

Link to Presentation:

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1A9NFYOME1fqK5YAgS7xivblu9Q2GY4yr-iCpAOdl2YY/edit?usp=sharing>

1. Hello everyone, as Laura mentioned, my name is Manar Swaby and my pronouns are she and they. I am a Black neurodivergent person. I am wearing a blue turtleneck, white cardigan, dark blue glasses and have a shaved head. I currently live on the ancestral land of the Osage people, currently known as St. Louis, Missouri. I am excited to talk to you all about the work that I've been a part of since December 2021 with the Historic House Trust of NYC. Altogether, this project is an "Exploration of Accessibility & Innovation within NYC Historic Houses".
2. To give you a little bit of background about the Historic House Trust of NYC, also known as HHT. HHT was founded in 1989 and is a private-public partnership with the NYC Parks Department. They were founded because during this time NYC Parks Department saw a real need to support historic houses in a real and tangible way – the network of historic houses is comprised of 23 independent historic houses and sites – for example Historic Richmond Town in Staten Island, Van Cortland House Museum in the Bronx, and the Little Red Lighthouse in Manhattan. What's interesting about this structure developed by NYC Park Department is that the houses are physically owned and maintained by NYC Parks, but operated, staffed and run through independent nonprofit organizations. And the role of HHT is to provide centralized structure and support to the houses, and they do that through a number of ways including this grant-funded project.
 - a. In 2019, HHT received a grant from New York Community Trust to lead an Accessibility and Innovation Initiative. The goal was to identify opportunities to strengthen the experiences of people with disabilities across the network of houses. This grant was written to do so through a series of innovative accessibility pilot projects, and to ultimately highlight and share the learning with others.
 - b. So, following a few shifts and pauses, in part prompted by the COVID19 pandemic, I joined the project in Dec 2021 to hit the ground running and relaunch the project.
3. Before I jump into sharing a little bit more about me, my approach to moving this project forward and share with you where we are now, I wanted to take some time to acknowledge the current sociocultural context that we are embedded in and that was important for me to lean in in this project scope.
 - a. Museum as sites for the people – acknowledging that these house museums operate in their neighborhoods as community organizations, they are spaces of convening for people to join in events and engage with one another in meaningful ways
 - b. Changing frameworks of disability – acknowledging moving from a medical model approach of disability, that looks at disability as impairment or something wrong

with a body, and shifting towards a sociocultural approach, that understands that how we design spaces and experiences are ultimately what disables people.

- c. Thirdly, we want to acknowledge that there are a lot of great practices and resources that exist in the museum field around accessibility, but very few of them center on advancing accessibility when your budget and resources are small. There are things that folks can do, but the questions typically are where do I begin, and what do I prioritize?
 - d. Fourthly, acknowledging that for a lot of organizations and people, COVID opened their eyes to new ways of engaging virtual communications and programming. In some ways allowed folks to identify ways to build bridges with a lot of disabled people and members of their community
 - e. Lastly, preservation and accessibility are not contradictory. There are a number of examples where through community input, innovative solutions to honoring and maintaining the cultural and historic value takes place and still extends to disabled folks and their experiences and needs.
4. A little bit about me and my organization – Sway B Access is a small business, and we work with government and nonprofit organizations engaged in language access and disability access strategy and implementation. I share this slide to highlight these three pillars of our work, that we center
 - a. Designing for Equity & JUstice
 - b. Core to our process is Organizational Transformation and Workforce Development – accessibility is about internal process, commitment, values, and practices, operations, resources and ultimately people. Approaching from this holistic way is really important for us to move this forward so accessibility is embedded into the life of an organization, and not just an afterthought, which for many it tends to be.
 - c. Lastly Meaningful community engagement, which is really centering input and experiences of community members and stakeholders
 5. I share all of that to highlight our approach in grant project, which centers Organizational Strategy and Design
 - a. Our typical process has a robust Discovery phase, Strategic Planning Phase, Implementation Phase and Optimization Phase.
 6. We tweaked that to fit the very specific goals of this Grant project, and our project phases are Discovery, Analysis, Pilot Project Implementation, Analysis and Knowledge Share
 7. The Discovery Phase is composed of two main pieces, an Internal Needs Assessment and Community Needs Assessment.
 - a. I'm going to lean into our process and approach within the Internal Needs Assessment, which really allowed us to understand where is HHT and where are these participating historic houses and their nonprofit partners are in relation to accessibility. We looked at their Operations, Practices, and Infrastructure through an Operational Audit. We also used Interviews and Surveys with staff to learn more about the CUltura and Attitudes within the organization.

8. Based on this information, we leveraged an Organizational Accessibility Impact Framework methodology, that is composed of 2 Dimensions, 5 Criteria Areas and 22 Indicators. All to help us understand, where is HHT as an organization-network and where are independent historic houses. How mature and advanced are their accessibility practices, and what opportunities are there to develop innovative practices and projects to advance accessibility within their spaces?
 - a. I'm going to give you a quick rundown of this methodology
9. Dimension One is really looking at how mature these houses are functionally, in three primary areas:
 - a. Accessibility Infrastructure: Policy, Practices, Process, Procedures
 - b. Impact on Disability Communities and Populations: Existing partnerships, existing accessibility programs, accommodations, etc.
 - c. Equity and Community Impact: Overarching practices with local communities and particularly those that are marginalized
10. Dimension Two is looking at that ORganizations capacity, in terms of financial resource and staffing
11. In total we had 8 of 23 houses participate in this Operational Audit, which are listed on this slide
12. This slide shows you where each of the houses scored in maturity in those three Dimensional Criteria areas. At the bottom, you'll see HHT, as an organization "scored" as Initial in Accessibility Organizational Infrastructure; Impact of Disability Populations and COmmunities and Emergent in Equity & Community Impact.
 - a. Overall we saw a lot of the houses are yes in fact operating as community centers and community centered spaces, but there is definitely a disconnect and lack of strategic prioritization with disabled folks.
13. Here we mapped out these houses, so we can really visualize the span of maturity by resource.
14. To decide where we would host pilot projects, we conducted in person site visits
15. We hosted group conversation with house directors, in part asked them for their direct feedback about pilot project ideas
16. Considering all of the data that we pulled and gleaned from the houses, strategically chose these four highlighted in green to host pilot projects, which are set to officially launch next week!
17. This was an incredibly rich project, and there's so much more I could say. Before I leave I wanted to share some of the lessons learned that were really important for us and we took into account in our pilot project plans, that center Meaningful Collaboration on three different levels.
 - a. With Visitors with Disabilities
 - i. It was important for us to really center in our pilot project implementation phase, incorporating people with disabilities during the planning development and launch.
 - b. Across Independent Nonprofit Partners who run Historic Houses
 - i. We wanted to really highlight collaboration for these houses with one another – knowing and seeing the valuable resources in each other.

- c. ANd lastly Developing Centralized Infrastructure within HHT
 - i. really wanting to identify opportunities for HHT to lean into their structure as this support and mediator body.