

Creating a Community of Museum Colleagues

Felice Cleveland and Natalie Svacina

Co-Chairs, Houston Museum Education Roundtable (HMER)

What is a Museum Education Roundtable?

- A group of museum educators that provide support, professional development, and challenges to each other by sharing programs, experiences, research, and resources.
- Many communities around the country have developed Museum Education Roundtables, including New York, Chicago, and Dallas/Fort Worth.

How is HMER organized?

- HMER's guiding principle is collaboration and not competition.
- HMER is also flexible in terms of programs, topics, and formats. HMER's goal is to be responsive and thoughtful to member needs and interests.
- HMER celebrates each others successes, but also is willing to share failures and learn from each others mistakes.
- In organizing programs - we are committed to offering programs on a variety of different days, times, and locations to address the needs of our wide range of members.
- We regularly check-in with members through in-person conversations, post-it note surveys, pre and post evaluations, and e-mail, as we are committed to providing programs that is a good fit and of interest to our members.
- While HMER programs are based on object-based learning, we welcome anyone who is interested.
- HMER has a Steering Committee which consists of two co-chairs and four Steering Committee members. They plan at least six programs each year with each Steering Committee member spearheading the planning for one program, whether at their own institutions or partnering with outside institutions and community members.

How do you choose members for your Steering Committee?

- We chose colleagues who represented a diverse type and size of museums.
- We looked for people who are passionate about professional development.
- We looked for mid-career professionals.
- We chose people who are knowledgeable and interested about current trends in the field of museum education.
- We chose people who were willing to plan and communicate with the rest of the Steering Committee.

What are some examples of formats for your programs?

- Networking | informal, tours of museums, happy hour, lunch
- Speed Dating | a variety of organizations present an idea or program and members spend time with each organization before gathering together to discuss and debrief
- Institutional Deep-Dive | a visit to one organization that gives an overview of a specific program and shares all the details of how it was planned and executed
- Hands-on Activity | Sharing an idea for making and how it is used at a specific organization

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- Roundtable Discussion | An open and transparent discussion on a broad and relevant topic
- Community Connections | Using the network of HMER members to connect to the community and broaden our scope of work through shared learning

How do you stay connected to your members?

- At the beginning of each academic year at our Kick-off event we ask members to share what topics they would like to discuss and places they would like to visit. The Steering Committee uses this information to plan future programs.
- We often send out pre-surveys and questions in advance of a program to gather information about how to focus a discussion.
- We keep in touch via email and Facebook.

What are your recommendations if I want to start a MER?

- Plan events at different times of day and in different parts of town in order to be accessible to a variety of members.
- Be selective about who you choose for your Steering Committee--be transparent about the commitment and choose based on the person, not the institution.
- Be flexible and responsive to your members--be open to members hosting and proposing topics.
- Do not be afraid to make adjustments to your model if something is not working.
- Use your meetings as an opportunity to celebrate museums and support each other's work, programs, and institutions. Too often as museum educators we don't make time to visit museums in our own cities.

What other cities have a MER? (this is just a sampling!)

- CHOE (Chicago Hands-On Educators) | <https://choechicago.wixsite.com/choe>
- dfwMER (Dallas/Fort Worth Museum Educators Roundtable) | <https://dfwmer.wordpress.com/author/dfwmer/>
- MESOC (Museum Educators of Southern California) | <https://www.mesconline.org/>
- Museum Education Roundtable | <http://www.museumedu.org/>
- NYC MER (NYC Museum Educators Roundtable) | <http://www.nycmer.org/>
- PhillyMER (Philadelphia Museum Education Roundtable) | <https://phillymer.com/>
- PittMER (Pittsburgh Museum Educators Roundtable) | <https://pittmer.wordpress.com/>

How can I get in touch with you?

- Felice Cleveland | Director of Education and Public Programs at Contemporary Arts Museum Houston | fcleveland@camh.org
- Natalie Svacina | Director of Education at Houston Center for Contemporary Craft | nsvacina@craftthouston.org