<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:30–9:00 am</td>
<td>Arrivals so we can start promptly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00–9:15 am</td>
<td>Welcome and Introductions (Megan and Everyone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Thanks to host and housekeeping details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Introduce selves and exhibit projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Overview of schedule and goals for today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Workshop Context and Logistics</strong> (Megan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• National standards for interpretation - discuss interpretation challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Workshop series context, structure, content, goals, logistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Resources at hand: binders, materials, and people in the room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:15–10:30 am</td>
<td>BREAK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:30–11:30 am</td>
<td>Introduction to Interpretation (Lisa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What is interpretation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Who is interpretation for?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A word about evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Your interpretation toolkit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30 am–12:30 pm</td>
<td>Interpretive Exploration and Critique at the Museum of Peoples &amp; Cultures (Lisa and Everyone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ACTIVITY: Explore the galleries with an eye toward interpretative strategies (30 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Last 30 minutes: Reconvene to share comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30–1:30 pm</td>
<td>LUNCH (on your own)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:30–2:30 pm</td>
<td>Exhibit Planning and Management (Megan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Exhibit Planning Worksheet is our friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Team &amp; Timeline Management tool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:30–2:45 pm</td>
<td>BREAK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:45–4:45 pm</td>
<td>What’s the Big Idea? (Lisa and Everyone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Why do we need a Big Idea?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How do you write a good one?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How can you use it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ACTIVITY: Break-out to museum partner teams to draft your Big Idea (30 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Last 45 minutes: Report from each team on Big Idea and group discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:45–5:00 pm</td>
<td>Wrap-up (Megan and Everyone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Refer to syllabus – discuss assignments for next session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Questions? Comments?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Audience surveys and nametags to the basket please</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TELLING OUR STORIES: INTRODUCTION TO MUSEUM INTERPRETATION

UTAH HUMANITIES HERITAGE WORKSHOP
November 4, 2019 – BYU Museum of Peoples & Cultures, Provo, UT

Workshop Overview

SCHEDULE

Morning
• Introductions & Housekeeping
• Interpretation Standards Discussion
• Workshop Logistics
• What Is Interpretation?
• Interpretive Exploration & Critique

Afternoon
• Exhibit Planning & Management
• What’s the BIG IDEA?

Wrap-Up
• Questions & Comments
• Assignment
• Post-Workshop Survey

GOALS FOR TODAY

Museum Interpretation
• National Standards
• Interpretation Concepts
• Elements of Interpretive Exhibits
• Exhibit Evaluation

Project Management Tools
• Exhibit Planning Worksheet
• Time & Team Management Form

Thanks to our hosts

BYU MORMON YOUNG UNIVERSITY
MUSEUM OF PEOPLES AND CULTURES

WORKSHOP CONTEXT & LOGISTICS

Megan van Frank
Museum & History Programs
Utah Humanities
vanfrank@utahhumanities.org
Museums & Public Trust

AAM Code of Ethics for Museums

• Museums make their unique contribution to the public by collecting, preserving and interpreting the things of this world.
• They own and use natural objects and human artifacts to advance knowledge and nourish the human spirit. Collections are the basis for research, exhibits, and programs that invite public participation.
• US museums are grounded in the tradition of public service. As public trusts, they hold their collections and information as a benefit for those they were established to serve. Members of their governing authority, employees and volunteers are committed to the interests of these beneficiaries.
• Local, state and federal law provides the basic framework for museum operations. But legal standards are a minimum.
• Museums must do more than avoid legal liability, they must take affirmative steps to maintain their integrity so as to warrant public confidence. They must act not only legally but also ethically.

