AASLH

TECHNICAL LEAFLET BUNDLE

A PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR STATE AND LOCAL HISTORY

Programs for Your Public

BNDL018

This bundle includes great ideas for beginning or improving your programs. From theater techniques for interpretation to innovative programs for millennials, these ideas are sure to be crowd pleasers and attention-getters.

TL197—Interpreting Foodways (1997)

TL227—Theater 101 for Historical Interpretation (2004)

TL254—Designing Education Programs that Connect Students to Your Collections (2011)

TL263—What's the Big Idea? Using Listening Sessions to Build Relationships & Relevance (2013)

TL272—How to Design Programs for Millennials (2015)

This bundle may help institutions achieve the standards as set forth under the Interpretation section of the AASLH Standards and Excellence for History Organizations Program (StEPs).

HISTORY NEWS TECHNICAL LEAFLET

A PUBLICATION OF THE
AMERICAN ASSOCIATION
FOR STATE AND LOCAL HISTORY

Interpreting Food History

BY SANDRA OLIVER

Food is at the center of all human endeavor. Your visitors, members, staff, and trustees all share the need for sustenance. Museums and historic sites across the country have the opportunity to connect their visitors to some aspect of food history, whether the site is an historic house with only a dining room or a living history farm with animals as well as crops of grain, vegetables, and fruit. Technology and science museums can demonstrate the link between food production and distribution, and its eventual preparation and consumption. Fine and decorative art collections invariably have images depicting food as well as objects decorated with food motifs or created for food service or consumption.

A food history program can be as simple as a single lecture to accompany an exhibit, or as rich as a fully-integrated, year round, farm-and-kitchen, from-field-to-table program. Many sites enjoy the liveliness and interest that a cooking demonstration brings, but even a few selected pieces of faux food can add a new level of meaning to an object or room. The wonderful and important thing about food is that all your visitors—no matter what age, background, or gender—understand food on some level, even if only through their own personal tastes. Food can also be used as an entry point for introducing more complicated themes and ideas.

BEGINNING PRINCIPLES

Take Food History Seriously. Food history is nearly the last of the social history topics to emerge. While anthropologists have long recognized food's role in human behavior, historians have been slow to regard it as a worthy topic, even (or perhaps especially) women's studies and feminist historians. Many historians who did acknowledge it, were regarded as slightly eccentric. In the past twenty-five years, however, symposia, exhibits, publications, and extraordinary scholarship have increased awareness of food history within scholarly communities. University presses are now the best sources of historical cookbook reprints and new scholarship. Some universities offer food history topics and a few Ph.D. candidates have written, or are writing, their dissertations in food history.

Concomitantly, history museums have abandoned the mere baking of gingerbread to develop sophisticated foodways programs which delve not only into the production and preparation of sometimes complex dishes, but also the social significance of table settings and manners. Historic sites now plan for food history programs as carefully as they do for other research-based programs.

Use an Interdisciplinary Approach. Food is ephemeral, and cooking and eating are behavior. No one discipline alone adequately informs us about food in the past; no single resource will provide even a majority of the facts we need. Period cookbooks are actually the last link in a chain of resources you will need.

Material culture studies including architecture, historical archaeology, agricultural history, and social history will best support food programs at traditional history sites. Anthropology, ethnology, folklore, economics, food sciences, and nutrition have a great deal to offer the open-minded historian. *Most importantly,* cooking is to the study of food history as the performance of music is to musicology. Food cannot be studied on paper alone. The gravest errors in contemporary writing about food or domestic work history occur when the historian has not cooked or consulted with someone who has.

State of the Art. Food history is a new and emerging field, and naturally the quality of the scholarship is still evolving. In recreating a group's or site's foodways, plan to address all the following:

- food supply—commercial and domestic including seasonal variations
- water source and supply
- food preparation spaces: kitchens, field kitchens, pantries, cellars
- cooks and other food handlers
- available cooking technology—hearth or stove, and equipment
- dining area and equipage
- daily meal patterns and seasonal variations including holidays

The better studies of foodways describe all these. To move to the level of understanding the *significance* of food, seek the following:

