

SEPTEMBER 28 – OCTOBER 1



VEX25 CHICAGO
★ ★ PEOPLE FIRST ★ ★



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★ WELCOME TO CHICAGO ★

Welcome to Chicago for the 14th annual Visitor Experience Conference!

We are thrilled to be welcoming you here for four days of what we do best: museum visits, fun events, and an affordable conference focused on the work that you do. Over the last thirteen conferences, we have had no shortage of unique experiences, from behind-the-scenes tours to encounters with Texas longhorns. This year promises to bring new opportunities to grow, learn, and celebrate together.

Chicago is a city full of energy, resilience, and creativity—qualities that mirror the strength of our field. While the world around us can feel uncertain, our work stands as a testament to what happens when people come together to spark curiosity, joy, and connection. This week is about celebrating that power, and about putting people first—in our organizations, in our communities, and in our practices.

We couldn't be more excited to spend these next few days with you, discovering fresh ideas and finding inspiration in one another. Thank you for being part of the 2025 Visitor Experience Conference in the Windy City. Together, we'll continue shaping the future of our field with optimism, purpose, and heart.

CHICAGO TRANSIT AUTHORITY



You can enjoy unlimited rides on all CTA buses and trains with CTA's 1-Day, 3-day, 7-day or 30-day unlimited-ride passes. Your pass activates the first time you use it and is good for the full length of time from that moment.

Passes are loaded onto your Ventra Card or personal, contactless bankcard at Ventra Vending Machines or over the counter at hundreds of Ventra retailers around town.

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[Click here for more maps & info](#)





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Real-time occupancy monitoring and intuitive tools that staff can manage without a system admin.



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More



Ticketing Together

ventrata.com

Cultural institutions around the world are navigating a changing landscape of visitor expectations, funding models, and digital transformation. Whether facing evolving public funding priorities or the push to diversify revenue streams, institutions must operate with agility and purpose to ensure sustainability.

Ventrata empowers museums, zoos, aquariums, gardens, cultural and historic sites with a modern, unified platform—streamlining operations, delighting guests to drive increased sales for both tickets and memberships.

Memberships & Donor Flows

Tiers, benefits, auto-renewals, and round-up giving.

Enterprise Reliability

Google Cloud uptime, transparent status page, and 24/7 staff support.

Groups & Education

Quotes, POs, invoicing, and arrival lists.

24/7 Live Support

Always-available real-time help for your staff.

Hardware & Offline Mode

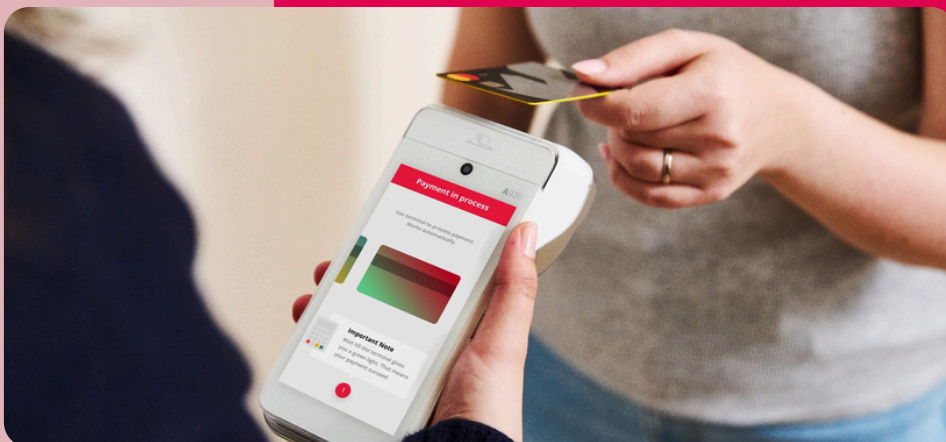
POS, kiosks, scanners; seamless even without internet.

Trusted Globally

Powering Tower Bridge, English Heritage, the National Gallery London, the Empire State Building and, coming soon, Chicago Architecture Center.

Transparent Pricing

No implementation fees and a fair pay-as-you-go model.



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More**



VISITOR EXPERIENCE GROUP

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★ ★ JOIN OUR TEAM ★ ★

Ready to get involved with the Visitor Experience Group (VEX)? The path to joining our team of volunteers usually begins by attending our annual conference or other events. From there, you might be asked to become a VEX Ambassador, serving as a regional representative on our Audience Engagement team. We then recruit for our Communications, Events & Operations, and Programming teams from this pool of Ambassadors and frequent attendees. We select board members from all these groups to ensure our leadership stays relevant and diverse.



JOIN TODAY

Hire the VEXperts

The Visitor Experience Group offers consulting services focused on Visitor Experience and Staff Engagement. Our board members bring decades of experience to the table and we're ready to share our expertise with you. Visit vexgroup.org to learn more and start the conversation about bringing the Visitor Experience Group to your institution!



**VISITOR
EXPERIENCE
GROUP**

★ ★ SUNDAY 9/28 ★ ★

For those of you arriving Sunday to hit the ground running on Monday, we invite you to join us for the Welcome to Chicago Dine-Arounds! Here's how the Dine-Arounds work:

- Meet in the lobby of the Hilton Garden Inn South Loop at 5:30 PM
- The VEX team will be splitting up to go to different restaurants for dinner, all within strolling distance of the hotel
- Choose your destination – you can base your decision on the menu, the members of the VEX team going, the distance from the hotel, etc.
- Head over to the restaurant
- Enjoy dinner and conversation with members of the VEX team and your fellow attendees
- Each person will cover their own dinner and drinks

We will also have the VEX25 Registration Table open in the lobby of the Hilton Garden Inn South Loop from 4:30–5:30 PM.