AAM Code of Ethics for Museums

Museums & Public Trust

Governance

• Collections

Programs

aam-us.org/resources/ethics-standards-and-best-practices/code-of-ethics

Museums & Public Trust

AAM Code of Ethics for Museums

Programs

Museums serve society by advancing an understanding and appreciation of the natural and cultural common wealth through exhibitions, research, scholarship, publications and educational activities. These programs further the museum’s mission and are responsive to the concerns, interests and needs of society. Thus, the museum ensures that:
• programs support its mission and public trust responsibilities
• programs are founded on scholarship and marked by intellectual integrity
• programs are accessible and encourage participation of the widest possible audience consistent with its mission and resources
• programs respect pluralistic values, traditions and concerns
• revenue-producing activities and activities that involve relationships with external entities are compatible with the museum’s mission and support its public trust responsibilities
• programs promote the public good rather than individual financial gain.
American Alliance of Museums (AAM)

Education & Interpretation Standards

1) The museum clearly states its overall educational goals, philosophy, and messages, and demonstrates that its activities are in alignment with them.
2) The museum understands the characteristics and needs of its existing and potential audiences and uses this understanding to inform its interpretation.
3) The museum’s interpretive content is based on appropriate research.
4) Museums conducting primary research do so according to scholarly standards.
5) The museum uses techniques, technologies, and methods appropriate to its educational goals, content, audiences, and resources.
6) The museum presents accurate and appropriate content for each of its audiences.
7) The museum demonstrates consistent high quality in its interpretive activities.
8) The museum assesses the effectiveness of its interpretive activities and uses those results to plan and improve its activities.

American Association for State & Local History

Interpretation Standards (Programs, Exhibitions, Publications)

1) The institution asserts its public service role and places education at the center of that role.
2) The institution clearly states its overall educational goals, philosophy, and messages, and demonstrates that its activities are in alignment with them.
3) The institution understands the characteristics and needs of its existing and potential audiences and uses this understanding to inform its interpretation.
4) The institution’s interpretive content is based on appropriate research.
5) Institutions conducting primary research do so according to scholarly standards.
6) The institution uses techniques, technologies, and methods appropriate to its educational goals, content, audiences, and resources.
7) The institution presents accurate and appropriate content for each of its audiences.
8) The institution demonstrates consistent high quality in its interpretive activities.
9) The institution assesses the effectiveness of its interpretive activities and uses those results to plan and improve its activities.

AASLH StEPs Interpretation Standards

Unacceptable Practices

✓ Biased comments or behavior related to race, ethnic background, gender, age, ability, economic status, or their personal criteria.
✓ Disregard for visitors’ interests, abilities, knowledge, and preferences by failing to ask about their interests and experiences.
✓ Using outdated, inappropriate, or inaccurate materials as sources, evidence, or examples.
✓ Giving false or fabricated information to visitors.

(AASLH, Standards & Excellence Program for History Organizations, 2010, p 111)
What About Your Museum?

How are you doing with these standards?
Successes?
Challenges?
Ambitions?

Utah's Museum Environment
- Over 6 million visitors each year to Utah museums
- 250+ Utah museums – all shapes, sizes, locales
- Small museum = operating budget <$250K (AASLH, AAM)
- 70% Utah museums are <$100K; 54% are <$25K
- 62% historical in nature; 32% DUP affiliates
- Single room galleries, fascinating collections with strong local connections, paid and volunteer staff with high turnover and limited opportunities for training
- Minimal interpretation in exhibits & education
- 80% rank interpretive programs as highest priority

Museums are Crucial Partners for Utah Humanities
- Cultural anchors in communities all over Utah
- Partnerships and grants
- Smithsonian Museum on Main Street (MoMS) traveling exhibitions since 1995 (host to 9 tours in 25 years benefitting 45+ museums & communities)
- Many have challenges hosting MoMS, creating interpretive programs, applying for grants, etc.

How might this group benefit from offerings designed for just them (training, consultations, professional development) to strengthen infrastructure & partnership opportunities?
Utah's Museum Interpretation Initiative

- Training & professional development
  - Shift exhibit model from 'Antique Shop' to 'Interpretive Exhibits' so museums become sites of story instead of depositories of stuff.
  - Strengthen curatorial, interpretive, educational best practice to museum staff and volunteers to benefit them and their audiences.

