opportunity to be as transparent as possible. Which it sounds like you all are being really upfront. This is why, and we also are looking forward to 2026. There's something coming on the horizon to have a similar, you know, honoring of what we do at the Fourth of July. So I think that's a really interesting stance. And maybe we need to have another one of these sessions with you all in September to hear how it went.

Question 8

Sara Phalen: Maybe Rachel and Carrie both can both speak to this, about your boards. When they finally made the jump to do this. If there was one top selling point. But as we all look at new possible frameworks and structures and partnerships to better sustain all of us like, was there anything that really sued the decision of each individual board to make this jump?

Carrie Ronnander: I think, from that the CVM side, it was the opportunity to pick up some staff to do more things. Basically there was hope there would be cost savings, and I think there will be. And you know, from a business perspective like Oh, we can do this better. And then the other addition to that was the Logging Museum is a different kind of museum experience because it's immersive. And it's not something that our galleries can do. You don't get to go into a reproduction blacksmith shop, which is fairly ubiquitous in lots of museums, but not ours. Not in Eau Claire. So that was just a way to be able to expand the operations and to stop fighting. This constant battle of "it's still logging museum, and they're doing their own thing," I mean, can't control what they're doing. Well, now we can. You can kind of have a big picture approach to the whole museum campus.

Rachel Lange: And over on our side. There's, you know, plenty of reasons why this was a good idea, but the big thing that came out in January of 2022 was that we did this fantastic strategic planning session where everyone had these great ideas, and they were all really cool. But when we sat down afterwards with like small groups, and started parsing them out, it just turned into me having to suddenly be like 4 people. It was impossible. I mean I want to do these things. We had to have a bigger staff, and with the way that the logging museum is set up, with the way it's designed, there's no room for that sort of growth that we needed. And so that was part of the convincing. I was really lucky. I have really supportive board members who realized what I was saying when I was trying to explain, like, Hey, if we wanna do these things, we're gonna have to find a different way to do it. And then moving forward from there, just connecting with Chippewa Valley Museum on a deeper level, and making sure that we can move forward this way with something that we've been talking about for probably 10 years on and off at that point. So, it didn't come out of the blue. But I was very lucky to have a board that that agreed with me that this was a good idea.

Jenn Edginton: Way to advocate for yourself. That's great. That really is because of a lot of people in the museum field, myself included, would be like Yeah, let's figure out how to make this work. And I would take on that right. That's I think, a lot of people in the museum field are here because we love it. We're

ready to do the work. So I think that that's amazing to really understand capacities in such a way and figuring out a solution that is so outside of the box, it's really amazing.

Question 9

Jenn Edginton: is there anything that you'd like to share for anyone, even remotely thinking about mergers, or something of that sort? And I'd love to hear from each of you what are kind of your last parting thoughts here?

Carrie Ronnander: I think board leadership is really key, and as you just heard from Rachel that it made all the difference for the logging museum side, and I mean there have been times and days where sometimes the politics between some individuals come in from both sides of the board at a board meeting I just wish we hadn't done this, and like I get so tiring sometimes. Most of the time it's fine, but you know, trying to work those diplomatic relationships and be just a staff person and add a board member can be challenging. So really you don't want to go into a merger without the Board members kind of in agreement. I mean, if there's a hold out, I wouldn't try to push it forward, because it will be very unpleasant. For the most part it's been okay. And it's also been interesting. It is that the Board has been involved, and they've been doing something like 300 plus hours and helping out with committee work. So having some really good board members in your camp, have everybody be supportive, it will. It's necessary.

Rachel Lange: For me one of the big things was working closely with the leadership on the other side of the institution that you're merging with. So, Carrie and I worked very closely through the whole process, and met pretty much every week for almost a year, and just talked about what we are looking for, talked about some of the challenges we are facing, discussed things that we thought maybe could come up that could be difficult and just keeping that really open communication makes it much easier to move forward in that transition and kind of decide. You know? Where do I want to go? Where does she want to go? Or what, what is best for institutions. And how can we make that with us together, and just kind of getting on the same page before we started to move forward with that.

Olaf Lind: I would say, you know, once you're on in the process of emerging report about to get there, we we've had incredible committees. Our committees have really done a great amount of work. They've been really helpful, you know. So you know, bringing in people for things we couldn't get our head around. What do we need to do with buildings and grounds across 2 locations or more? What do we need to do with telephone systems and security systems? And networks, and how do we make all of this stuff operate seamlessly? Because you know our development manager may need to go and be at a desk at a different building. And can that person get to the files they need to, and the things they need to work? And they answer their phone. Can someone reach them on their direct line? All of those things are really important for the way that you know business feels, and also then, keeping in mind the customer experience right. So you have to tie in the Wi-fi systems all of those sorts of things. You know our building engineer has been absolutely incredible. Frank is amazing. You know I could go to him and say, Hey, we need to put some, you know, Cat 6 from here over to here, and it just happens. I go help him, but we just go do it. And so, you know, really spending time on saying, who are the people that we're working with and bringing them in and getting them involved. And you know, working with good

people makes things easier. So doing the work to work with good people upfront saves a lot of time and energy.