SIGN UP →



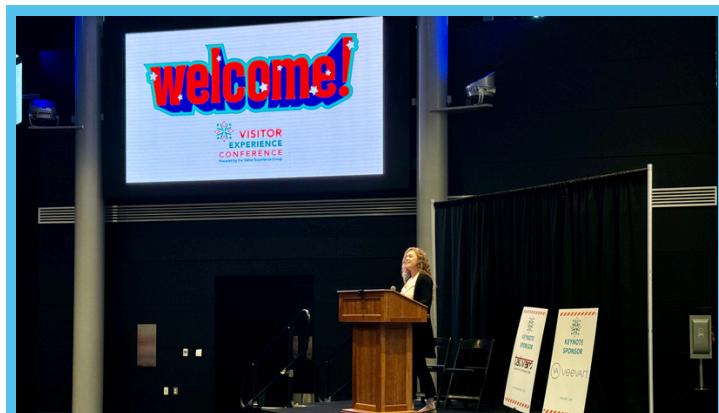
★ ★ MONDAY 9/29 ★ ★

WELCOME

9:00 AM – James Simpson Theater

KEYNOTE

9:15 AM – James Simpson Theater



SESSION BLOCK 1

10:30 AM – 11:30 AM

SESSION BLOCK 2

11:45 AM – 12:45 PM



LUNCH

12:45 PM – 2:15 PM

Options on page 25



SESSION BLOCK 3

2:15 PM – 3:15 PM

SESSION BLOCK 4

3:30 PM – 4:30 PM

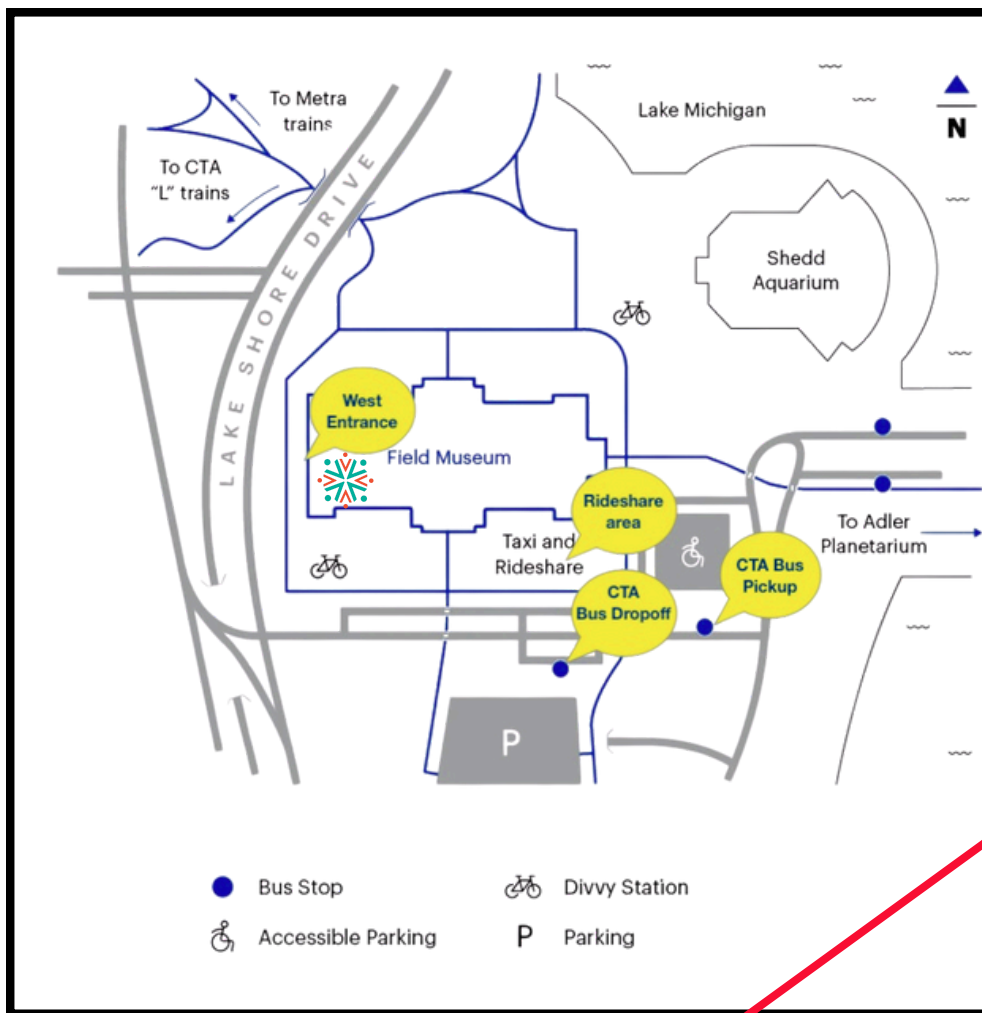
SHINDIG AT THE SHEDD

6:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Shedd Aquarium



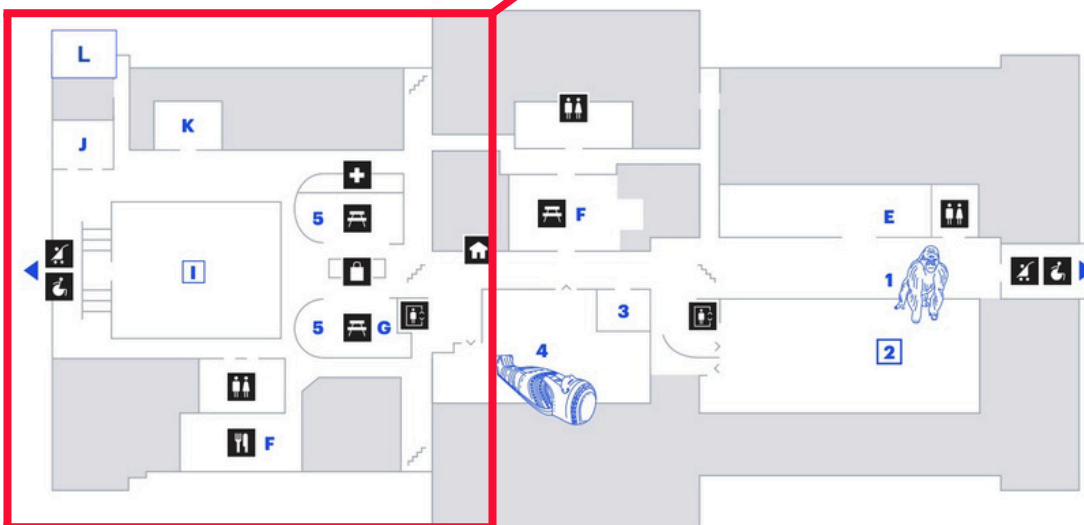
FIELD MUSEUM



DIRECTIONS

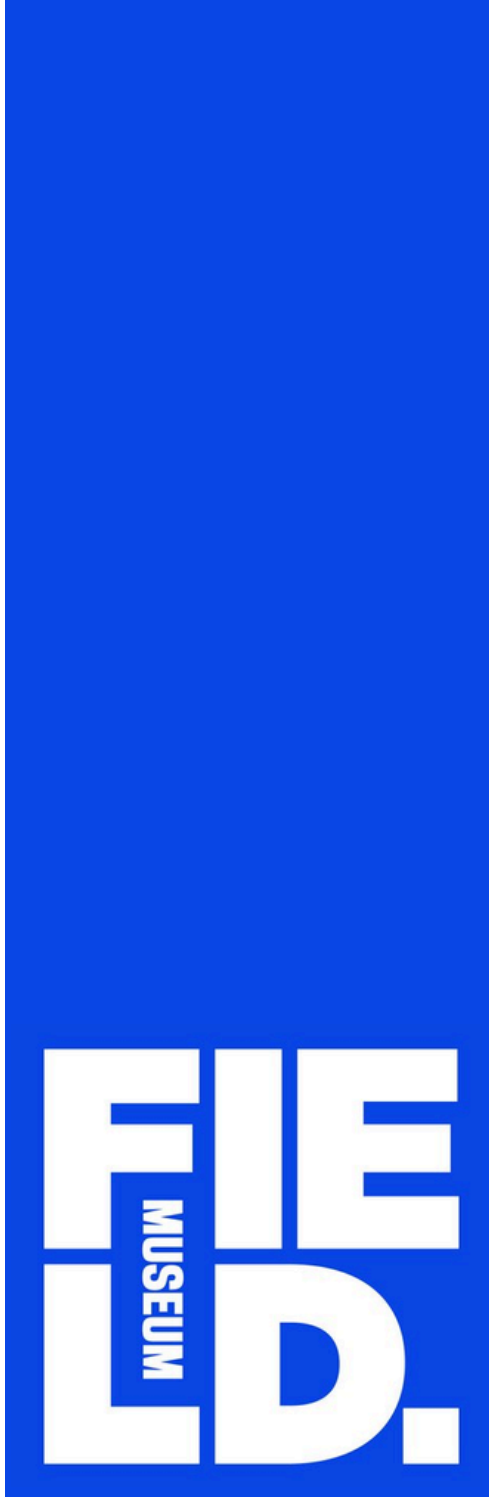
- Enter at the West Entrance
- Check-in is located just inside the West Entrance
- Sessions will be taking place on the west end of the ground floor

G Ground Level



- 1 Bushman the Gorilla
- 2 Underground Adventure
- 3 Insects
- 4 Inside Ancient Egypt (continued)
- 5 Sea Mammals
- E PlayLab | Crown Family PlayLab
- F Picnic Area | Siragusa Center
- G Picnic Area | Sea Mammals
- H Explorer Cafe
- I 3D Movies | James Simpson Theatre
- J Lecture Hall | A. Montgomery Ward Hall
- K N. W. Harris Learning Collection
- L Lecture Hall II

☐ Ticketed



[VIEW FULL MAP HERE](#)

- ★ LECTURE HALL 2
- ★ REGISTRATION/ENTRANCE
- ★ JAMES SIMPSON THEATER
- ★ CLASSROOM A
- ★ CLASSROOM B
- ★ CLASSROOM C



KEYNOTE



JOSH LIEBMAN

Founder

Liebman Leisure Group

Josh Liebman specializes in guest experience within attractions, tourism, and hospitality, including service standards, complaint resolution, and driving guest loyalty. Josh is a serial entrepreneur, consultant, and speaker.

Josh's educational background includes a Bachelor's Degree in Theme Parks and Attractions Management, along with a Master's Degree in Hospitality & Tourism, both from the University of Central Florida's Rosen College of Hospitality Management.