- Get museum staff connected
  - With each other & with local partners – help build regional networks.
  - With state & national associations that provide access to best practice (e.g. UMA, WMA, AASLH, AAM).

- Funding & onsite support
  - Equipment, resources, mentors to help with onsite exhibit projects.

- Partnership among state-level institutions
  - Collaboration to leverage our limited resources to better serve museums.

65 Interpretive Exhibit Projects Since 2010... and Counting...

"You are doing great things for museums in Utah! A model that other states could learn from!" – Alice Forren (retired museum consultant)

"The workshops have been the most valuable thing we have ever participated in. The information was clear, well presented, and easy to understand and get excited about."

"We learned how to tell stories more easily, more completely, and in an interesting way. I started out as a museum beginner, but this has given me the confidence I lacked and desired. Now I know what I'm doing, basically, or where to go to get help."

"The knowledge I gained from research will help me tell a better story on our tours. This project was time consuming, but worth every second for the end-product."

Benefits to Museums

- Practical and integrated approach to interpretation: planning, research, writing, design, and education.
- Increased knowledge and skills to tell your stories and connect with visitors.
- Hands-on experience developing an interpretive exhibit at your own museum = learning by DOING.
- Resources – equipment, information, membership and personalized support to carry out exhibit project.
- Connection to statewide networks of museum colleagues & ongoing support from training team.
- Catalyst for future interpretive projects.
How Museums Participate

✓ Agree to take part in whole workshop series and site visit in June 2020.
✓ Complete interim assignments and onsite exhibit project.
✓ Choose how to spend $500 equipment stipend & $150 for association membership or books.
✓ Update exhibit project based on feedback from site visit and audience response.
✓ Submit final report within 30 days of end of Smithsonian MoMS run (rolling).

2019-2020 Workshop Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 2</td>
<td>Interpretation Intro (Megan &amp; Lisa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 3</td>
<td>Research (Darby &amp; Catherine &amp; Megan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2</td>
<td>Exhibit Design (Lisa &amp; Paul)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 6</td>
<td>Writing (Lisa &amp; Megan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>Education (Virginia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1-15</td>
<td>Site Visits to see prototype exhibits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WW Open</td>
<td>Complete exhibits based on feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WW Close +30</td>
<td>Final Project Reports due within 30 days of your Water/Ways closing (along with your other reporting paperwork)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#1 Interpretation

Telling Our Stories: Introduction to Museum Interpretation

✓ National standards
✓ Interpretation concepts
✓ Elements of interpretive exhibits
✓ Exhibit evaluation
✓ Exhibit planning & management tools
#2 Research
**Finding Our Stories:**
**Researching Collections & Communities**

- Discover new libraries, sources, research strategies
- Evaluate sources for bias, authenticity
- Topical and object research to place stories in context
- Use cataloging & significance assessment as a guide to research and documentation

“We discovered we were telling lies...”

---

#3 Exhibit Design
**Designing Our Stories:**
**Well-Structured Exhibits**

- Exhibit design to convey a “Big Idea” to visitors
- Choose objects and structure information to support that Big Idea
- Exhibit objects SAFELY and attractively

“I now know the steps to take, resources to use, mistakes to avoid, and how long it takes to create a good exhibit...”

---

#4 Writing
**Writing Our Stories:**
**Exhibit Labels**

- Assemble information from multiple sources to create compelling and credible narratives
- Write exhibit labels that visitors will read and create supporting materials for your exhibit
- Hands-on practice fabricating inexpensive but professional-looking labels
#5 Education

Teaching Our Stories: Museum Education

- Museum education philosophy
- Integrate educational elements
- Preparation of self-guides and education plans
- Inquiry-based, interactive teaching strategies to engage visitors

“Rather than just throwing together displays, we now know how to create interpretive exhibits, and supplement them with interactive elements, self-guides, and more educational tours and programs.”