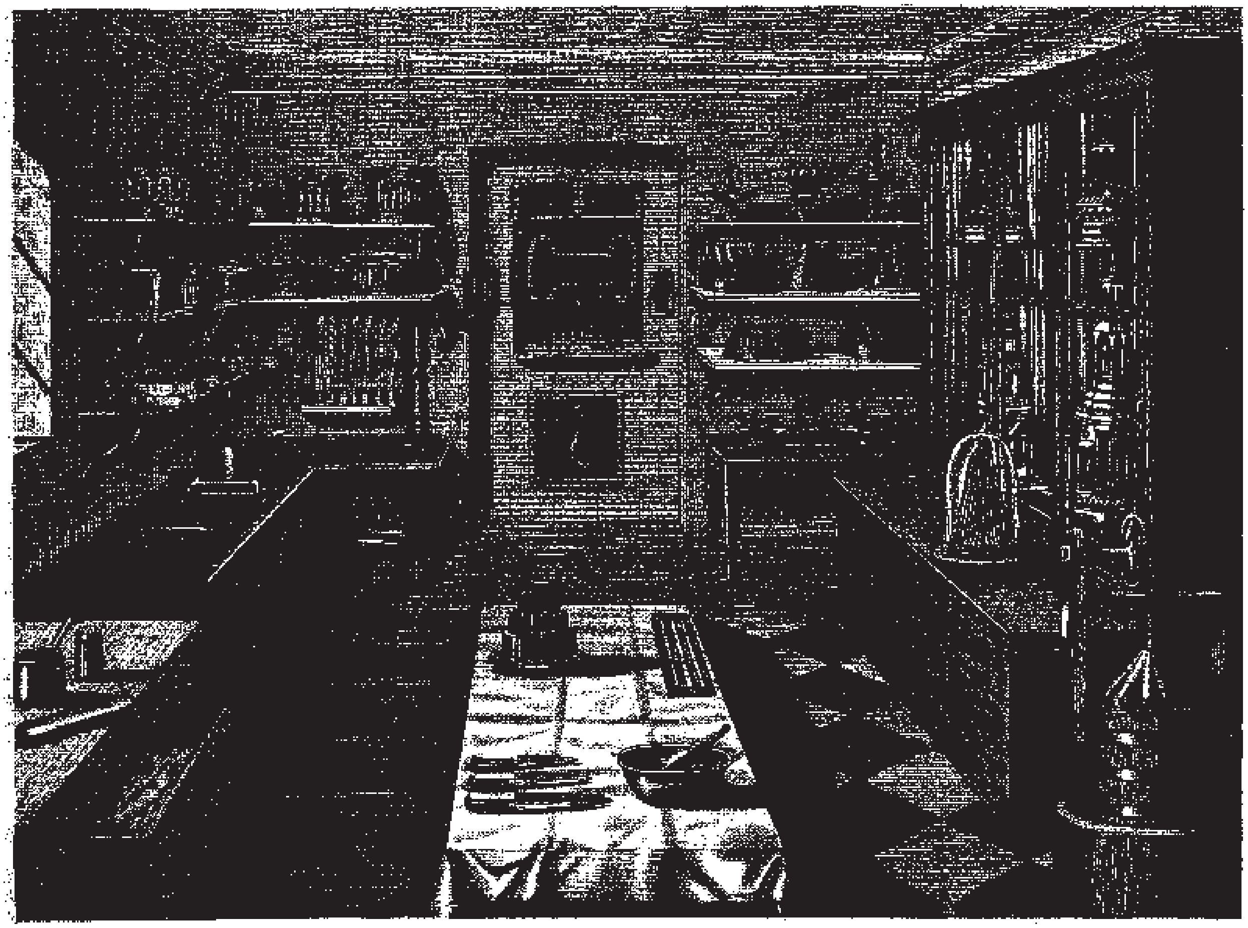
- evidence of conflict over or around food, including theft
- expressions of satisfaction and dissatisfaction about food supplies, preparation, and service.
- contrasts of plenty and want
- effects of the market on production and consumption by both producers and consumers
- evidence of industrialization on food supply and preparation
- evidence of refinement and gentrification of food
- evidence of food as identity markers for class, gender, ethnicity, region
- issues of health and nutrition
- magical or power attributes of certain foods
- correlations between certain foods and the producers and/or preparers
- (fish and fishermen, women and kitchen gardens, dairying, men barbecuing, etc.)

Secondary Sources: A great deal of the better known secondary works on food history are gradually being replaced by better scholarship. Generally speaking, plan to use work published before the 1970s with care. In fact, use the bibliographies and footnotes from these works to lead you to the original sources themselves which you will want to examine. Waste no time with any work lacking footnotes or bibliography.