Josh has worked for some of the top attraction operators in the world, including, but not limited to Walt Disney World, Universal Orlando, and Cedar Fair. Josh has been integral to the openings of multiple attractions in various leadership capacities. Additionally, Josh has consulted for many of the world's leading hospitality brands, including Ritz Carlton, Four Seasons, Waldorf Astoria, and many more.

Josh is Co-Host of the AttractionPros Podcast, which brings the audience into the room with the top leaders, executives, and influencers in the attractions industry. AttractionPros has published hundreds of interviews offering insights from theme and amusement parks, water parks, family entertainment centers, museums, zoos and aquariums, and nearly every corner of the global attractions industry.

In December 2023, Josh published his first book, The Hospitality Mentality: Create Raving Fans through Your Guest Experience.



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ac-me /'akmē/ noun

from Greek akmé "peak, highest point"
the point or pinnacle at which something is
best, of highest quality, or most successful.

Providing 10+ years of consultative support,
innovative functionality, and flexible APIs for
museums, zoos, aquariums, gardens, and
other arts, science and cultural institutions.

We understand your goals and have walked
in your shoes. Please consider ACME if you:

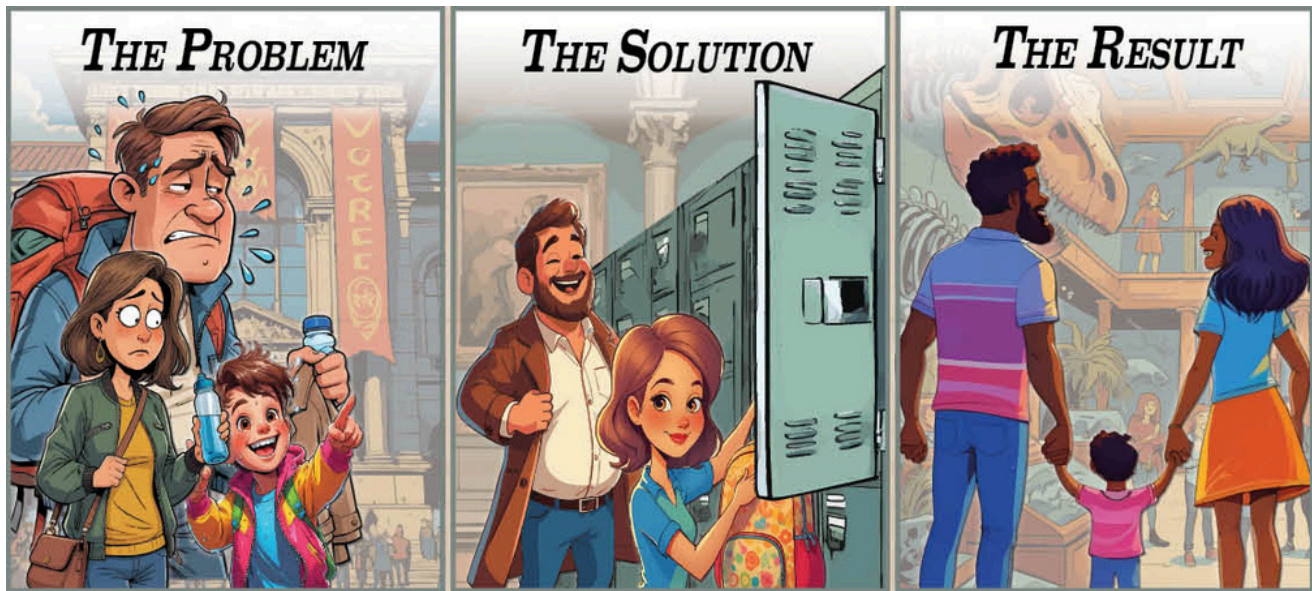
- Have an outdated or expensive ticketing system that is difficult to manage.
- Use an "all-in-one" system that is not flexible enough for your evolving needs.
- Have growing chargeback losses and disjointed payment acceptance support.
- Want to be more efficient in your visitor services operations and more effective growing memberships, events, group sales, programs, and donations.

