Queers in the Museum

Laurabéeth Lima
Alexander Lussenhop
Margaret Middleton
J.R. Uretsky
Agenda

1. Icebreaker (15 mins)
2. Slides (25 mins)
3. Discussion (25 mins)
Agreements

● This is primarily for queer museum professionals
● This is not 101

● “I” Statements
● WAIT (Why Am I Talking?)
● Assume best intentions
Supporting Staff

Lauraberth Lima
Institutional Support Of Staff

Museum of the City of New York

- The Museum of the City of New York was founded in 1923
- The mission is to celebrate, document, and interpret the city’s past, present, and future
- Museum’s collection contains approximately 750,000 objects
- Staff of 100 full time
Institutional Support Of Staff

Inclusive Content

_EActivist New York_ (Current), presents the passions and conflicts that underlie the city's history of agitation. Using artifacts, photographs, audio and visual presentations, as well as interactive components that seek to tell the story of activism in the five boroughs.

_Gay Gotham: Art and Underground Culture in New York_ (October 7, 2016 - March 26, 2017), brings to life the queer creative networks that sprang up in the city across the 20th century—a series of artistic subcultures whose radical ideas had lasting effects on the mainstream.
Institutional Support Of Staff

Inclusive Content

Germ City: Microbes and the Metropolis explores how disease have changed New Yorkers physically, socially, and culturally, and the surprising interplay between people and pathogens in an urban context. The exhibition explores care from medical, scientific and cultural-political (activist) perspectives and features sources and objects addressing topics from the HIV/AIDS crisis to the Young Lords seizing of an x-ray truck for TB screenings in East Harlem.

Jordan Eagles, Blood Mirror, 2015–present

Artist Jordan Eagles created his sculpture Blood Mirror in response to a federal ban on blood donations from gay and bisexual men unless they have been celibate for a full year. Many argue that the rule, which dates in its current form to 2015, should apply equally to all donors, based not on sexual orientation but on risk-taking behavior. The sculpture is made with 59 blood donations from gay, bisexual, and transgender men.
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Development

Keith Haring Foundation Grant
Education Programming for Young Audiences

- *I am Jazz Read Aloud*, October 2016
- *Alvin Ailey Winter Show*, December 2016
- *Keith Haring Inspired Body Painting*, January 2017
- *Andy Warhol inspired Printmaking*, February 2017
- *1st Annual LGBTQ Teen Summit*, February 2017
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Preparation to Reach Audiences

- **Professional Development at All Staff Meetings**
- **Educator Trainings on LGBTQ+ History & Intersectionality**
- **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Access Committee**
- **Interdepartmental Dialogue & Brainstorming**
- **Consistent Engagement with the Queer Community**

*Making the Queer Scene*
Public Program at MCNY
A group of writers, performers, and activists discuss the historical and ongoing importance of queer nightlife in New York.
Institutional Support Of Staff

Lived Environment

- Queer Staff In Leadership Positions
- Accessible Building
- Commitment to Doing the Work
Institutional Support Of Staff

Lived Environment

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New York City Department of Cultural Affairs
Workforce Demographics Survey
Designed and Administered by SMU DataArts
Organization: Museum of the City of New York
Mentorship

J.R. Uretsky
Coming Out
Alexander Lussenhop
Coming out as trans at work

- Why come out?
  - Living openly will reduce stress/anxiety
- Is it worth it for you?
  - Bias and harassment will increase stress/anxiety
- How do I manage it?
  - Sharing my process with you
What I did

Talk to HR
(...not that useful, but still good to do)

Talk to my boss
(much better)

Make a plan

Inform:
1. My department (12 people)
2. Frequent collaborators in the museum (~200 people)
3. Frequent collaborators outside the museum (~15 people)

(cont.)
Dear department,

I need you all to know something important about me, which is that I am transgender. For me, this means that even though I was assigned female at birth, I am more comfortable living, identifying, and being acknowledged as male. I use male pronouns (he/him/his), and I've chosen the name [New Name] for myself.

I am relieved to finally be telling you, and I'm confident that all of you will support me. I know it can be hard to learn a new name and pronouns for someone, so I want you to know that as long as you are trying, it won't hurt my feelings if you make mistakes at first. If you do accidentally use my old name, all you need to do is correct yourself and move on. With some practice, though, I'm sure you'll all get it.

I'd be lying if I said I wasn't nervous about all of this, but I feel lucky to have all of you as my coworkers during this process.

Best,
[New Name]

*Ruben Hopwood from Fenway Health
Mason Dunn from MTPC is also good
What I did

Frequent collaborators inside and outside museum (200+ people)
1. Boss emailed internal managers the morning of our meeting
2. Right after our meeting, sent a mass email to all
3. For some external people, specific project leaders sent the email
4. Showed up at work around noon where everyone was magically using the right name and pronouns

Dear colleagues,

I'm writing to share some information about one of our [department name] employees, [Old Name]. [Old Name] is transgender, which means that although she was assigned female at birth, she is more comfortable living, identifying, and being acknowledged as male. Moving forward, he will be using male pronouns (he/him/his) and going by the name [New Name].

I know all of us appreciate what a supportive, collegial place the Museum is to work, and I'm sure this will be no different. The change in pronouns and name may be hard at first, but with some time and practice will start to come easily for all of us.

Please feel free to ask me or HR, if you have any questions. And thank you in advance for your support of one of our valued [department name] team members!

Best,
[Boss]
Why did this work?

1. Minimized the work I had to do!

1. Most communication came from HR or managers

1. Closest coworkers had the chance to ask questions that may have felt awkward or uncomfortable without worrying about harming me

1. Everyone found out at once--no one caught off guard

1. Assumed best intentions on everyone’s part and treated them with respect
Casemaking

Margaret Middleton
Making the case

- Link to mission
- Point to precedence
- Identify partners
- Support with research
Link to mission

- Mission/vision/values
- Strategic plan
Point to precedence

● Internal:
  “We have a history of doing this kind of work.”

● External:
  “If they did it, so can we.”
Identify partners

- Internal accomplices
- Outside organizations
Support with research

- LGBTQ Alliance
- MASS Action
- Journal of Museum Education
- Academia.edu
- Twitter
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