WHAT WILL YOUR COLLECTION SUPPORT?

Food interpretation, like any other interpretive aspect of your site, is always best if there is sufficient material and documentary evidence to back it up. The richest and most accurate story is the one that will be most specific to your site. We already have plenty of generic hearth cooking programs across the country to introduce the topic. We are best served when sites seek ways to personalize and localize their food story. Your collection is the key to what you can do.

Architecture. When owners modify domestic structures, kitchens are among the first rooms to be modernized. Many restored historic homes no longer have kitchens (or the rooms are so altered that they are barely recognizable). Support rooms like pantries



and cellars, or in some regions out-buildings like dairies, smoke houses, and spring houses are also missing or obscured.

Work from your strengths: if you have lost your kitchen but have interesting extant outbuildings, consider developing a program that utilizes them. For example, if you have a smoke house, emphasize meat preservation. If you are lacking a dining room, consider depicting small meals consumed in other rooms.

If your site is positioned to make extensive restoration, keep in mind that the field could use more *urban* kitchen exhibits, twentieth century restorations or recreations, work camp, institutional, and underclass kitchens.

Archaeology. Food remains uncovered by archaeology close the gap between the prescriptive literature of cookbooks and general facts about food supply. Ceramics and metals help us accurately set the table, furnish kitchen, and select storage containers. Through archaeology you can present a highly personalized account of your site. If your site has been analyzed by archaeologists, reexamine the reports with an eye for food-related artifacts. If not, put a dig on your wish list, or examine information about similar socio-economic sites in your region.

Research Resources. Primary sources are often rich in incidental but revealing food references. Make sure you include food among your card catalog headings, and on manuscript reader's review sheets, so you can find your references again when you need them. Alert research staff to note the locations of food references.

Here is what to expect to find in various sorts of primary sources:

Manuscript narratives and personal accounts, letters, journals, and diaries — not everyone in past times talked about the food they ate. Those who did primarily described special occasions. These sources are significant, as they add personal experience to your research. Look also for miscellaneous, off-hand references to daily activities which shed light on your subject's food habits—references to gardening activity, animal husbandry, shopping expeditions, trades or exchanges with neighbors, and food gifts.

Account books — If you have account books for your site's occupants, read for food information. These sources will tell you what food was brought in, and in what quantity, and prices listed will shed light on relative values of foods. Look also for evidence of food exchanges, particularly of fresh meat and produce. Account books from food vending businesses describe what was available, average quantities and frequencies sold. Account books also reveal information about food related household equipment.

Inventories — These are well known to reveal information about both furnishing and food- related tools. Earlier ones particularly mention food; read with an eye to skewing by seasonal limitations or family politics.

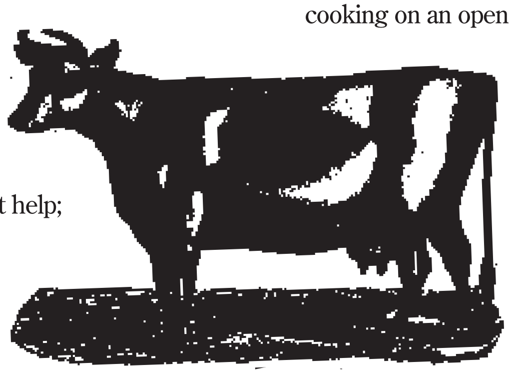
Period imprints, particularly travel and description and local history — These sources can reveal general and particular information about your site and subject(s). Guests and travelers often described meals served to them by prominent individuals, as well as food served in public houses. Sometimes they described local customs, agricultural practices, trade, and industries—all of which can shed light on food history.

Pitfall: Beware of boosterisim or hypercritical reviews. The oft-quoted Frances Trollop, for example, disliked almost everything she encountered about American food and eating habits. Compare her descriptions to those of the curious and observant Swedish naturalist, Peter Kalm.

Newspapers — Modern people do not believe everything they read in newspapers, and neither should historians. Newspaper advertisements are, however, a good source for supply information. Newspapers carried special occasion menus for public dinners and miscellaneous food-related events as well as information about local farming or gardening. Look for seasonal variations on food supply and food humor, which often reveals attitudes toward various foods.

Literature — Prose and poetry may present another view—albeit often dramatized—of regional and period foodways. Compare these descriptions with other material from your site's era, and use to find overlaps in attitudes about food. These overlapping areas are often where you gain the highest accuracy.

