

# SPOTLIGHT ON MUSEUM ED

*This column explores innovative informal education projects being undertaken within our local museum community. As active spaces for dialogue, connection and critical thinking, our institutions seek to highlight programming that makes them more inclusive, and that encourage more meaningful engagement with visitors.*



## Groundbreakers: Creating Pro-D Opportunities for Informal Educators

Within informal learning institutions, having educators with a wide range of training, skills and experiences is a tremendous resource as we seek to create welcoming and responsive learning environments. While this diversity is important in making our sites more inclusive and relevant to the communities we serve, the need for informal educators to have such expansive knowledge and skills poses challenges in how institutions can support their professional practice. Although there are opportunities for informal educators to continue to develop their skills and knowledge through Massive Open Online courses (MOOCs) and graduate degrees, like [UBC's Masters of Museum Education program](#), there are few options for formal professional development that focus specifically on teaching and learning in informal settings. This makes organizations like the [Lower Mainland Museum Educators \(LMME\)](#) not only important, but necessary in strengthening

professional practice within the field of informal education.

As a collective of museum educators with a passion for professional development through frequent peer-to-peer exchanges, LMME provides leadership in professional development for the diverse group of informal educators across the Lower Mainland. As an organization, LMME fosters professionalism and commitment to excellence in museum-based learning through its programming and active communication network. Regular meetings provide opportunities for guest speakers to highlight contemporary issues within the field of informal education, and for educators to discuss challenges and celebrate innovations at their sites. Topics at these meetings range from trends in interpretation and perfecting presentations for conferences, to integrating technology into programs and developing community partnerships.

Another area where LMME has been able to identify gaps and address needs for professional development within the community is through the creation of a museum education conference. The idea for an inexpensive, local one-day conference about teaching in informal learning institutions was sparked by conversations about the value of attending and presenting at conferences, and how it is often out of reach for educators, especially those at the beginning of their career. A group of emerging museum professionals, mentored by the LMME Executive, gained valuable first-hand experience organizing a conference and volunteered countless hours to pull the event together in less than six months.

The first of its kind in BC, the inaugural LMME conference was held on January 9, 2017 at Science World. Speakers presented on a variety of topics connected to the theme of building community relationships

ranging from working with Indigenous communities and creating opportunities for accessibility, to engaging all ages. In addition to providing opportunities for educators to share best practices and present for the first time, over 150 attendees and speakers benefited from networking with peers and learning the stories from leaders and mentors within the field.

Building upon the success of the inaugural conference, the second annual LMME conference was hosted in partnership by the H.R. MacMillan Space Centre, Museum of Vancouver and Vancouver Maritime Museum on January 29, 2018. Bringing together over 175 staff and volunteers from museums, art galleries, science centres and other informal education organizations, presentations unpacked and broke down the big ideas of today: inclusivity, creative thinking, social responsibility and innovation. Through workshops, break-out sessions and engaging seminars, educators explored how to use nature as a teaching resource and strengthen volunteer engagement in small museums, as well as ways to connect teachers and museums through local history kits and community field experience .

With planning for the 2019 Conference well underway, and meetings continuing on a regular basis, LMME continues to provide meaningful and accessible professional development opportunities for volunteers, students and staff across

the Lower Mainland. The value of the programs and service the LMME provides continues to benefit institutions by inspiring educators to implement innovative new ideas, continue to build relationships and collaborate within the community and most importantly, to prioritize the development of skills and knowledge that will further their professional practice.

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**Above:** Committee members Pilar Wong Navabi and Sandra Borger sign in speakers at the 2017 Conference. Photo credit: LMME/Melanie Devoy



**Above:** Naomi Higo from Ocean Wise presents at the 2018 Conference. Photo credit: LMME/Michelle Huang