The Gen-X Factor: Career Navigation Strategies for the (So-Called) “Lost Generation”
NEMA 2015, Portland, ME
Wednesday, November 4, 1:45 – 3:15 p.m.

Facilitator Biographies

**Marilyn Weiss Cruickshank** has over two decades of non-profit experience helping museums, historic sites, parks, and cultural organizations fulfill their educational mission.

In her consulting business, Creative Simplicity Organizing & Productivity, which she founded in 2009, Marilyn has worked with hundreds of clients to get them better organized and be more efficient with their space, time, and resources. She works one-on-one with staff, facilitates large and small projects, and presents professional development workshops, all to help individuals and professionals deal with the overwhelm they face on a daily basis.

Prior to her work with Creative Simplicity, Marilyn successfully ran her own museum education consulting business for 14 years. Focusing her time on regional and national museum projects, she worked on evaluation, curriculum development, teacher workshops, the creation of education advisory committees, educational content for the Internet, and the facilitation of community partnerships.

Marilyn is a former Director of Education of the USS Constitution Museum, a former New England Museum Association Board Member, and a past recipient of AAM’s Nancy Hanks Memorial Award for Professional Excellence in the museum field. She has an M.B.A. with a concentration in non-profit management and a B.A. in Art History.

**Elisabeth Nevins** has enjoyed over 14 years helping people connect with content, collections, and stories in ways that engage, enlighten, and inspire. Her firm, Seed Education Consulting, advises on and creates educational experiences and interpretive content for museums and historic sites. She has consulted on a variety of projects for the Leventhal Map Center at Boston Public Library, Housatonic Heritage, Beverly Historical Society, Newport Art Museum, Steamship Historical Society, and Historic Newton among numerous others.

Nevins has worked in the education departments of the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, Lower East Side Tenement Museum, Connecticut Historical Society, and Historic New England. As director of education and interpretation for Boston’s Old North Church historic site, she managed the development of the *Tories, Timid, or True Blue?* website—winner of an American Association of State and Local History Leadership in History Award of Merit—and created Old North’s first on-site education program for elementary-aged students.

She holds a B.A. in history from Yale University and an M.S.Ed. in museum education and early adolescent education from Bank Street Graduate School of Education. Her volunteer commitments include serving as co-chair of the New England Museum Association education professional affinity group, on the board of the Museum Education Roundtable as co-chair of the editorial team, and as a
peer-reviewer and photo editor for the Journal of Museum Education. She lectures regularly on issues in the field for Boston-area museum studies and public history programs.

**Purvi Patwari**’s career in the human resources field has spanned 19 years. As a newcomer to the non-profit sector her recent positions have been within contemporary art museums. Purvi’s HR foundation stems from start-up environments within the technology, bio-tech and education areas. These environments have provided her the opportunity to work with a diverse employee base and within companies with a variety of work cultures.

Entering the museum field in 2008, Purvi joined the Institute of Contemporary Art in their newly constructed building in Boston’s waterfront district. The enriching experience of hiring staff, managing employee programs, and developing policies for museum professionals from interns to Director led to another start up role at deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum in Lincoln, MA. Purvi joined deCordova in 2013 as their first Human Resources employee in the museum’s then 63 year history. She continues to focus on hiring talented staff, employee relations, change management and professional development for employees.

Purvi holds a M.A. in Museum Studies with a focus on Education from Tufts University and a B.A. in Political Science and Anthropology from the University of Vermont.

---

**Marieke Van Damme**

I grew up in a family that stopped to read historical plaques. When I had to pick a major in college, I didn’t know what to do so, after a process of elimination, I ended up with History or English. I shrugged and went with history. After college, I didn’t know what to do with myself so I joined Americorps VISTA and moved to Alaska. I worked in adult literacy and met a lot of amazing people. I was bored at my VISTA job so they let me volunteer with the National Park Service. When my VISTA year was up, I was hired by the Park for a collections move. My boss sat me down with those two giant blue binders and said, “Read these.” My museum education had begun.