Cookbooks and recipe notebooks — Cookbooks are *prescriptive* literature. They describe what is *supposed* to happen under the best conditions. The early works—pre-1800—are most often written for gentry household, assuming a housewife is instructing servants. Later works are more likely to address the middle-class housewife cook herself, with or without help; the well-known *American Frugal Housewife* is a good example. A few books were geared towards the lower-classes. As the nineteenth progressed into the twentieth century, cookbooks were often written by reformers with an agenda. Cookbooks are virtually useless for underclass sites and marginally useless for early frontier sites except as background information. Southern gentry sites will find English and Southern cookbooks more useful during the antebellum period than later, and Northerners will find an enormous array of books at their disposal, for many cookbook writers and publishers were from the northeast.



Pitfall: Cookbook dates do not always reflect the era of the cooking within. Publishers often reprinted cookbooks intact for up to twenty or more years after their initial writing, even though certain food supplies and technologies changed. On the other hand, food habits are very conservative—they are among the last habits to change, either individually or as a culture, so material from an *earlier* era may best reflect your sites' foodways, especially if the occupants were older. Do not adhere to your usual period limitations with foodways research, but be flexible at least up to twenty years (and even as many as thirty years) before and after.

Manuscripts recipes — These are the inner circle of written instruction. As with cookbooks, the life of many manuscript receipt books is very long, often begun at the commencement of a married life, and added to over time. Expect to find a plethora of recipes for desserts, preserves, and remedies—items requiring more precision and made less frequently than daily meat and potatoes. Food historians assume that handwritten recipes represent foods the cook actually prepared or certainly intended to, and so come considerably closer to reflecting an individual's or family's preferences.

You will be best served if your site has a printed or manuscript cookbook in the collection known to have been used on site, or from the occupying family. The next best thing is a printed or manuscript cookbook from a similar family and time.

Food Related Artifacts. Along with the time lag that occurs with recipes, there are tremendous variations in acceptance of technology, food supply, and cookery habits across the country and even within regions. This underlines the necessity for local and *contextual* research. In the mid-nineteenth century across the United States and Canada, there were simultaneously urban households equipped for wood or coal stove cookery, with a great range of foodstuffs available and prepared in the highest of styles, and rural poor and frontier households cooking on an open hearth with a food supply more typical of a hundred years earlier.

If your site lacks specific inventories, take a very hard look at the site's collection of food-related artifacts for information on how the objects came to be in the collection. Wherever possible, match your collection to additional information from archaeological or documentary evidence. Too often museum collections, especially those of house museums, have been subject to artifact accumulation of the "wouldn't it be nice to have...." variety.

Once you have examined your collection, consider how much you wish to have on exhibit. Sites which want to maximize artifacts on view may wish to have less real-food activity. Sites with a thin collection of historical culinary equipment may find this a good opportunity to acquire usable reproductions.

Ancillary Food-Related Site Programs. Field crops, gardens, and animals all support a food program and integrate the whole story of an historic site. A site with a milk cow can consider more seriously a cheese-making demonstration; a site with an orchard can economically conduct a cider-pressing program.

CHOOSING PROGRAM LEVEL

Occasional or Annual. Some sites interpret food once a year, often in conjunction with a holiday or a special event. Other sites add a food component to all special events. For example, a site sponsoring a militia encampment may encourage the group to cook, both for themselves and for the public; a site hosting a fall event may present historical ways of working with apples or other fall crops; summer house tours might conclude with a recreation of an historic tea. Consider turning to outside vendors, reenactors, or professionals to present a program. Many come with their own equipment and materials and the cost of hiring them will be considerably less than building and maintaining your own program. You can also consider training a cadre of volunteers who will perform cookery as needed for special events.

Regular. Some sites choose to have food presentation each day the site is open; others prefer to present food programs on weekends or on maximum attendance days. Still other sites designate one weekend a month for a regular program. Sites open only seasonally gear their foodways programs accordingly. Southern sites may prefer to operate in the cooler months, for the sake of both visitors and staff.

Special Programs. Programs with or for children, schools, elderhostels, culinary arts, or other special food interest groups, are an ideal way to present your food history. Using food as the entry point, be sure to coordinate school programs with curriculums for local or state history program requirements.