The team at ACME will help you implement
a better solution that offers insights and
actions to support your mission.

- Best-in-class open solution architecture, integrated to leading CRM, business intelligence, and distribution partners.
- Responsive and knowledgeable support team that listens, understands, and finds solutions to your operational, technical and financial challenges.
- Embedded online and POS payment acceptance with advanced risk and fraud mitigation capabilities.

ACME's **Unified Visitation Platform** makes it easy for
your team to support the entire guest journey, creating
a seamless experience for your visitors and members.





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SESSION BLOCK 1

10:30 – 11:30 AM

STAYING ACCESSIBLE WITH PAY WHAT YOU WISH ADMISSION

- CLASSROOM A

INCREASING PARTNER SALES – UNLOCKING THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIPS

- CLASSROOM B

PEOPLE, PLAY, & PIPE CLEANERS: PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF FUN

- CLASSROOM C

BOATLOADS OF OPTIONS! USING TICKETING PACKAGES TO STREAMLINE THE ADMISSIONS EXPERIENCE

- LECTURE HALL 2

STAYING ACCESSIBLE WITH PAY WHAT YOU WISH ADMISSION

While we might not picture admission as a barrier, it has become an economic barrier for many. Pay What You Wish Admission ensures everyone can experience our exhibits, regardless of financial barriers. This initiative allows visitors to contribute any amount that fits their budget, fostering inclusivity and community engagement.

We will explore how a Pay What You Wish admission model enhances accessibility, fosters community engagement, and sustains cultural institutions. The Buffalo History Museum switched in 2022 to this model and has seen an increase in attendance, revenue, and overall community engagement. Discover best practices for implementation, marketing strategies, and measuring impact. Join us to discuss how this approach can make history, art, and education available to all.

KELSEY REED

Guest Service & Retail Manager
Buffalo History Museum



TAKEAWAYS

- How to make admission prices accessible
- Best practices for asking for admission based on a recommended price
- How admission accessibility can impact other departments

ACCESSIBILITY, TICKETING, REVENUE



INCREASING PARTNER SALES – UNLOCKING THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIPS

With limitations on staffing, budget, and marketing spend, it is imperative that museums increase visitation and maximize revenue per visitor for long-term sustainability. Of course, everyone knows this and have been trying for years to find scalable, low-effort ways to grow. What if you could tap into an entirely new sales force, without hiring a single additional team member?

This session explores organizations using the European model of distributed inventory: using third-party resellers, local tourism providers, hotel concierges, and online travel agencies while maintaining full control over pricing, inventory, and data. We'll share real-world case studies demonstrating how museums have grown ticket sales through curated partner networks, improved their visibility in the tourism ecosystem, and unlocked new revenue streams.

DAVID ELLIS

Account Executive
Ventrata



MADELINE SNEED

Director of Tourism & Sales
Chicago Architecture Center



SALES, MARKETING, REVENUE



PEOPLE, PLAY AND PIPE CLEANERS: PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF FUN

Fun isn't just for visitors—it's essential for staff too! Learn how playful activities like morning stretches, spontaneous prototyping, and more can energize staff and enhance the guest experience. We'll share non-painful icebreakers and rapport-building techniques that foster positive connections in order to create a welcoming environment for staff and visitors.

TAKEAWAYS

- Practical strategies for supporting front-line staff from team-building to training sessions
- Ways to enhance visitor interactions through observation and reflection
- Real-world tactics and everyday rituals for cultivating a positive work culture

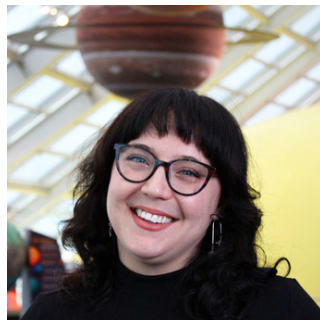
STEVE HOBE

Senior Coordinator of Education
Adler Planetarium



KELSEY CHIGAS

Senior Coordinator of Education
Adler Planetarium



PAUL KAUFMANN

Senior Coordinator of Education
Adler Planetarium



PLAY, PROGRAMS, STAFF ENGAGEMENT



BOATLOADS OF OPTIONS!

USING TICKETING PACKAGES TO STREAMLINE THE ADMISSIONS EXPERIENCE



In 2021 the Independence Seaport Museum moved to a model of offering guided tours on a daily basis for its Historic Ships. Although financially successful this made it complex for staff to explain all options for tickets succinctly. In 2023 ISM introduced ticket packages to better communicate to visitors all options available to them when visiting.

ANDREA POLLOCK

Public Engagement Manager
Independence Seaport Museum



TAKEAWAYS

- The pros and cons of ticketing packages
- Communicating to staff the art of upselling
- Evaluating success of ticketing model and pivoting as necessary



TICKETING, PACKAGES, ADMISSIONS



THANK YOU TO THE
VEX25 SNACK
SPONSORS



SESSION BLOCK 2

11:45 AM – 12:45 PM

EMPOWERING DECISION-MAKING THROUGH VISITOR JOURNEY MAPPING: PUTTING PEOPLE AT THE CENTER

- CLASSROOM A

WELCOME STARTS IN THE OFFICE: HUMANIZING THE VISITOR SERVICES MANUAL

- CLASSROOM B

NEW VISITOR – WHO DIS?