Your Exhibit Project

- Practice the various elements involved in interpretation
- Recommend 3-10+ objects
- Small or large scale
- Your time & space are the variables

Interpretive Exhibits on a Shoestring

DOESN’T TAKE MUCH $

- Offer well-researched & interesting information
- Visually appealing & accessible to various audience types (streakers, strollers, studiers)
- Use the exhibit to provide visitors with different ways of learning about & thinking more broadly about your topic

But it does take TIME & planning, organization, commitment...
Binder Orientation

- Overview Section
  - Workshop Schedule
  - Participants & Facilitators
  - Interpretation Standards from AAM, AASLH

- Workshop Sections 1-5
  - Bibliography & Readings
  - Each session you will get:
    - Daily Agenda
    - Presentation Notes
    - Assignment Example

http://utahhumanities.org/index.php/Center-for-Community-Heritage/museum-interpretation-workshop-resources.html

- Forms – Organizational Tools for You
  - Exhibit Planning Worksheet
  - Team & Time Management
  - Research Log & Object Info Sheet
  - Rough Outline & Label Trackers
  - Audience Evaluation Samples
  - Final Report Form – REVIEW NOW

- Session Materials
  Room for agenda, notes, activity sheets from each workshop

Assignments

- Refer to Workshop Schedule in your binders for details.
- Readings support your work and understanding.
- Assignments are to help keep you moving on milestones.
- Please complete the assignments given for each workshop to the best of your ability – no grades here!
  - We aim to give you feedback on every assignment within 2 weeks.
  - Email assignments to Megan vanfrank@utahhumanities.org or bring to session to hand in.
  - Facilitators are doing assignments too, so always a model available.
- Completion of exhibit project is important.
- Project reports due by your WW closing date +30 days.

Logistics & Support

- Equipment, etc.
  - Coordinate with Megan to clarify your needs for the $500 equipment stipend – she will purchase directly or issue check
  - Professional association membership or books up to $150

- Communication
  - Email (please check regularly and clear us from junk settings)
  - Google group email list open to everyone in this 2019-20 cohort for questions or related issues miworkshops@list.utahhumanities.org

- Paperwork
  - Basket for any paperwork or assignments brought (survey forms, equipment receipts, etc.)
  - Return nametags for reuse.

- Facilitators
  - Facilitator model exhibit.
  - Detailed assignment feedback.
  - Freaking out? We are always available to help!
2019-2020 Workshop Facilitators

Megan van Frank
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801.587.3611
lthompson@nhmu.utah.edu
www.nhmu.utah.edu

Catherine McIntyre
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800 S University Plwy, Orem, UT 84058
801.822.8021
mcintyre@ou.edu
www.uvu.edu/library/archives

Darby Doyle
Independent Public Historian
SLC, UT
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dhoudibango@gmail.com
Darbydoyle.com

Paul Stavast
Utah Museum of Peoples & Cultures
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801.422.0018
paul_stavast@byu.edu
mpc.byu.edu/home.html

Virginia Catherall
Utah Museum of Fine Arts
410 Campus Center Dr, SLC, UT 84112
801.388.5192
victoria.catherall@umfa.utah.edu
www.umfa.utah.edu

Resources
• Physical
• Virtual
• People

MORNING BREAK – 15 minutes
INTERPRETATION
Lisa Thompson
Exhibition Planner
Natural History Museum of Utah
lthompson@umnh.utah.edu

GOOD NEWS: People Trust Museums

OUR CHALLENGE: Antique Shop Syndrome

"Many museums without interpretive programs can look like antique shops. Visitors frequently treat them as such as they browse among the old things, stopping to examine or admire whatever interests them, without ever being aware of how the objects relate to one another and to the history of the community."