Several museums across the country offer special evening dinners, often cooked down-hearth with hands-on participation, followed by period games or music. Such programs can be quite successful, with reservations going on choice weekend nights for as much as $50 per person. Other sites offer birthday parties, teas, picnics, even breakfast programs.

Such programs usually require a back-up kitchen with standard dish washing equipment and refrigeration, as well as some level of pre-program preparation. In some seasonally operated sites, these programs provide winter employment for historic cooking staff.

Thematic Programs. One successful approach to a foodways program is field-to-kitchen, showing the processing of agricultural or farm products into household foods. Examples include showing dairying processes from grazing to milking to cheese and butter making; or wheat from harvesting, threshing, milling, to baking bread. Seasonal changes offer natural variations.

Other theme possibilities include those based on one ingredient, such as corn or sorghum. Site cooks can recreate various dishes featuring unique regional uses of the ingredient, and underscore the daily importance and variations in its uses. Sometimes a theme such as "bread" leads to similar explorations of yeast, flour, baking processes, artifacts, symbolism associated with bread, and the various uses of bread.

Fireless Programs. Where fragile collections or conservation policy prohibit live fires, a selection of fireless activities can enrich regular programming. Some processes can be started or finished with conventional heating off-site, with the rest of the process conducted in public view. Examples: custard can be churned into ice cream, milk heated then made into soft-cheeses; vegetables prepared for pickling with the hot process completed later. Other processes can be done completely without fire: sauerkraut making, vegetable or fruit drying, butter churning, or cold dessert assembly.

Foodless Programs. Conservation-safe food exhibits are certainly possible. A very small handful of custom faux food producers across the country can fashion displays of whole meals from roasts to trifles, or produce an array of small sweets to depict a tea. Faux food leaves nothing to the imagination, and often leave sites looking as if they had purchased all the same take-out food from some historic deli. The selection of artifacts to suggest a recipe in the making or the preparation of a particular meal, leaves a site free to display unusual and intriguing artifacts, and the meals or processes that rarely get attention, such as breakfast, gelatin, and molded dessert making.

EQUIPPING YOUR PROGRAM

What to obtain. Except for gentry sites, there are about forty items which regularly appear by 1840 in inventories, outfitting lists, and household hint books. Later nineteenth century sites have more stuff—specialized gadgets and storage containers. Earlier seventeenth and eighteenth century sites, frontier sites, and underclass sites have fewer. To determine your historic battery de cuisine, examine inventories, archaeological reports, and, if known, cookbooks used at your site.

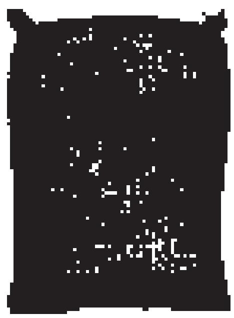
Pitfall: Some historic kitchens look as if the curators had spent a great deal of time with the historic equivalent of the William's Sonoma Catalog. Beware over-furnishing.

Artifacts. Each historic site will make their decision about artifact use depending on their collections policy and practice. You may use more durable artifacts carefully—even cast iron can be fragile and crack if dropped—while you can never use other pieces—particularly glass and ceramics. Depending on the extent of your cooking program, you may be able to equip yourself with sufficient *reproductions* for preparing your basic menu, while displaying artifacts representing special occasions or infrequent processes.

Reproductions. Certain items are widely available: very decent, faithfully reproduced redware and yellow ware pottery, forged ironware, tinware, and treen.

Glass, silver, and fine ceramics are much more difficult to find, and equipping your site from the present supply tends towards an eerily homogenous look.

Food. The good news with food supplies is that most historic recipes call merely for basic ingredients: flour, sugar, molasses, lard, butter, vegetables, meat. The bad news is that obtaining ingredients that authentically replicate earlier forms is next to impossible: with flour, for example, you can come *close,* but the wheat grown in earlier times is no longer available. Renewed interest in heirloom plants and early breeds continuously brings into reach more truly appropriate period food. With a little effort, you can find local supplies of traditionally processed foods like stone ground meals, sweeteners like sorghum, preserved meats and fish, and other regional specialties. Otherwise, obtain the least processed foods possible, matching as nearly as possible its probable historical appearance.



Pitfalls: Its very tempting to make inappropriate substitutions to satisfy modern taste: do not permit margarine where lard should be used or baking powder where saleratus was the rule. Site food budgets also skew the historic picture. In any given week, a great deal more chicken is cooked in museums across the country than was cooked in an entire historic *month* or more across the whole country. Consider the purchase of large quantities of beef and pork, even whole sides, for custom butchering for your site.

