Small but Mighty!
Keeping Your Small-scale Museum Vibrant
Session Goals

• Gain practical strategies for staffing strategies, program development, and exhibit planning for small museums with small budgets.

• Develop a tool kit of ideas for keeping things fresh on a budget for the small-scale museum.

• Provide networking opportunities with colleagues from similar, small institutions for support and new ideas.
Presenters and Topics

Amarinda Keys - Children’s Discovery Museum, Waterville, Maine (Staffing)

Erin Dowdall - Wonder Works Children’s Museum, Oak Park, Illinois (Exhibits)

Rohani de Pont & Sugeidy Windster - Children’s Museum Curacao (Programs)
Background

Founded 1989 as a traveling museum.

Opened physical space in 1992.

Located in two locations in Augusta Maine before moving 30min North to Waterville.

Served about 10,000 visitors/year.
A Big Move
Future 3,000 sqft hall
Trust

Collaboration

Flexibility
Trust

Open communication

Regular check-ins

Autonomy
Flexibility

I support the Children’s Discovery Museum because I believe in the power of IMAGINATION!
Collaboration

Partner with other organizations!

- Story walk with the library
- Summer camp support with Viles Arboretum
- Mainefest with Maine-state Museum
- Sunflower Gardens with Waterville Creates
STEM-A-Palooza with the MSL (Maine State Library)
Table Talk: 3 Minutes

Share your staffing structure at your museum. What works well? Are there ideas from the presentation that resonated and might work in your institution?
WONDER WORKS’ MISSION IS TO SPARK CURiosity & CREATIVITY IN ALL YOUNG CHILDREN THROUGH POSITIVE, PLAY-BASED LEARNING EXPERIENCES.
OAK PARK, IL 60302
CELEBRATING OUR 20TH ANNIVERSARY
IN OUR LOCATION THIS MAY!

WE ARE SMALL BUT MIGHTY!

- HUNDREDS OF VISITORS DAILY
- 400+ ZIP CODES A YEAR
- WITHIN 10 MILES OF:
  - 15+
    - TOWNS & VILLAGES
    - CHICAGO NEIGHBORHOODS
  - 6 UNIVERSITIES
  - CTA & PACE BUS LINES
  - METRA TRAINS
  - 2 CTA "L" TRAINS
OUR SPACE

6 INDOOR
Built It Farm to Market Great Outdoors Wall of Wonder Lights, Camera, Action! North Ave Art Room

2 OUTDOOR
Becky Boyce Nature Play Space Children's Garden

OTHER
Small Lunch Room Front Storage Room Entrance + Front Desk Back Office Small Storage Closest Offsite Storage
Wonder Works Children's Museum

Floor Plan

6,400 SQUARE FEET
LARGEST INDOOR EXHIBIT - 900 SQ. FT
LARGEST OUTDOOR EXHIBIT - 1200 SQ. FT.

The Children's Garden
The Great Outdoors
Farm to Market
Office space
A.C. unit
Build It
heating unit
North Avenue Art Works
Activity room
Bathrooms
Front desk
Storage
Stage
Lobby

*This exhibit is still under construction

The Lights, Camera, Action exhibit is our theater room.
*Seating in this area does not leave the room

DESIGN MUSEUM IN THE ROUND

All exhibits (with the exception of the Art Room) are open concept that flow into one another.

PERMANENT STRUCTURES

Stage
Farm to Market
- Buildings -
- Crank -
Tree House
TRADITIONAL EXHIBITS NOT FEASIBLE FOR US!

WHAT WORKS FOR YOUR MUSEUM?

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX
Analysis SWOT to Plan Exhibit Spaces

- **Strengths**
- **Weaknesses**
- **Opportunities**
- **Needs**

- **Budget**
Analysis SWOT to Plan Exhibit Spaces

**STRENGTHS**
- Loose Parts
- Specially Trained Staff
- Intimate Space
- Museum Design

**WEAKNESSES**
- SPACE!
  - No Designated Classrooms
  - No Large Exhibit Space
- Storage
- Structure & Location

**NEEDS & OPPORTUNITIES**
- Need: Multipurpose Space
- New Exhibits
- Opportunity: Storage
- Opportunity: Programming
- Get Creative!