(Patrick A. Foltz, Ohio Historical Society Local History Notebook, November/December 1985)
OUR CHALLENGE:
Tombstones Aren’t Interpretation Either

What Is Interpretation?

Interpretation is a means of communicating ideas and feelings that help people enrich their understanding and appreciation of their world, and their role in it.

Interpretation

Telling stories that are interesting & relevant

- Is based on sound information, thematically organized, but is much more than plain information.
- Is an interactive learning experience that invites people to explore ideas, think, reflect, debate.
- Is not absolute – there is no single right way to do interpretation. It depends on the different people and perspectives involved.

(From Sharing Our Stories: Guidelines for Heritage Interpretation, 2007)
How is Interpretation Different from Providing Information?

An Example of Information

FLUORITE CaF$_2$
Fluorite is a relatively common mineral often found in ore deposits and limestone quarries. The most common crystal forms are cubes and octahedrons, although dodecahedrons and combinations of cubes, octahedrons and dodecahedrons are sometimes found. Fluorite has been found in Utah in the Dugway Mountains and the Wildcat Mountains and also near Marysvale. One special characteristic is fluorescence, which was named after fluorite. Most fluorite glows in the dark a bright blue-white under a long wave ultraviolet light.

An Example of Interpretation

Fluorite is dazzling in its diversity
From blazing yellows to brilliant purples, fluorite (CaF$_2$) comes in many beautiful colors. Some specimens are multicolored, containing bands of different hues or bits of other minerals. Fluorite also comes in a variety of shapes. Look for crystals with four, eight, or even 12 sides. The special property of "fluorescence," or glowing under ultraviolet light, was named after fluorite. You can make fluorite specimens glow in the Museum’s Gems and Minerals exhibit.
Interpretation can occur in places like parks, museums, and zoos, or at trailheads and scenic vistas. Signage helps visitors understand and think about what they are seeing, while tours and hands-on educational experiences help visitors learn in new ways.

What is an Interpretive Exhibit?

- Uses a combination of objects, documents, photos, and labels to tell a story.
- Conveys a meaningful, relevant theme (BIG IDEA).
- Has a clear structure that supports the theme.
- Uses objects to help us understand ideas, make new connections, see new perspectives.
- Presents sequences, studies effects, explains relationships, makes comparisons, and raises questions.

(Based on Tom McKay, "Exhibiting Local Heritage" Wisconsin Historical Society, Exchange 26, 2003)
Who is Interpretation For?

- Exhibits are for VISITORS!
- Visitors want meaningful experiences
  ✓ What does this mean?
  ✓ How does it connect to other things I know about?
  ✓ How does it help me understand them in a new way?
- Visitors want relevant experiences
  ✓ Why should I care?
  ✓ How does this relate to me?

Who is Interpretation For?

- Visitors need to feel included and respected
  ✓ “This place values people like me.”
- Telling inclusive stories is challenging
  ✓ Collaborating with partners is key. You’ll need their perspectives and expertise.
  ✓ Change can be hard for stakeholders who like things the way they are.
- Don’t get overwhelmed
  ✓ Start somewhere.
  ✓ Every step counts.
What Do We Know About Museum Visitors in General?

- Visitors come for a fun social experience with family or friends
- Visitors want to feel competent
  - They will skip elements they can't understand or connect with
- Visitors have limited time and energy
- Most visitors are motivated non-experts

What Do You Know About Your Visitors?

Evaluation 

*Helps you get to know your visitors & make better exhibits*

Don’t panic. Evaluation doesn’t have to be hard.

*Front-end evaluation*
- Before you get started, find out what visitors know and what their expectations are. This will help you craft your Big Idea.
- “What comes to minds when you think about X?”
- “What would you expect to do, see, find out about in an exhibit about X? How would you feel in an exhibit about X?”
- “How likely would you be to come see an exhibit about X?”