Fire. Sites which go to great trouble to furnish period kitchens with reproductions need to obtain firewood and kindling that matches period technology. If period kindling is impossible, make sure the fire is lit before visitors appear on the scene. Shavings created by draw knives or hand planes are better than newspaper, and hatchet-split kindling is better than shop scraps. Check to make sure no plywood, pressure treated, or composite scraps have crept into the wood box. If necessary, train cooks in hatchet use.

Back-up kitchen. You may wish to have back-up facilities for standard refrigeration, food storage, and clean-up. Plan it in proportion to your program. For example, large programs with extensive year-round cookery may need a great deal of cold storage, while smaller programs can use household-sized equipment. You will need washers and dryers to wash towels and miscellaneous linens.

STAFFING AND TRAINING

Cooks as Artisans. When training staff, do not assume a correlation of gender and cooking skill. While it is true that women still do most household cooking, the nature of cooking itself has changed so much over the past twenty years that such common historic methods as bread making, baking from scratch, disjointing fowl, boiling puddings in a bag, are not universally familiar, and will require as much training as the use of hand planes.

Cooking is a skill, and historic cooking is a highly developed skill requiring the same practice, repetition, and self-confidence as other crafts. Performing the skill before the public and other staff members while explaining it takes it to still another level. Your historic cooks will need the same respect, training, careful selection, and support as your other crafts people.

Interviewing and Selection. Do interview specifically for historic cook assignments. Make sure your prospective cook at least likes to cook, has affinity for food, and is self-confident. If your site does butchering and meat preparation, be sure staff will be comfortable with related tasks. Curious and energetic people open to experimentation are a better bet for historical cooking than the gourmet cook, who may have a great deal of pride attached to his/her performance. If your site permits it, consider men for cooks: sites with bakeries, gentry homes where a chef might have been employed, production cheese works, work camps, and the like are possible places for men to do food preparation.

Training. Provide your cooks with broad exposure to primary sources. If needed, prepare them ahead of time with guidelines for critical reading. Mere exposure to a few photocopied recipes from a period cookbook is inadequate. Expose them to narratives, accounts books, newspapers, letters, and archaeological reports. Encourage continued reading. Food references are usually so buried that the more people you have scouring the research sources for them, the better. Provide a standardized system of notation so work is shared.

Provide hands-on, in-kitchen training from fire-building and handling to oven-heating to all the basic cooking processes: boiling, broiling, frying, roasting, baking. Send staff members to a site with an established program for a one- or two-week apprenticeship, or bring an experienced hearth or wood stove cook and teacher to your site for intensive work with new staff. Allow each new staff member to become adept at basic processes—boiling, frying, broiling, before having them move on to roasting, boiling in bags, and baking from scratch. Adjust menus accordingly.

DAILY OPERATIONS

Cooks and Coordinators. Assign responsibility to one person for planning menus and assigning supplies, provisioning, and over-seeing the food storage facilities. In the best-run programs, cooking sites are equipped with appropriate basic supplies—flours, meals, sweetenings, seasonings—and cooks pick up, or have delivered daily, assigned groceries from a back-up kitchen. Leftovers are returned to the back-up kitchen, evaluated for further use, and stored. Grocery assignments prevent assertive cooks from selecting choice viands for an impressive display, and leaving the rest of the staff in the lurch for lunch. It also prevents shyer historic cooks from reliance on a limited repertoire.

As in any household, one person needs to oversee food supplies, check for spoilage, replenish supplies, and ensure cleanliness. You may also wish to assign this person the budget responsibilities for the program.

To Eat or Not to Eat. Historic sites with cooking programs vary tremendously in their policies about whether staff or the public can eat the food prepared. Obviously, food prepared in an historic setting simply cannot precisely match modern standards for cleanliness—in fact, if they do, the food is probably not being prepared authentically enough. (It should be noted that modern Americans are considerably more anxious about food safety than most of our European contemporaries; a good example, is the difficulty of obtaining in the U.S. French cheeses made from unpasteurized milk and consumed with impunity by thousands of French.) Check with local food handling regulations if you decide to serve the food to the public.