- CLASSROOM C

A BRAND NEW APPROACH TO ACCESSIBILITY

- LECTURE HALL 2

EMPOWERING DECISION-MAKING THROUGH VISITOR JOURNEY MAPPING: PUTTING PEOPLE AT THE CENTER



Join us for an engaging and interactive session focused on Visitor Journey Mapping, where we emphasize the importance of centering people in every decision-making process. In today's competitive landscape, understanding the needs of our visitors is crucial to creating meaningful experiences that foster loyalty and satisfaction.

JESSICA SHARPE

Founder & CEO
J Sharpe Solutions



TAKEAWAYS

- Understanding the fundamental components of Visitor Journey Mapping and its role in human-centered design
- Tools and methodologies for visualizing the visitor journey and identifying pain points and opportunities for improvement
- Strategies for fostering a culture of empathy within your organization to ensure that visitor perspectives are prioritized in all initiatives



JOURNEY MAPS



WELCOME STARTS IN THE OFFICE: HUMANIZING THE VISITOR SERVICES MANUAL



The ways we welcome visitors are informed by the ways we welcome our colleagues. In this interactive session, let's explore together what welcome means to us—and how we can build it in internally, using the same models of invitation, community agreements, and community building that we use with our visitors.

CASEY COOLIDGE

Visitor Services Manager
Chazen Museum of Art



TAKEAWAYS

- That establishing a policy foundation of internal, departmental welcome promotes institutional wellbeing
- That the communal models of collaboration and relationship building that we usually apply toward visitors can be powerful tools in this process
- That this foundation builds out into improved visitor engagement



STAFF ENGAGEMENT, POLICIES, INTERNAL COMMUNICATION





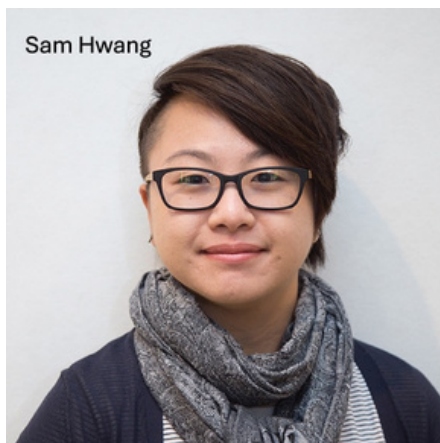
NEW VISITOR, WHO DIS?



Join Grounds For Sculpture's progress as we work towards building new community relationships, the development of a visitor data dashboard, and strategic audience building through targeted exhibitions and programming. How does this align with the equitable focus of our mission and what have we learned along the way.

SAM HWANG

Director of Guest Services
Grounds For Sculpture



RYE PALASCIANO

Manager of Guest Services
Grounds For Sculpture



TAKEAWAYS

- Building community-centered audiences
- Data analysis
- Working towards equitable access



DATA, AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT



A BRAND NEW APPROACH TO ACCESSIBILITY

In partnership with the Shedd Aquarium, we took a fresh look at accessibility and learned eye-opening lessons that can improve all visitors' experiences. We went deep in interviews with disabled volunteers and surprising experts -- including blind oceanographers -- to get new insights into how to design experiences that are stickier, pain-free, and more meaningful.

TAKEAWAYS

- Beyond the Basics: A New Lens on Universal Design
- Shaping More Meaningful Journeys: Principles for Today and Tomorrow
- Accessible Design: The Key to Deeper Engagement

JASON ULASZEK

Founder & Chief Design Officer
Inzovu



JEFF LEITNER

Cultural Researcher & Social
Innovator
Inzovu



DANIELLE DUMERER

VP, Technology & Information
Security
Shedd Aquarium



UNIVERSAL DESIGN, ACCESSIBILITY



LUNCH

12:45 – 2:15 PM

Lunch is on your own – here are a few options:

AT THE MUSEUM CAMPUS

- Field Bistro at the Field Museum
- Explorer Café at the Field Museum
- Kim & Carlo's Hotdogs near the South Entrance of the Field Museum
- Del Campo's Tacos near the East Entrance of the Field Museum

OFFSITE OPTIONS

- [Click here to view a variety of restaurants within about a mile of the Field Museum](#)



★ ★ SESSION BLOCK 3 ★ ★

2:15 – 3:15 PM

PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER: A CLEAR PATH TO IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY

- CLASSROOM A

TOTS AT THE MUSEUM

- CLASSROOM B

MINDING THE GAP: DEVELOPING AN INTERGENERATIONAL VISITOR SERVICES COHORT

- CLASSROOM C

MENTORSHIP: OFFERING A GUIDING HAND TO THE NEXT WAVE OF GUEST EXPERIENCE LEADERS

- LECTURE HALL 2

LEADING WITH EXPERIENCE: PERSPECTIVES ON ENGAGING INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL AUDIENCES

- JAMES SIMPSON THEATER

PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER: A CLEAR PATH TO IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility can feel like a puzzle, but we've got the pieces to help you put it together! In this session, get free tools, resources, and a proven process created by and with people with disabilities, to help you create accessible practices, programs, and spaces—no more confusion, just a clear path forward!

DANI ROSE

Director of Cultural Access
Open Door Arts



NICOLE AGOIS

Managing Director
Open Door Arts



TAKEAWAYS

- A step-by-step proven process to help your organization assess, understand, and improve accessibility
- Comprehensive tools, templates, and resources to help you every step of the way
- Clarity and confidence to get started and make change

ACCESSIBILITY, PLANNING





TOTS AT THE MUSEUM



Young children ages 0–5 are the future of our museums, so it is crucial now more than ever to foster welcoming spaces for them and their families. Uncover three interdepartmental solutions to prevent child-related art incidents AND cultivate an accessible environment for families of young children. Learn how to implement these solutions and watch as they improve visitor experience for not only children, but patrons and employees alike.

