The 2017 American Alliance of Museums (AAM) conference has meshed well with the work many of us are committed to both personally and professionally. The weekend prior to arriving in St. Louis, I’d attended the Othering & Belonging conference hosted by the Haas Center for a Fair and Inclusive Society. And this came on the heels of attending Silicon Valley’s Culture Conference, and my Organizational Development Department’s year-long deep-dive into helping our museum become a more inclusive and welcoming organization. We all have to start somewhere, and I regularly found myself struggling to make sense of concepts in which my colleagues were already well-versed. The goal of participating in these programs was to make that okay. As the Haas Institute Director, John A. Powell has said, we have to be soft on people while being hard on structures.

The 2017 AAM conference theme, Gateways for Understanding: Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion, is the third in a sequence of conversations in the museum field that ask the question who are we, what do we stand for, and who are we trying to serve? It began in Atlanta 2015, when The Social Value of Museums keynote speaker Johnetta Betchs Cole challenged us to consider, “If we are to be relevant [and] stay artistically and financially viable, [we must rethink] what takes place in our museums, to whom our museums belong, and who the colleagues are who have the privilege of telling important stories through the power of science, history, culture and art.” Building on this in Washington, DC, AAM’s 2016 Power, Influence, and Responsibility theme invited the museum field to “explore responsibilities that come with living in a democratic society. Is it the role of museums to address social justice issues? How do museums provide an appropriate community forum for civic debate? How do museums educate policy makers about the many ways they address community needs through their programs and services? How do museums leverage their power through their key stakeholders—volunteers, trustees, visitors and donor—to demonstrate their social value?” They went on to note, “our nation’s capital is filled with examples of how society has become more just and compassionate, whether through laws or civic demonstrations. Yet the city also struggles with poverty, educational inequity and the quest for municipal independence.” Brooke Leonard, AAM Chief of Staff, shared her trepidations with CEO Laura Lott: “We know that we must embrace diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion. Many of us are grappling with how to take the next steps. And we’re all probably a little nervous about sounding uninformed or inadvertently saying something hurtful in the process – in spite of good intentions.” But discomfort is not a reason to shy away from these conversations.
And while the dialogue around diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion is certainly not a new one, we are focusing on it with a new intentionality at the AAM conferences, with the hopes of using our power and influence to help move the field forward in a meaningful way.

The 2016 Open Forum on Diversity and Inclusion allowed participants to share their questions and feedback on a number of topics, and AAM pledged to continue developing core competencies among is staff and volunteer leadership and provide a resource page for all members of the Alliance. This is the path that brought many of us to St. Louis. Keynote speakers Haben Girma, Bryan Stevenson, and Vincent Valdez set the tone by sharing their journeys toward engagement and advocacy. After participating in the American Association for Museum Volunteers (AAMV) board meeting and luncheon, I happened upon a conference room where an animated discussion addressed an exhibitor’s choice to bring a life-sized mannequin of a slave auction to their booth. The key issue was that it was presented out of context, without interpretation; what purpose did it serve? They wondered if it might be covered with a sheet for the remainder of the conference. The following day, the issue was alluded to by the CEO in a “mistakes were made” memo in the conference newsletter. Later, I visited the Exhibit Hall Community Center and Transformation Lounge where the presence of The Justice Fleet station allowed for the creative expression of confusion, hurt, and requests for support. These just represent the most high profile conversations occurring at a conference where diversity and inclusion were at the front and center of many sessions and conversations. This newsletter reflects on AAMV’s experiences at the conference to share that with our members. Whether you choose to take a deep dive with your team or simply click on some of the interesting resources included above, keep in mind that none of us have all the answers, but together, in conversation, we can certainly move toward a deeper understanding of the subtext and context within which we engage our volunteers.

Deirdre Araujo  
Secretary, AAMV  
Manager of Volunteer Engagement, Exploratorium, San Francisco, CA

“I had photographed the bright red Justice Fleet truck when I arrived in St. Louis, delighted when I saw it trundling down the street. These photos show my first glimpse of the vehicle, and then the profoundly moving art they later helped to create.”  
—Deirdre Araujo
Internships in Small Museums  
Monday, May 8 | 1:30 - 2:45 pm  
By Regina Lynch

At this year’s AAM Conference in St. Louis, Richard Harker, President of AAMV and Education and Outreach Manager at the Museum of History & Holocaust Education, joined together a panel of individuals who work with interns both in small museums and universities in order to fully explore the challenges, successes, and ethical questions surrounding internships in small museums. The panel included Lin Nelson-Mayson, Director of the Goldstein Museum of Design and Graduate Studies, and Director of the University’s Museum Studies Graduate minor; Richard Toon, Director of Museums and Museum Studies at Arizona State University; and myself Regina Lynch, Curator of Education Fellow at the Biggs Museum of American Art.

To begin the conversation, we took on the challenge of distinguishing between volunteer positions and internships, placing special focus on small museums where resources may be scarce. While panelists agreed that volunteer positions offer a great deal to students and can help build work experience, we concluded that ultimately internships should offer more in depth career development and mentorship and should be planned around educational programs. Given the level of guidance required for a successful internship, the panel emphasized that before any institution begins taking on interns, the staff must first fully assess the time commitment involved in supporting an intern.