**BUDGET**
- Understand
- Track
- Target
- Get Creative!
BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD
WE USE MODELS AND APPROACHES THAT FIT OUR INSTITUTION

- Reframed our understanding of our space & how we use it
- Changed our budget model
- Reimagined what we put in the space
- Continually look for non-traditional exhibit opportunities
HOW DO WE USE OUR SPACE?

- Exhibits must be multifunctional
  - All items must be able to move
  - Art Room & Lunch Room serve dual purposes
- Items are swapped out on rotation
- Storage becomes and active space
WHAT DO WE PUT INTO OUR SPACE?

- Loose Parts Theory of Simon Nicholson
  "The idea that loose parts, materials which can be moved around, designed and redesigned, and tinkered with; create infinitely more opportunities for creative engagement than static materials and environments." *

- Invest in Museum Quality Toys
- Programming
  - Take Over Events
  - Themed Weeks
  - Art Room Series

* https://www.lecs.act.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/326276/Loose_Parts_at_LECS.pdf
• Changed Budget Model from Yearly Forecast to Monthly Cashflow

• Deep Dive into Budget Categories, Line Items and Sources

• Recategorized Certain Line Items

• Planned purchases & upgrades
OTHER OPPORTUNITIES

- Becky Boyce Nature Play Space
- Donor Wall, 1/2 walls separating lobby and hallway
- Glass Windows
- Street & Parking Lot
Table Talk: 3 Minutes

What resources/companies/products have you used to keep your exhibits fresh on a budget and to scale?

Any fun new things you have bought that are not typical items visitors play with at home?
OUR 5 PILARS

Target group: 1 - 10 y/o
ORGANIZING OUR PROGRAMMING
WHAT - WHEN - BUDGET - EXAMPLES
REGULAR PROGRAMMING
Recurring activities within the museum

- Recurring programming
- Repeated days
- Costs within yearly budget, determined by targeted visitor amount.
- Examples: STEM Saturday – Sunday Funday – Art of the Week project
SPECIAL PROGRAMMING
Related to special events / occasions

- Event linked to special days
- Holidays / special occasions
- Costs no more than break-even. No Profit Motive!
  More important to be relevant.
- Examples: Mother’s Day - International Child Rights Day - King’s Day
COMMERCIAL PROGRAMMING

Programming activities with a profit motive

- Event with a profit motive
- Any day after opening hours
- Costs are percentage of the expected profit. Determined by the minimum capacity for this event.
- Examples: Kids Night Out (Drop Off) – Halloween – Sinterklaas
EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMING
Educational, school-related activities

- School related events, within the museum or outreach
- Week days
- Costs are kept low, mostly done with donations.
- Examples: School visits - Teacher Workshops - Museum on the Go
ORGANIZING OUR PROGRAMMING

WHAT - WHEN - BUDGET - EXAMPLES

REGULAR PROGRAMMING
Recurring activities within our museum

SPECIAL PROGRAMMING
Related to special events / occasions

COMMERCIAL PROGRAMMING
Programming activities with a profit motive

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING
Educational, school-related activities
BUDGETARY TIPS & TRICKS

- Material costs
- Minimum number of entries
- Collaborate
- Development of programs: Re-use!

Sugeidy Windster
Programming & Education Manager
LET'S GET INTERACTIVE

You'll receive a bag with loose parts...
Let's think outside of the box!

But first a handy tool
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**CAN WE DO IT IN TERMS OF...**

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**BE CAUTIOUS OF BLANK SPOTS! DID WE THINK OF THE FOLLOWING...**

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Table Talk: 5 Minutes

You just received a bag with loose parts of less than $1,-.

What can you think of as a programming activity with the received materials? To what items of the checklist does your activity comply?
Q & A for the Panelists
Peer Networking

What idea from this workshop can you try when you get back to your museum?

What idea may be a long-term goal?

Get (at least) two business cards/contacts from your networking time.