ZAC VAN SCHENCK

Early Childhood Educator
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts



TAKEAWAYS

- We will explore research that defends a young child's place in the museum
- We will then briefly discuss findings from my personal research, then dive into the solutions, including child-centered visitor experience training for employees, accessible signage, and the importance of interactive galleries
- We will discuss how to move forward with these solutions within your organization, along with highlighting museums and educators who have led by example



EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION, ACCESSIBILITY





MINDING THE GAP: DEVELOPING AN INTERGENERATIONAL VISITOR SERVICES COHORT



What makes the Tang Museum's visitor services so unique? Our intergenerational team! Learn how the Museum has fostered teaching and learning among a group that is primarily led by Skidmore students and supported by a non-student staff.

OLIVIA CAMMISA-FROST

Special Events and Publications Manager
Tang Museum at Skidmore College



TAKEAWAYS

- How college students and non-student staff benefit and learn from each other
- How this intergenerational group brings new ideas to looking at art and assisting visitors
- What training and support for these groups looks like



STAFF ENGAGEMENT, TRAINING





MENTORSHIP: OFFERING A GUIDING HAND TO THE NEXT WAVE OF GUEST EXPERIENCE LEADERS



SUMMIT One Vanderbilt aims to provide a best-in-class guest experience for our visitors and team members above all else. This presentation speaks to our unique take on guiding the next wave of leaders in our organization and trumpets the importance of mentorship across industries.

BAYO FAYEMI

Associate Director of Guest Experience
SUMMIT One Vanderbilt



TAKEAWAYS

- The value of mentorship within an organization
- SUMMIT's approach to mentorship
- How-to kick start your own mentorship program



STAFF ENGAGEMENT, STAFF DEVELOPMENT



LEADING WITH EXPERIENCE: PERSPECTIVES ON ENGAGING INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL AUDIENCES

Join us for a candid conversation with Chicago museum professionals who have navigated both successes and challenges by placing experience at the heart of their work. From managing teams to engaging volunteers, these leaders will discuss how they foster creative problem-solving, adaptability, and a welcoming environment for all.

TAKEAWAYS

- Insights into how mid-career leaders balance visitor and staff needs
- Practical strategies for people leadership that encourage professional growth and solution-focused behaviors
- How an experience-first mindset can have positive repercussions for internal and external audiences and projects

JOSH ANDERSON

Director of Visitor Services
Chicago History Museum



JOSEPH HERNANDEZ

Senior Manager of Guest Services
Adler Planetarium



ANI SCHMIDT

Senior Manager of Facilitation
Adler Planetarium



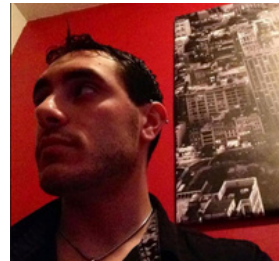
AMELIA POLLOCK

Volunteer Projects Coordinator
Griffin Museum of Science and Industry



GREGORY STORMS

Senior Manager of Public and
Community Engagement
Chicago History Museum



STAFF ENGAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP



SESSION BLOCK 4

3:30 – 4:30 PM

YOU ARE HERE: ON MAPS & BELONGING

- CLASSROOM A

A FUN AND SAFE DAY AT THE ZOO

- CLASSROOM B

RETENTION REIMAGINED: ELEVATING MEMBER ENGAGEMENT FOR LASTING IMPACT

- CLASSROOM C

EMPOWHERED TOGETHER: REVOLUTIONIZING FEMALE ALLYSHIP

- LECTURE HALL 2



YOU ARE HERE: ON MAPS AND BELONGING



Maps and wayfinding are more than navigation tools—they communicate belonging. This session explores how cultural sites can design accessible signage to empower disabled visitors, improve autonomy, and enhance the visitor experience. Attendees will evaluate real-world examples, identify accessibility gaps, and workshop solutions tailored to their institutions.

DANI ROSE

Director of Cultural Access
Open Door Arts



TAKEAWAYS

- A checklist of best practices for designing accessible signage and wayfinding systems
- Practical tools for assessing and improving existing maps and signage
- Inspiration to create wayfinding strategies that enhance visitor confidence, inclusion, and trust

A FUN AND SAFE DAY AT THE ZOO

Cultural institutions and amusement parks need to have safety procedures in place but zoos have to add the element of dangerous animals into that action plan. The Guest Service team at Lincoln Park Zoo not only welcomes guests and encourages a fun day but are role players in the safety and security of all. Including the gorillas and venomous snakes. Action Plans and Drills for the zoo environment will be reviewed.

CHRIS JORGENSEN

Director of Guest Services
Lincoln Park Zoo



TAKEAWAYS

- Safety is always the #1 priority
- A safe environment is a revenue opportunity
- Deliver safety with a smile



PUBLIC SAFETY





RETENTION REIMAGINED: ELEVATING MEMBER ENGAGEMENT FOR LASTING IMPACT



Discover strategies to retain and engage museum members through in-person and virtual experiences. Learn how the Field Museum fosters long-term loyalty by connecting members with scientists, experts, and exclusive exhibitions. Explore innovative approaches to strengthen member relationships and keep them excited about their membership, even through changing times.

STEPHANIE TICAS

Membership Operations Manager
Field Museum



TAKEAWAYS

- Efficient Engagement for Members
- Member Support can help sustain your mission
- Evolve Digitally to stay connected



MEMBER ENGAGEMENT



EMPOWHERED TOGETHER: REVOLUTIONIZING FEMALE ALLYSHIP

How do you cut through the clutter, be bold and lift up the future generation of female leaders? Learn how to build our toolbox to rewrite the narrative to promote women in the corporate world.

