The Iowa Museum Association Rising Star Award is intended to recognize individuals who have worked or volunteered in the Iowa museum field for 3-8 years and have helped their museum broaden its audience through engagement activities. Nominees may be employed or volunteer in an Iowa museum of any type.

Melissa Porter, a 2017 Master of Arts graduate of George Washington University's Museology/Museum Studies program, concentrated on interpretation and public engagement during her course of study. Shortly after graduation, Melissa became Museum Program Manager at Brucemore, a National for Historic Preservation site, charged with creating new programs and executing the already existing 64 days of concerts, plays, and events scheduled as well as 220 days of history tours.

Melissa distinguished herself through the creation and leadership of multiple program types including children's programming, growing attendance more than 40% between her first and second year; heritage programming; cultural partnership programming; and outreach, meeting with other area museum educators to coordinate and share ideas on local programming.

Melissa's work in cultural partnership programming included the creation of two new programs at Brucemore that grew engagement not only for Brucemore but for other Linn county communities. The Preservation Tour she developed underscores Brucemore's dedication to community engagement, and increases awareness of the theory, practice, costs and value of historic preservation. Beyond developing the 90-minute tour, Melissa wrote and designed email and social media marketing to encourage ticket sales.

Cynthia Sweet, Director of the Iowa Museum Association said, “The Rising Star Award recognizes individuals who have worked or volunteered in the Iowa museum field for 3-5 years and have helped their museum broaden its audience through engagement activities. Melissa Porter's work at Brucemore is an outstanding example of the fresh ideas and new perspectives emerging professionals and new volunteers bring to the field. Her enthusiasm, vision, and innovative approach make her a Rising Star in the Iowa museum industry."

Melissa Porter's work in coordinating staff, outside partners and audiences in the Douglas Starch Works commemoration program, demonstrated a courage to act innovatively in what community programming and outreach could mean. As a result, Brucemore benefited from increased community goodwill and the potential for ongoing partnerships."

- David Janssen, Executive Director, Brucemore

MELISSA SPENT HER FIRST YEAR LEARNING THE ESTABLISHED RHYTHM OF THE ORGANIZATION. NEVER AFRAID TO ASK QUESTIONS, SHE LEARNED QUICKLY. BY HER SECOND YEAR AT BRUCEMORE IN 2018, SHE HAD BECOME A VALUED AND VITAL MEMBER OF THE STAFF. MELISSA PLAYS A PIVOTAL ROLE FOR OUR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TEAM AND ORGANIZATIONS. SHE CONTINUES TO GROW IN HER ROLE AS A MUSEUM PROGRAM MANAGER AND AS A CONTRIBUTOR TO THE BRUCEMORE STAFF AND MUSEUM COMMUNITY."

- Tara Richards, Director of Community Engagement