How Can Improvisation and Experimentation Foster
Better Communication in our Museums?

About the Panelists

Pilar Garro (pgarro@thetrustees.org) is the Castle Hill Engagement Site Manager at the Trustees. Pilar currently oversees the tour program, public programs, and visitor experience at Castle Hill leading the engagement team to create and execute innovative, unique and memorable experiences for public enjoyment. Prior to the Trustees, Pilar was the site manager of Historic New England's Beauport, the Sleeper-McCann House in Gloucester, MA where she significantly increased visitation, program offerings, and expanded the interpretation to include LGBTQ history. Pilar holds a Bachelor of Arts from Wheaton College, a Master of Arts in Museum Studies from the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City, and attended the Attingham Summer School in July, 2010. She is active in tourism efforts on the North Shore, holding board positions with the North of Boston Convention and Visitors Bureau, the North Shore Community College Hospitality and Tourism Advisory Committee and is also involved within the museum community as a board member of the New England Museum Association.

Dale Jones (dalejones@makinghistoryconnections.com) founded Making History Connections to help museums and historic sites offer engaging programs and experiences that effectively connect with visitors. Jones is a recognized leader in the history, museum theatre, and living history fields as a creator of powerful interpretive experiences and as an audience evaluator. Four main areas highlight his work: Historical Performances, Staff Training, Tour Development, and Evaluation. Dale creates compelling and provocative experiences using museum theatre, living history, and guided tours to engage and entertain, and to portray conflicts and complex issues. He has produced or scripted over thirty museum theatre productions for sites including the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Maryland Historical Society, Sotterley Plantation, Conner Prairie Museum, Old Sturbridge Village, Mystic Seaport Museum, Historic Spanish Point, Historical Society of Washington, D.C., the Baltimore City Life Museums, Gettysburg Seminary Museum and the Pleasant Company and its American Girl Dolls. Throughout his career Dale has designed unique visitor experiences and trained staff to deliver engaging interpretive presentations. His style reflects a combination of best practices, visitor research, and theater techniques, which he has crystallized into a process called THE CAST Model of Tour Design and Staff Training. His strategies enhance both guided tours and living history interpretation. Dale has conducted visitor studies – front-end, formative, summative and longitudinal – with scores of museums and organizations across the country. He understands the importance of developing affordable evaluation plans that provide valuable information to staff and at the same time build staff capabilities.

Jen Oleniczak (jen@theengagingeducator.com) is the Founder and Artistic Director of The Engaging Educator. After realizing the education field lacked the ‘how you say it’ training, she decided to combine her loves of improv and teaching – cue The Engaging Educator. Jen has given two TEDx Talks on the power of improv at TEDxCortland in 2013, and on embracing failure in the workplace at TEDxMelville in 2015. Jen is an improviser turned educator and vocal coach, with training in Theatre and Voice from Marquette University, Art History at the City College of New York and her current pursuit of an MA/BCBA in Autism Education at St. Joseph’s University. She’s worked with many NYC institutions as a museum educator and teaching artist, most recently with Guggenheim Museum, Queens Museum, and Community-Word Project. As an actor and improviser, Jen has toured and trained nationally, and can still (sometimes) be found onstage. She can always be found tweeting about life behind #improv and #museumed at @TheEngagingEd.
Julia B. Rosenblatt (juliabrosenblatt@gmail.com) is a playwright, actor and Artistic Director of HartBeat Ensemble. Founded in 2001 by Steven Raider-Ginsburg, Julia B. Rosenblatt and Gregory R. Tate (1952-2012), HartBeat Ensemble creates provocative theater that connects our community beyond the traditional barriers of class, race, geography and gender. While with HartBeat, she has co-written and performed in Graves, News to Me, Ebeneez-a Hartford Holiday Carol, The Pueblo, and Rich Clown, Poor Clown, Beggar Clown, Thief. Her play, Flipside received critical praise and was brought back for a second run in Hartford followed by a regional tour including the NY International Fringe Festival (2012 Best New Ensemble Work). She is currently writing Gross Domestic Product, a full-length music-theater work that explores motherhood in the “post-feminist” era and its relationship to our country’s economy. In addition to her playwriting and performance work, Julia is a recognized theater educator and has developed a unique approach to civic learning while teaching theater skills at a high level for young adults. This has evolved into HartBeat’s acclaimed Youth Play Institute (YPI). Other core programs Julia developed for HartBeat are Startin’ Drama (empathy training) and Arts-Based Curriculum Integration (ABCi). Through her work with HartBeat Ensemble as well as an individual artist, she has been the recipient of numerous grants and awards for her writing and education work, including the 2009 New Boston Fund Individual Artist Award and the The Connecticut Office of the Arts (COA) 2013 Artist Fellowships Awards.

Danielle Steinmann (dsteinmann@thetrustees.org) has spent her career making connections between people, organizations, and subject matter through the creation of innovative, dynamic, and collaborative interpretive programs at non-profit organizations. As Director of Visitor Interpretation at the Trustees, she leads the effort to enliven, animate, and rejuvenate the Trustees many historic and cultural properties. These properties include the National Historic Landmarks such as Naumkeag and Old Manse, and the iconic Castle Hill at Crane Estate. Prior to joining the Trustees, Steinmann was the Associate Director of Interpretation and Public Programs at Hancock Shaker Village. There she created visitor experiences designed to make the Shaker way of life relevant to contemporary audiences. Before Hancock Shaker Village, Steinmann was the Assistant Curator of Education at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, where she initiated and developed new public programs and outreach strategies aimed at diverse audiences and oversaw the training and management of the Clark’s docents and paid guides. She has taught Art History and Museum Studies courses as an adjunct faculty member at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts and Bennington College. Steinmann holds a BA cum laude in Art History and French Studies from Wellesley College and an MA in the History of Art and Architecture from the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, and has had extensive training in Visual Thinking Strategies and graduate coursework in education.

Emily Waniewski (EWaniewski@stowecenter.org) is a Program Coordinator at the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center and is responsible for leading school programs and interpretation. She joined the Stowe Center team in 2014 as an Interpreter. Emily is a State of Connecticut certified teacher. Prior to working at the Stowe Center, she taught theater and arts integration for eight years in the Hartford and New York City public school system. She holds a Master of Arts in Educational Theater from New York University and a Bachelor of Arts in Theater Performance from Northeastern University.