JUSTINE PUGLIESE

Founder

EmpowHered Hospitality



TAKEAWAYS

- How to rewrite our narrative
- How to become balcony women
- How to build a toolbox that works for us



CAREER PATH, ALLYSHIP





MONDAY, 9/29



- 9:00 AM – Welcome & Keynote, James Simpson Theater
- 10:30 AM – 11:30 AM – Session Block 1
 - Staying Accessible with Pay What You Wish Admission – Classroom A
 - Increasing Partner Sales – Unlocking the Power of Partnerships – Classroom B
 - People, Play and Pipe Cleaners: Practical Applications of Fun – Classroom C
 - Boatloads of Options! Using Ticketing Packages to Streamline the Admissions Experience – Lecture Hall 2
- 11:45 AM – 12:45 PM – Session Block 2
 - Empowering Decision-Making Through Visitor Journey Mapping: Putting People at the Center – Classroom A
 - Welcome Starts in the Office: Humanizing the Visitor Services Manual – Classroom B
 - New Visitor – Who Dis? – Classroom C
 - A Brand New Approach to Accessibility – Lecture Hall 2
- 12:45 – 2:15 PM – Lunch (On Your Own)
- 2:15 – 3:15 PM – Session Block 3
 - Putting the Pieces Together: A Clear Path to Improve Accessibility – Classroom A
 - Tots at the Museum – Classroom B
 - Minding the Gap: Developing an Intergenerational Visitor Services Cohort – Classroom C
 - Mentorship: Offering a Guiding Hand to the Next Wave of Guest Experience Leaders – Lecture Hall 2
 - Leading with Experience: Perspectives on Engaging Internal and External Audiences – James Simpson Theater
- 3:30 – 4:30 PM – Session Block 4
 - You Are Here: On Maps & Belonging – Classroom A
 - A Fun and Safe Day at the Zoo – Classroom B
 - Retention Reimagined: Elevating Member Engagement for Lasting Impact – Classroom C
 - EmpowHered Together: Revolutionizing Female Allyship – Lecture Hall 2
- 4:30 – 4:45 PM – Closing remarks & 2026 Host Announcement, James Simpson Theater



SHINDIG AT THE SHEDD

Shedd Aquarium

- 6:00 – 9:00 p.m.
- 1200 S DuSable Lake Shore Dr, Chicago, IL 60605
- A short stroll away from the Field Museum
- Ticket includes
 - Open Bar
 - Tex-Mex appetizers
 - Full Aquarium access
 - Animal encounters
 - Battledecks



■ [What the heck is Battledecks?](#)



ENHANCE YOUR GUEST EXPERIENCE WITH

IMMERSIVE

VIRTUAL REALITY ATTRACTIONS



THEATER



OUTDOOR



PRE & POST-SHOW



INDOOR

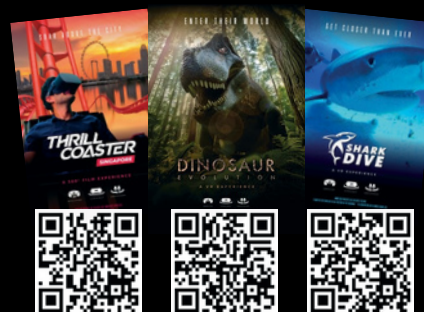


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★ ★ TUESDAY 9/30 ★ ★

THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE BLUEPRINT:

ALIGN YOUR TEAMS, WOW YOUR GUESTS, GROW YOUR REVENUE

Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Edlis Neeson Theater, 1st Floor,
9:00 – 10:30 am

DEI IN THE CROSSHAIRS:

ADVANCING EQUITY IN CHALLENGING TIMES

Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Edlis Neeson Theater, 1st Floor,
11:00 am – 12:30 pm

MOVING BEYOND THE DEFICIT MODEL OF THE VISITOR:

VISITOR FIRST APPROACHES TO SITE INTERPRETATION

Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Crown Family Room, 3rd Floor
11:00 am – 12:30 pm

LUNCH (COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM STORE ASSOCIATION)

Deep dish and tavern style pizza
Crown Family Room, 3rd Floor, 12:30 – 2:00 pm



BUILDING BRIDGES: THE BATTLE AGAINST CULTURE WAR

Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Edlis Neeson Theater, 1st Floor,
2:00 – 3:30 pm

ACCESS ALL-STARS: MAKING THE CASE FOR INCLUSION

Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Crown Family Room, 3rd Floor,
2:00 – 3:30 pm

360 HAPPY HOUR

360 Chicago, 4:00 – 6:00 p.m.



MSA IS YOUR RESOURCE FOR EARNED REVENUE SUCCESS

**First-time sponsor of the Visitor Experience Group Conference —
Please look for MSA representatives in attendance to learn more!**

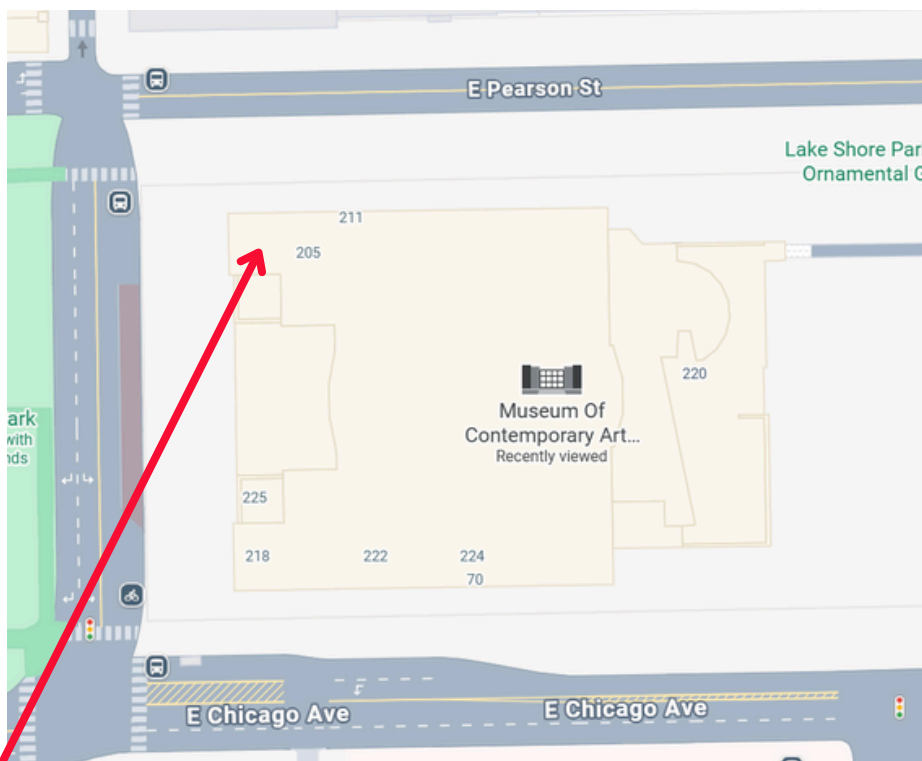
The **Museum Store Association (MSA)** is a community of nonprofit retail professionals and wholesale vendors who share your goals and challenges.