I moved to Boston in 2002 because a friend was coming here and I was tired of Alaska. I asked a bunch of area NPS sites if they needed help. Salem Maritime was the only place who said yes. I worked there for two and a half years until they ran out of money for me. Although I didn’t have health insurance, air conditioning in my third floor office, or a short commute (I lived in Allston at the time), they let me do my museum studies homework while I worked the visitor services desk.

I spent a short while in visitor services behind the welcome desk at the New England Historic Genealogical Society where they also let me research the collection and present on what I found. I wanted to be back in museums so I moved north of Boston to be in charge of the George Peabody House, a city-run museum. Those were two very interesting and educational years. I was very young and in charge of a museum, pretty much left to my own devices. But I missed the city, and I couldn’t pass up the opportunity to work at the Bostonian Society/Old State House, where I had done my museum studies internship.

I was with the Society for some six years, working in collections then moving up to Old State House Site Director, Acting Director of the Public History Department, and finally Deputy Director. I loved working...
with everyone in the museum, from board members to visitor services assistants, and raising money for a cause I believed in. I also got another master’s degree, this one from Boston University in Arts Administration with the fundraising certificate. Any remaining spare time I had was spent volunteering for my neighborhood community center, the Jamaica Plain Tuesday Club at the Loring Greenough House (built in 1760).

In the fall of 2013, I joined my husband on a fellowship at the University of Michigan. I quit my job and we put all of our things into storage. In Ann Arbor, we formed a strong cohort with other journalists and spouses, spent three weeks travelling around South America, and took a long time to think about what really mattered to us. Being away from museums gave me the headspace to work on Joyful Museums, my project studying workplace culture in museums.

We moved back to Boston the summer of 2014. I did fundraising for the Trustees of Reservations for less than a year before I began working for the Cambridge Historical Society. It feels oddly comforting to go to work every day at a job that draws from all my skills and I love being able to set the culture. I’m probably done going to school, but, hey, you never know. There’s still so much I want to learn!

Tara Young

If you start counting from the job I had at the Worcester Art Museum when I was 15 (studio assistant for kids’ art classes), I have been in the museum field for more than 25 years. After graduating from Harvard and the University of Pittsburgh with a BA and MA in art history, respectively, I got my first full-time museum job in 1998. I worked at the Seattle Art Museum as assistant curator of modern and contemporary art for five years, then, after determining that I was too much of an introvert for the contemporary art world, became associate curator of education at the Tacoma Art Museum. In 2005 my husband and I moved back to the East coast, and I became the Director of Education at the Higgins Armory Museum in my hometown of Worcester. After about 2 years there, I struck out on my own as a museum education consultant. My primary client was the brand-new Museum of Russian Icons; I also worked on projects with Fruitlands Museum, the Getty, and a number of publishing companies. In 2010, I was appointed Deputy Director at the Museum of Russian Icons; we are now about to celebrate our 10th anniversary, and we recently learned that we received AAM accreditation. When I accepted the job, my twin daughters were about a year and a half old; they’re now in second grade, and we’re all grateful that the Museum has offered me a very flexible work schedule. I also teach “Museum Education for K-12 Audiences” in the Museum Studies program at Tufts.

The idea for this session started percolating a couple of years ago, as I began to notice the strong camaraderie among my (mostly) millennial students (“YEPs” or “EMPs”). Despite great colleagues and the invaluable work of NEMA, I began to feel increasingly isolated as a Gen-X museum professional, having watched dozens of talented Gen-Xer colleagues leave the field over the years. We are the next generation of museum leaders, and on the whole we seem to be less adept at advocating for ourselves than Millennials, and less sure about our career path than the Boomers were. My personal goal for this session, and conversations that follow, is that NEMA GenXers will become more adept at forging alliances, taking risks, considering non-linear career paths, and articulating the value that we provide to museums.