Power of Place: Developing Exhibits that Reflect Unique Communities
Co-creating Exhibits in partnership with Community-based Artists

1930s

2018

Power of Place, Interactivity Conference, 2019
Defining Community


These six neighborhoods have a population of approx 840,000 which is more than Denver, Boston, or Detroit.

BCM is the only municipal museum offering programs targeted to families with young children in this area.
A Shifting Exhibit Model Driven by Defining Goals: Visitor Experience, Institutional, Community Engagement

- Use contemporary art as a starting point of family conversations and provide a framework for engagement based on accessible content.

- Position the museum as part of the conversation about topics impacting the community such as housing and changing neighborhoods.

- Engage local artists and offer the opportunity for them to engage family audiences as part of their work and process.

- Respond to the constraints related to short-term rental exhibits

- Interest in challenging our internal team to create something fresh and new.
Co-Creating with Community-based Artists

March - September 2016
Featuring six NYC-based artists

December 2017 - June 2018
Partnership with artist Anderson Zaca
The Brooklyn Hi-Art! Machine collective created a fence weaving and invited visitors to create a message to share with their neighbors.
Aisha Cousins, *Mapping Soulville*

Aisha Cousins uses the history of Malcolm X Boulevards around the world as a point of departure to consider how street signs represent neighborhood culture and history.
Elizabeth Hamby, *Alphabet City*

In *Alphabet City* Elizabeth Hamby examines the architecture of New York City Housing Authorities’ 61 housing developments.
James Rojas, *Place It!*

James Rojas’ interactive urban planning model offered visitors the opportunity to consider the components of a community and build a neighborhood with everyday materials.
Priscilla Stadler, *Fragile City*

*Fragile City* addresses our vulnerability in a city laden with new housing and business developments replacing older establishments.
Rusty Zimmerman’s *Free Portrait Project* featured portraits of Crown Heights residents representing the neighborhood’s diversity and change over time as well as challenging the idea of historic portraiture.
Our City features six contemporary artists, each examining different aspects of what makes up a neighborhood and life in New York City.

The exhibition brings up difficult topics like neighborhood change and housing equity. Brooklyn Children’s Museum invites you to consider the quality of life in this city and take on the roles of urban planners, artists, architects, and visionaries as you ask these questions:

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A GOOD NEIGHBOR?

WHO DO YOU GREET WHEN YOU STEP OUTSIDE OR WALK DOWN YOUR STREET?

WHAT DO THE PEOPLE AND THE BUILDINGS IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD LOOK LIKE?

WHAT’S YOUR FAVORITE THING TO DO IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?

ARE THERE THINGS YOU WISH YOU COULD CHANGE ABOUT THE PLACE YOU LIVE?

WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A HEALTHY AND HAPPY NEIGHBORHOOD?
Welcome to the Brooklyn Children’s Museum block party! Block parties happen when members of a community come together to celebrate their street. They are a summertime tradition in neighborhoods all over New York City. Often the entire block is closed to cars so neighbors can share activities like jump rope, scooting, biking, sidewalk chalk, water play, grilling, and dancing. Some block parties have bouncy houses while others have live music and performances. Block parties are most popular in warm weather when neighbors of all ages can enjoy being outside together.

Have you ever been to a block party?  
Who are your neighbors?  
What kinds of things do you like to do on your block?

Send us a picture of your family on your stoop or in your neighborhood and we’ll include it as part of the Block Party exhibit!

#BKStoopSelfie  #BCMBlockParty  BlockParty@brooklynkids.org
Activities included: grilling fake food, spinning at the DJ station, hula hoops, jump rope, hop scotch, and a community photo mural
Exhibits have become inspiration for:

Professional Development Workshops

Artist-led Programs

Community Events

Pop-up Exhibits
Extending the Experience

Our City Activity Booklet

Block Party Newspaper
Lessons Learned (& we’re still learning!)

**Find the right community partner for collaboration!**

• Craft an **agreement for partnership** that clearly lays out the expectations. If an artist define use of the artwork- existing or commission, materials, support for installation, insurance, honorarium, etc.

• Seek partners that **genuinely want to engage families and children in their process** and/or art-making.

• Create **mutually beneficial exchanges** beyond the exhibit. Partner for grants, pop-up exhibit opportunities, public programs, lectures, etc.

• Collect **visitor feedback** and respond to it!
Thank you!