*Formative evaluation*
- Share your draft labels and prototype your interactives
- “What was the main message of that label?”
- “What interested you most?”
- “Was there anything that was unclear or confusing?”
Summative Evaluation

* What was that about?

- Summative evaluation
  - Did your exhibit achieve its goals?
  - Find out what works for visitors and what doesn’t
  - Surveys and exit interviews
  - Visitor tracking

Just do it! Any evaluation you do will be better than none.

What has worked for you?

What Is In Your Interpretive Toolkit?

TELL ME!
HANDS-ON ACTIVITY
INTERPRETIVE EXPLORATION OF MUSEUM

1) With questions in mind, explore galleries on your own (30 minutes).
2) Keep track of your experience and thoughts on your handout sheet.
3) Reconvene to share comments and discuss (30 minutes).

LUNCH BREAK – 60 minutes
EXHIBIT PLANNING & MANAGEMENT
Megan van Frank
Museum & History Programs
Utah Humanities
vanfrank@utahhumanities.org

Let’s Plan an Exhibit
1) Form an exhibit TEAM and establish a TIMELINE
2) Identify the Big Idea – what story are you telling?
3) Develop an exhibit plan (and update it as you go)
4) Research your objects and overall subject matter
5) Write a rough outline to narrow that research
6) Write labels based on that outline
7) Sketch to visualize and make a prototype
8) Evaluate throughout: get feedback from team members, outsiders, visitors – adjust accordingly

Form Exhibit TEAM
Team & Timeline Management Form
- Overall Exhibit Project Manager
- Content Development Team Roles
  - Theme & Structure
  - Research (objects, images, topic)
  - Writing & Editing
- Fabrication Team Roles
  - Design (overall & graphics)
  - Conservation (planning & mounts)
  - Construction (case & labels)
  - Installation
- Education Team Roles
  - Learning Materials (e.g. self-guides)
  - Public Programming (e.g. events)
  - Evaluation
- Seek Outside Help Where Needed

Core team of 2-5 people
DCI Model for Teams

**ROLES**

- **D = Decision Maker**
  Authority and responsibility to make the decision
- **C = Consultant**
  Consulted by the decision maker before decision is made, gives recommendation, provides input, but doesn’t share “the D”
- **I = Informed**
  This person must be told of a decision after the decision is made, especially when the decision affects the team member’s role.
- **W = Worker**
  The person who implements the decision

**GOALS**

- What are we going to accomplish?
- By when? Define interim milestones?

**PROCEDURES**

- How will we work together?
- What are the mechanics of paperwork flow? Coordination of shared tasks? Reporting procedures?

**SOURCES OF CONFLICT ON TEAMS**

Conflicts come from disagreements about goals, roles, and procedures. The most frequent reasons for disagreement are ambiguity (people haven’t talked about it in the first place), misunderstanding (people unknowingly have different impressions of the decisions they made), or professional differences of opinion.

---

**Establish a TIMELINE**

**Team & Timeline Management Form**

- Plan for Four Phases
  - Content Development
  - Fabrication
  - Education
  - Evaluation
- Scheduling
  - Workshop schedule as framework
  - Work back from product due dates
  - Recognize task dependencies
  - Build in deadline buffers
  - Be realistic about your milestones
- Structure a Collaborative Process
- Task List or Gantt Chart or whatever format works for you
- Revise as you go

**Make Exhibit Plan**

**Exhibit Planning Worksheet**

- Organizational Tool used throughout project = MASTER DOCUMENT
- Get your story structured
- Keep honing theme (big idea) and sub-themes (supporting concepts) through research
- Keep track of objects & other support materials needed
- Track ideas & goals as they evolve through research and collaboration
- Communication with your team & us
- Becomes your archival record

Revised version due each month & used to evaluate at site visit
Exhibit Planning Worksheet Asks...