On a related note, the panel was asked to reflect on the quality of work that can sometimes result from internships. Richard and I agreed that as museum educators, we supervise interns as part of our educational programs, not as a way to provide the museum with results we would expect from a full-time, seasoned employee. The panel also agreed that internships are meant to benefit interns first and foremost and every project, no matter the outcome, should serve as a learning opportunity.

The theme of AAM’s conference this year was “Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion,” which are all issues that must be taken into consideration when recruiting and managing interns. Though, as one panelist pointed out, the issue of diversity is also ever-present in museums as a field, the panel was able to suggest several options for providing internship opportunities that can serve the largest possible population of students. The panel agreed that providing interns with flexible schedules is one way to

Presenters:

• **Lin Nelson-Mayson**, Director of the Goldstein Museum of Design and Graduate Studies, and Director of the University’s Museum Studies Graduate minor  
• **Richard Toon**, Director of Museums and Museum Studies at Arizona State University  

Moderator:

• **Richard Harker**, Education and Outreach Manager, Museum of History and Holocaust Education
ensure that students who may be in school full-time and working part- or full-time can take part in unpaid internships.

To complement the question of diversity and inclusion, we addressed ways to offer interns some form of payment. It was suggested that museums come up with specific projects related to defined budgets and pay interns a stipend to work on those projects. The idea of issuing stipends for travel and food was also discussed, as well as partnering with local advocates of individual museums to offer interns housing for a semester. Lin Nelson-Mayson also mentioned tapping into similar institutional advocates and donors to create a paid-internship fund.

We concluded the conversation with a discussion of the best and worst practices. Once again, the general theme circled around the concept that the most successful interns and intern projects are those that are fully supported by staff time and resources. As a museum educator, conversations like these are crucial to the development of my education strategy and practice. Volunteers and interns both provide invaluable resources to museums and museums should deliver equally beneficial experiences to the people who help us run our small museums.

Risk Management and Volunteers - What Could Go Wrong?
Tuesday, May 9 | 8:45 - 10:00 am
By Lois Kuter

Risk management is a huge topic to cover in just 75 minutes but we discussed a number of basic areas, starting with Aaron Haag who discussed risks that can be averted through a careful process to bring volunteers on board. This includes being aware of the Fair Labor Standards Act and risks of discriminatory practices and doing background checks as required by your institution and State laws. Preventing risks requires the use of clear and complete position descriptions and communication with volunteers about the roles they will play and the skills and experience you seek. A consistent application and interviewing process will insure a fair selection process.

Robbin Davis spoke about risks associated with volunteer behavior which can include not only poor customer service in working with visitors, but also harassment, theft, libel or slander to the museum, or misrepresentation and poor behavior while representing or claiming to represent one’s institution at another museum. Besides a careful onboarding process to bring on the best candidates, the orientation and training you do is key to averting risks associated with poor behavior. Policies need to be clearly outlined in a handbook for both volunteers and those who supervise them. And clear and consistent feedback should be given to volunteers when issues first come up. Documenting problems in writing is essential. Robbin noted that developing a solid relationship with your volunteers is also important – they are part of your team!

Gwen Nelmes addressed the many risks associated with safety and the importance of preparing volunteers to know what to do in case of injuries or accidents, damage to museum property, lost children, weather emergencies, power outages, or even an active shooter. Having an emergency plan in place and making that information accessible to volunteers is critical. Obviously, training is key so that volunteers know what to do in an emergency situation. Simply being aware of potential risks and limiting them in the roles volunteer play is the first step. But, if volunteers engage in unsafe behaviors – misusing tools, entering a restricted area, climbing a chair to fix a light – giving them clear feedback and corrective information is important.

Risks can never be entirely eliminated, but prevention through thoughtful onboarding, training, and ongoing supervision and evaluation will minimize them.

For more details and additional resources on this topic please see the handouts from this session posted in the Resources Section of the AAMV Members Only section of our website.

Presenters:
•Aaron, Director of Volunteer Services, The Children’s Museum of Indianapolis
•Gwen Nelmes, Tour Program Manager, National Museum of Health and Medicine
•Robbin Davis, Director, Pioneer Woman Museum

Moderator:
•Lois Kuter, Manager of Volunteer Services, Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University
Best Practices in Volunteer Management

One of AAMV's goals in the coming months will be to re-visit our "Standards and Best Practices for Museum Volunteer Programs" that was first developed in 2011 and revised in 2012. You can access the document through the resources section of our website.

We invite all members of the AAMV community to share their thoughts, comments, and suggestions with us as we begin the process of re-visiting and updating this document.

If you have any comments or thoughts please share them with Lois Kuter at lvk26@drexel.edu

What's New at AAMV?

Now Online | Podcast Episode 6 - Richard Harker, the new President of AAMV, talks about his experiences managing volunteers and what he sees as the strengths of AAMV and the organizations future goals and plans.

If you want to hear from a particular person or about a specific topic on the podcast let us know by e-mail at: rharker@kennesaw.edu

Would You Like to Share Your Experience With Other AAMV Members?

If you would like to contribute a reflection to future editions of the newsletter e-mail our Newsletter editors:

Emily Knight (eknight@mocaga.org)
Deirdre Araujo (daraujo@exploratorium.edu)

Twitter

AAMV is now on Twitter @Museumvols. Follow us, retweet us, and send links that you want to share with our professional community.