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Children & Families Developing Exhibits

Lindsay Newton – Manager, Early Childhood and Family Programs
Our Story - Family Programs
Big Dreams: A History Clubhouse

• Bring history alive - learn about STL history in a way that is interactive and **FUN**
• For kids ages 2–10 with their families or caregivers
• Highlight collection
• Everything is hands-on
Family Voting

Ancient city of Cahokia

Downtown, present day

Forest Park, 1904

Mississippi River, early 1870s
Elementary School Focus Groups

- What do kids already know about their city?
- What gets kids excited about their city?
Family Focus Groups

• What did you do when you visited?
• What is going on in each picture?
• What did you like most?
• What do you wish you could have done while you were there?
Full-Scale Prototype
History Clubhouse: Let’s Build It!
Feedback Stations for Kids

1. Draw what you think the History Clubhouse should look like.

2. What are you most excited to do in the History Clubhouse? Vote for your two favorite activities.
Feedback Stations for Adults

1. How can we make the History Clubhouse a great space for you and your family?
2. What did your family do today?
3. Tell us about a time when your children have shown an interest in history.
Labels & Art
Promotion - Banner Contest
Takeaways

• Design: physical openness, photographs, visual appeal
• Labels: small and digestible “fun facts”, simple yet provoking questions, or prompts to try something
• Safety
• Cleaning, maintenance threshold
• Staffing
Downtown St. Louis
Forest Park
The Ancient City of Cahokia
The Mississippi River
Thank You!

Lindsay Newton
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Rethinking Authority and Visitor Agency (Without Breaking Your Museum)

Dana Schloss
Director of Exhibit Experience
New York Hall of Science (NYSci)
Where our visitors come from

NYC’s Five Boroughs (83%)
Tri-state Area (14%)
International & Domestic Travel (3%)
NYSci Neighbors
Pilot Testing with NYSci Neighbors
Visitor generated exhibits
Of our visitors, rather than for
Dana Schloss
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Emerging Power of Place: Children’s Museum of Yuma County

- Our first community-developed exhibit was “Bugs in a Bug”
- Designed in collaboration with Yuma Rotary Club
• Developing our first community-focused exhibit gave us:
  • Experts in the community
  • Passionate supporters
  • Loyal donors
  • Outreach specialists

• Led us to continue the partnership for a second year and took us to...
Mission: Space Connections
Focused on Yuma’s partnership with NASA
Highlighted other Arizona connections to NASA

• Lowell Observatory
• USGS-Flagstaff
• Arizona State University
Additional help from Museum Alliance (NASA/JPL in Pasadena)
Our journey to developing an exhibit that reflects our community...

• Find local experts
• Identify your supporters and advocates
• Venture outside of the community if needed

• Does the exhibit reflect the depth and breadth of the idea(s) you are exploring?
Thank you!

Melissa Rushin Irr
Executive Director

Children’s Museum of Yuma County
Yuma, Arizona

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Strategies
For Developing Exhibits that Reflect
Unique Communities
Gauge your audience

- What do they know?
- What excites them?
- Predisposed ideas/biases/fears?
- What don’t they know?
- What do they want to find out?
Invite your community to the table

• Who is already at the table? Who do you want to invite?
• Let them lead the way
• Not just at the beginning!
• Collaborate with other local organizations
Include front-line team members

- They are exposed to valuable visitor insight EVERY DAY
Be willing to change course

• Supports visitor-centric experience
• Promotes inclusion
• Allow time!
Use a familiar context

- Comfort
- Connect previous knowledge to new ideas
Incorporate multiple perspectives

- Provides new context to real world issues
- Encourage thinking in new ways
- Acknowledge multiple truths
Include personal stories

• Feature first-person stories
• Use their voices or exact words instead of paraphrasing or summarizing their story
Recreate experiences to support full immersion

• Allows kids to imagine places, events, and times they have not experienced
• Creates a memory – “I experienced that”
• Fosters empathy
Use real/authentic artifacts, objects, tools, and photos

• Provide unique experiences that can be tactile → empowering

• Encourage close looking, questions, and new conclusions or opinions

• “See it, try it”
Focus on relevant topics

- Provides new context to real world issues
- Encourages thinking in new ways
- Be fearless! Explore the big and complex
Encourage playing and learning together

• Parents as first teachers
• Provide suggestions for parents
• Vary for different types of learners
• Supports:
  • Social skills
  • Communication
  • Problem solving
  • Creative thinking
Foster story sharing

- Encourage visitors to share personal stories with each other
- Contribute personal stories
- Meaningful and memorable
Encourage engagement beyond the exhibit

• Suggest ways to continue learning at home or elsewhere in the community

• Ideal to encourage reflection

• Advocacy
Plan ways to measure success

• Quantitative
• Qualitative
2 minutes
Silent Personal Reflection

Think to yourself about something you have done or aspire to do that has engaged your home community in a meaningful way.
15-20 minutes
Group Work

Think about a challenge/success/unique aspect of YOUR home community and use these strategies to brainstorm how to develop a museum experience.
Share Session & Conclusion
Thank you!