• What story do you want to tell?
  ✓ What is the **TITLE** (working title is okay)?
  ✓ State your **BIG IDEA** (or theme) in one active sentence
  ✓ Develop **SUPPORTING CONCEPTS** (sub-themes) – like an essay
    (note that these will ultimately translate into physical exhibit sections)
  ✓ Everything is in service to, relates back to, your Big Idea

• What is the **RATIONALE** for exhibit?
  ✓ Make a case for this exhibit at this time
  ✓ Trying to attract new audience?
  ✓ Build new partnership?
  ✓ Drive collecting or feature prize object?

• Who is your **AUDIENCE**?
  ✓ Identify your audience beyond "everyone"
  ✓ Plan for them

Exhibit Planning Worksheet Asks...

• Develop your **VISITOR EXPERIENCE OBJECTIVES**
  ✓ **What do you want the audience to LEARN**
    What are the 1-2 key take-home messages of this exhibit – the juicy facts –
    you want your visitors to understand?
  ✓ **What do you want the audience to FEEL**
    Do you want your audience to feel inspired, sad, amazed, outraged?
    How are you going to make sure they get attached to your story?
  ✓ **What do you want the audience to DO**
    Is there some action you would like your audience to do – either within the
    exhibit or after they leave? This is a good place to include specifics about
    hands-on activities or self-guides.

  *These are what you evaluate to know if exhibit is successful...*

Exhibit Planning Worksheet Asks...

• What **OBJECTS** will help tell your story?
  ✓ List candidates with object IDs;
  ✓ Do you need to borrow objects?
  ✓ Purchase or build props?
  ✓ Augment with other items (images, etc.)?

• What are the requirements for **SAFE DISPLAY**?
  ✓ Can objects be exhibited safely?
  ✓ What are space and environmental needs?

• Begin to organize objects into **EXHIBIT SECTIONS**
  ✓ According to subthemes (supporting concepts)
  ✓ Reveals gaps in story balance
Develop a Prototype

- Make layout sketches or scale model of case, objects, and support materials
- Install a “draft” version of your exhibit with the commitment to update / finalize it based on feedback
- Evaluate: consult with people not on the exhibit team

Keep a Binder or Notebook

...and keep DATED COPIES of...

Team Organization Documents
- Team & Time Management form – update as you go along
- Minutes of exhibit team planning meetings, including decisions and assignments.

Timeline and Milestones
- Team & Time Management form – update as you go along
- Map your plan of work and specific milestones so you don’t get caught out.

Budget and Expenses
- Create an initial budget for costs like cases, mounting materials, printing, contracted labor, etc.
- Track costs as you go along – don’t forget to capture donated materials and labor.

Evaluation or Feedback
- Record of any feedback or edits you’ve gotten from others (informal or formal).

Photos and Publicity
- Add photos as the project develops.
- Capture copies of any publicity that project generates.

Evolving Versions of Exhibit Planning Worksheet

...and ATTACHMENTS...

Collection Object & Support Materials Checklist
- Create your own list of collection objects that are under consideration for your exhibit and refine this as you go along.
- Note the non-collection items that may be needed for the exhibit (e.g., images, maps, graphics, archival documents, models, props, etc.)

Research Documentation
- Research Survey Log Form is one way to keep track of topical research.
- Object Information Worksheet helps manage and record object research in a way that will be helpful for your collection documentation and significance assessment.

Exhibit Layout or Scale Model
- Attach sketches, including photographs of objects and supporting materials.

Exhibit Label Tracker & Other Written Products
- Rough Outline that refines research into the exhibit structure
- Evolving drafts of labels and other written materials
- Educational materials (self-guides, plans for hands-on interactives, etc.)
Evaluate & EDIT

...honestly THE HARDEST THING...

“Everything should have a reason for being in the exhibit, and for being where it is and how big it is. Everything should be in support of or relate to that big idea. If it isn’t, you must seriously ask yourself why it is in the exhibit.”

