

Bridging the Gap: Building Confidence with Disability for Front Staff

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BACKGROUND

Museums have been facing problems of accessibility for decades, and while steps have been taken to remedy these barriers, such as the AAM releasing an official guidebook to accessibility, not enough has been done. Visitor studies performed all over the world have shown one thing in common: the interactions between visitors and museum staff can negatively impact their experiences. This is a problem that deserves to be solved for many reasons, the most important being that if museums aren't accessible to everyone, then they are for no one. It is acknowledged that in order to fully implement accessibility, museums need to go further than their rules and regulations order them to. By addressing this problem, we will be finally making progress towards an issue that has plagued the museum world since its creation.

PURPOSE & IMPACT

The purpose of this project is to create a comprehensive training program for front staff and volunteers at the Museum of Pop Culture that teaches them how to positively interact with disabled visitors and educates them on ableism in museums.

The desired impact of this project was to improve the relationship between museums and disabled people. Regarding museum staff, the goal of this project was that they took the knowledge and skills from this training program utilized them during interactions with disabled guests, as well as addressing accessibility openly in their institutions. For disabled visitors, the goal was that they developed a new faith and trust in museums as we begin to right the wrongs in our past.

DELIVERABLE

The deliverable for this project was one, 2 hour, virtual training session for museum front staff. This included the session itself, a PowerPoint presentation, and additional resources for future facilitators. This training session taught staff about museum accessibility, what disabled visitors need from museum staff, and built skills for future interactions with disabled visitors.

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PROCESS TIMELINE

Phase 1 (Summer 2021-Fall 2021)

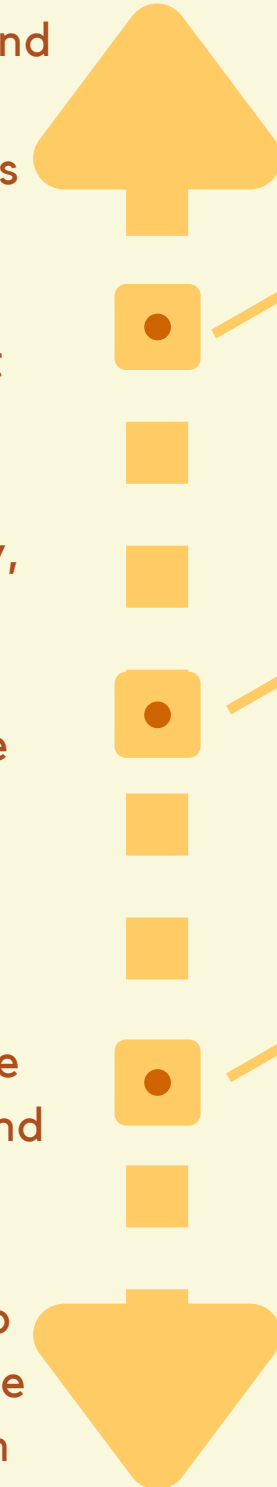
- Gather Thesis Committee
- Secure a Host Site
- Assess the extent of training provided to MoPop volunteers and front staff
- Determine workshop goals with MoPop

Phase 2 (Fall 2021-Winter 2021)

- Meet intermittently with committee members
- Research common practices museum accessibility guides
- Research disability justice
- Design workshop curriculum
- Interview disabled adults in Seattle

Phase 3 (Spring 2022)

- Revise workshop for a virtual format
- Design evaluation survey
- Host workshop at the Museum of Pop Culture in Seattle, Washington
- Gather feedback from participants
- Communicate findings



OUTCOMES

The results of the training workshop were overwhelmingly positive! The workshop was held virtually on May 17th, 2022 with a total of 5 attendees. Two-thirds of respondents reported that they had never received any training on disability/accessibility, and all respondents reported an increase or no change regarding their comfort assisting disabled visitors. Additionally, a majority of respondents reported that they felt very prepared to navigate situations and utilize the material taught during their next volunteer shift. All respondents reported that the material was taught in a way that made it easy to understand, with some complimenting the structure and comprehensive nature of the workshop.

CHALLENGES

There were some significant challenges I faced during the development of my workshop. Initially, I had to make a choice of where to gather my information from: organizations run by able-bodied boards or disabled self-advocates? It is very important to recognize the difference in materials that these two sides will create, and which one truly has the best interest of the community at heart.

Additionally, I had to convert this program to a virtual session rather than in-person. Attendance in the virtual program was lower than expected, and this could be due to the virtual format or for a variety of other reasons. This lower turnout also affected the reported outcomes of the program.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This project has shown that it is necessary for museums to value DEAI practices in their institutions by ensuring that employees and volunteers are educated on these matters. I would recommend that museums offer incentives and multiple opportunities for staff and volunteers to attend trainings such as these, and to offer opportunities to practice their skills.

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