CWAM Recap – Colorado Newbie at Her First CWAM Conference
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I was so excited to get the opportunity to attend the CWAM conference in April. Having just moved to Greeley at the end of January, it was a great opportunity to meet the folks in my field and learn more about all the exciting programs and projects that our museums, big and small, are undertaking.

Choosing just one session to highlight is a tough one! Most of the sessions that I attended focused on programs and operations, and I took quite a few gems of information away with me from each session. From animal programs to reimagining the historic house, to truly collaborative programs, there were so many that were relevant to my current position at the City of Greeley Museums. However, I'll focus on the Aurora Museums' session because it surprised me with the variety of relevant approaches to community engagement.

The session, led by Keith Outcelt, Deborah Teany, and Emily Miner, discussed perceptions of Aurora, CO and how the museum works to explore and celebrate the histories and experiences of the people who live there. Initially, I was intrigued by the Mosaic of Culture series, in which the museum works with a local group to develop exhibits and programming. This program emphasized working with the existing community groups and their organizations rather than trying to reinvent the wheel or tell the story of a community without their input. It was great to see how each iteration of the program is a little different and the museum and staff are able to be flexible. Later in the session, staff outlined the preschool program, homeschool, and a program for groups with special needs. Each of these programs had a framework that I could see implementing in our museums as well.

I loved the way that Aurora is making their museum a place for all of their community, and reimagining what it means to visit a museum. The way that Aurora invites input and collaboration with community partners and elevates the contribution of local residents is something to take note of. Designating time for preschoolers, homeschoolers, and people with special needs helps those members of the community feel like the museum is for them too. I left the session feeling like there were small steps I could take at my museum to create welcoming programming and reimagine how to collaborate with our diverse community as well.