WILLARD WHITSON
(Planning an Exhibit, p.210)

AFTERNOON BREAK – 15 minutes

WHAT’S THE BIG IDEA?
Lisa Thompson
Exhibition Planner
Natural History Museum of Utah
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What’s the Big Idea?

• A Big Idea is a sentence—a statement—of what the exhibition is about.
• A Big Idea is big because it has fundamental meaningfulness. It is not trivial.
• A Big Idea is the “so what” of your exhibit.
• It is not a topic, an outcome, or an objective.

Why Do We Need a Big Idea?

• The Big Idea provides a thread of meaning and coherence.
• Visitors will know what your exhibit was about.
• A good Big Idea will help you build a strong visitor experience.
  ✓ All the pieces add up.
  ✓ They resonate with each other.

What Happens When an Exhibit Doesn’t Have a Big Idea?

• Exhibits without a Big Idea are often overwhelming, confusing, intimidating, and hard to grasp.
• They lack soul. They lack a “so what?”
• They are underutilized.
• Have you been to one?
Some Big Ideas

• Most of what we know about the universe comes from messages we read in light.
• A healthy swamp – an example of a threatened ecosystem – provides many surprising benefits to humans.
• The conditions for life on Earth in extreme environments help define the ways we search for life on other planets.
• Art depicting the California gold rush promoted a skewed romanticized vision of one of the 19th century’s most important events.

(Some NOT Big Ideas)

• This exhibit is about the settlement of the western United States. (This is a topic.)
• This exhibit will present the complex historical and scientific information surrounding the questionable authenticity of sculpture. (This is an objective.)
• Visitors will learn about molecular structure, chemical reactions, and the scientific process of analyzing unknown substances. (This is an outcome.)
• Visitors will develop a sense of wonder about nature by exploring the secret world of animals. (Outcome.)

How Do You Write a Big Idea?

• Invest the time up front
• Start with your mission
• Sources of inspiration:
  ✓ Objects
  ✓ Story
  ✓ Historical event
  ✓ Current issue
  ✓ What else?
  • Test it out on anyone who will listen
  • Revise
  ...and revise again
How Can You Use Your Big Idea?

• A Big Idea is a litmus test for every element of your exhibit
  ✓ “What’s this got to do with the Big Idea?”

The Big Idea

POTENTIAL CONTENT

THE EXHIBITION

VISITOR QUESTIONS

How Can You Use Your Big Idea?

• A basis for evaluation
  ✓ A guide for setting your Visitor Experience Objectives
  ✓ A framework for Visitor Surveys

What Questions Do You Have about Big Ideas?

Let’s Discuss!
HANDS-ON ACTIVITY

START DRAFTING YOUR BIG IDEA

1) Divide into your museum team groups.
2) Brainstorm the Big Idea for your exhibit project.
3) Share your Big Idea draft statement with the group and let’s discuss.

Fremont Indian State Park – Project Title

• Big Idea
• Thoughts from the group

Snow College Library – Project Title

• Big Idea
• Thoughts from the group
JWP River History Museum – Project Title
- Big Idea
- Thoughts from the group

Kanab Heritage House – Project Title
- Big Idea
- Thoughts from the group

Swaner Preserve – Project Title
- Big Idea
- Thoughts from the group
YOUR ASSIGNMENT

SEE WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

1) Draft first version of the Exhibit Planning Worksheet. (See example provided.)
2) Draft first version of the Team & Timeline Management Worksheet. (See example provided.)
3) Bring to next session.
4) Check out the readings in your binder.
5) Don’t forget to holler for help if you need to!

Wrap Up!

• Support for this project provided in part by the Utah Division of Arts & Museums, with funding from the State of Utah. Thanks for our partnership!

• Thanks to American Alliance for Museums, American Association for State & Local History, Museum & Galleries New South Wales, and Museums Australia Victoria for valuable resources.

• Hand in evaluations and nametags to the basket please.

• Questions? Anything else? See you next time!

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