Membership Benefits Include:

- **Market perks** like free hotel stays—one market can pay for your membership!
- **Free registration** for MSA FORWARD Annual Conference & Expo, held in partnership with the American Alliance of Museums
- **Connections with 1100+ peers** across the global nonprofit retail industry and **access to new vendors** who understand and support the nonprofit retail model
- **Year-round education** led by industry experts

Membership Rates:

- Individual Membership \$205/person/annual
- 2–3 Memberships \$180/person/annual
- 4 or More Memberships \$150/person/annual



Use the Griffin Entrance on the corner of Mies van der Rohe Way and Pearson Street to enter MCA for the VEX25 workshops.

DONATE ❤️

The Visitor Experience Group is a nonprofit whose mission is to provide leadership, support, development, and encourage collaboration in the areas of Guest Services, Audience Engagement, and Operations. Your donation helps us work toward completing that mission!



**VISITOR
EXPERIENCE
GROUP** ⁴⁴



THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE BLUEPRINT: ALIGN YOUR TEAMS, WOW YOUR GUESTS, GROW YOUR REVENUE



Learn how to align departments to deliver a cohesive guest experience by connecting service standards, recovery, and premium offerings. This session provides tools to build a holistic strategy that improves satisfaction, streamlines operations, drives attendance and spending, and lowers acquisition costs at your venue.

JOSH LIEBMAN

Founder

Liebman Leisure Group



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TAKEAWAYS

- A clear method to get every department on the same page for delivering amazing guest experiences
- Real tools you can start using right away to map out and launch your experience strategy
- A solid understanding of how great experiences boost satisfaction, drive revenue, and make operations smoother



Edlis Neeson Theater, 9:00 – 10:30 am





DEI IN THE CROSSHAIRS: ADVANCING EQUITY IN CHALLENGING TIMES



Explore actionable strategies for sustaining Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) work in cultural institutions amid shifting political and social climates. This session offers tools for navigating resistance, fostering institutional resilience, and reaffirming DEI as core to mission-driven work.

SARA FURR, PHD

Head Strategist (Mayari Consulting) and Vice President of Inclusive Strategies at The Family Institute



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TAKEAWAYS

- Practical strategies to embed DEI into institutional frameworks for long-term resilience
- Techniques to address external and internal pushback while staying values-driven
- Approaches for aligning DEI work with mission, community engagement, and funding priorities



Edlis Neeson Theater, 11:00 am – 12:30 pm





MOVING BEYOND THE DEFICIT MODEL OF THE VISITOR: VISITOR FIRST APPROACHES TO SITE INTERPRETATION



Participants will engage in thinking about approaches to site that fully engage visitors, putting their interests, knowledge, and experience at the center of facilitated experiences rather than assuming visitors enter any experience with a deficit. Emerging theories and recent research will be presented. Links with DEAI will be discussed.

BRIAN FORIST, PHD

Senior Lecturer-Parks, Recreation, & the Outdoors; Indiana University School of Public Health-Bloomington



Photograph by K EagleWolf Mabrey

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TAKEAWAYS

- Participants will engage in dialogue with others to share perspectives and experiences with visitor-first interpretation
- Participants will come away with examples of visitor-first approaches to interpretation based in current theory and research
- Participants will see links between visitor-first interpretation and DEAI philosophies and actions



Crown Family Room, 11:00 am – 12:30 pm





BUILDING BRIDGES: THE BATTLE AGAINST CULTURE WAR



In this session we will learn about cultural humility on how to apply these principles, we will focus on perception vs perspective, and how we can all be more self-aware. As we tackle a complex topic (DEI), we'll dissect the challenges and barriers that are being faced in 2025. This journey will be thought-provoking as we will first assess our biases and blind spots. Then learn tips and strategy for overcoming these challenges.

GUS MARTINEZ

CEO - GSM Diversity LLC



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TAKEAWAYS

- Understanding that cultural humility is a process of everyday growth and development
- Learn how we can become change agents
- Expand our knowledge by seeing things in a much different perspective instead of our perception



Edlis Neeson Theater, 2:00 – 3:30 pm





ACCESS ALL-STAR: MAKING THE CASE FOR INCLUSION



You're an Access Champion—now put your skills to the test! In this interactive session, solve accessibility challenges, lead institutional change, and develop disability-centered programming. Learn how communication, pre-visit information, and proactive solutions eliminate barriers before they happen, and bring 'Service First' to life at your organization.

ALEX BOYLE

Director of Programs, Art-Reach

DANI ROSE

Director of Cultural Access, Open Door Arts



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TAKEAWAYS

- Strategies, training techniques, and workplace accommodations for supporting disabled, neurodivergent, and aging staff, docents, and volunteers
- A strategic framework for working directly with the disability community through authentic connection and distinct programming opportunities
- Examples of effective pre-visit information, including how to create access guides, FAQs, and proactive communication tools

Crown Family Room, 2:00 – 3:30 pm



360 HAPPY HOUR

360 Chicago

- 4:00 – 6:00 p.m.
- 875 N Michigan Ave 94th floor, Chicago, IL 60611
- Transportation Options:
 - ¼ mile from Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago
 - Accessible via the 3 bus and Red Line
- Ticket includes
 - Appetizers
 - Open Bar
 - The absolute best views of the Windy City



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VISITOR EXPERIENCE GROUP

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YOU

HOW CAN I DO
THAT??

VISITOR EXPERIENCE GROUP

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VEX25 CHICAGO

SEP 28 - OCT 1



★ ★ WEDNESDAY 10/1 ★ ★

LINCOLN PARK TOUR

Chicago History Museum
Lincoln Park Zoo
Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum

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**BIG
BUS**
• CHICAGO •

CHICAGO LOOP TOUR

Museum of Contemporary Photography
Center for Native Futures
Art Institute of Chicago

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★ ★ PRESENT AT VEX26 ★ ★

Inspired by today's sessions? Have an idea for next year's conference? Click the button below and submit your session idea for VEX26! The Call for Proposals will open at 4:30 PM on Monday, September 29.

SUBMIT

IDEAS FROM PAST ATTENDEES

- Green Energy
- Maintaining employee morale
- Cross-cultural relationship building
- Focus on small institutions
- Accessibility
- Leadership skills
- Managing up
- Connecting team to mission
- Accessibility for staff
- Dealing with difficult visitors
- Volunteer recruitment
- Analyzing visitor data
- Career development
- Staff engagement
- Operations
- Advocating for DEAI initiatives