Some sites encourage staff to eat interpretively in the public view to show period appropriate food service and table manners. Support this kind of interpretation with a handout or staff member to explain to visitors what is going on and why the public isn't free to join in. Otherwise, since our society considers it ill-mannered to eat in front of someone without sharing, staff is well advised to take the consumable food to a staff lunchroom where it can be eaten discretely.

FOR THE FUTURE

Oral history. Food is evocative. You will find visitors not only interested (or sometimes, repulsed) by the cookery they see, but forcibly reminded of their own food habits, childhood associations, and memories. Valuable information about food in our century, ripe for preservation, will be offered to the historic site positioned to record it. Let your foodways program recruit potential informants. If you already have an active oral history program, consider adding questions about eating habits and food supply. If your tapes are indexed, be sure to include references to food in the index.

Food and Family History. One western historic site sponsored a family food heritage program. They invited museum members and the public to bring to a potluck supper a dish made from their own family's collection of recipes along with a copy of the recipe, information about their family, and significance of the dish. The recipes and information were added to the museum's collection. At such an event, dishes reveal various ethnic and economic groups as well as countries and regions, sparking participant interest in further exploration.

Archiving Manuscript Material. If a collection of family papers is coming to your site or library, inquire after the culinary material, *particularly* handwritten recipe notebooks and cards. Now is the time to collect the early to mid-twentieth century material which shows the terrific changes of the transition from an era dominated by home food processing to the one dominated by the market place; the introduction of many now familiar ethnic foods; the coping strategies for the rationing during World War I and World War II, and the deprivations of the Depression. This material is tremendously endangered. While culinary ephemera and printed cookbooks have value as collectibles, the handwritten material is frequently thrown away.

GETTING MILEAGE FROM YOUR PROGRAM

Tying Food to Curriculum. Food programs can be tied to school curricula not only via history and social studies, but math, science, and geography. Food topics increasingly find a sympathetic interest among teachers.

Historic Sites and Food Writers. Most daily newspapers feature food once a week—on Wednesday—and unleash an army of copy-hungry food writers to whom information about historic food programs greatly appeals. Food professionals are discovering food history and are among the most enthusiastic consumers of historic food news. A lively program at your site will give a food writer a reason to return to your site.

Artisanal Food Movement and Museums. Along with greater interest in food history, general consumers and professionals alike are increasingly interested in the craft of producing specific foods, known as artisanal foods—hand formed bread, micro-brewed beer, traditional cheeses, charcuterie, and preserves. Food history can provide deep background on artisanal foods, and food artisans can provide food products tied to your program for sale in your museum shop.

Publishing Food History. Many historic sites have cookbooks for sale in their museum shops, too often hastily-assembled compilations of locally favorite recipes. If publishing is possible at your site, consider a book based on manuscript recipes from your collection, provided in the original as well as a version clarified for modern cooks. A collection of food-related extracts from site-related travel and description, diaries, journals, and letters is a valuable addition to food history scholarship.

RESOURCES

Bibliography

The best new food history work in North America is regional, and too numerous to list here. Several bibliographies have been assembled which will give you titles for reference:

Bitting, Katherine Golden. *Gastronomic Bibliography.* San Francisco: the author, 1939.

Lowenstein, Eleanor. *Bibliography of American Cookery Books, 1742-1860, Based on Waldo Lincoln's American Cookery Books, 1742-1860.* 3d ed. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1972.

Longone, Janice and Longone, Daniel. *American Cookbooks and Wine Books, 1797-1950. Being an Exhibition from the Collections of, and with Historical Notes.* Ann Arbor: Clements Library, Wine and Food Library, 1984.

New York, New York Public Library. *Regional American Cookery, 1884-1934; a List of Works on the Subject.* Comp. by James E. Gourley, New York, 1936, Reprinted with Additions from the *Bulletin of the NY Public Library of June-July, 1935.*

Oxford, Arnold W. *English Cookery Books to the Year 1850.* (Reprint of London: New York: Oxford University Press, 1913) London: Holland, 1977.

Weaver, William W. *Early Printed Cookbooks of Pennsylvania Germans: their Sources and Their Legacy.* From Pfalzer /Palatines. Heimatstelle Pfalz, 1981.

The Wine Institute. *Selective Bibliography of Wine Books.* San Francisco, 1944.

Wheaton, Barbara and Kelly, Patricia. *Bibliography of Culinary History: Food Resources in Eastern Massachusetts.* Boston: G.K. Hall & Co. n.d. Excellent comprehensive listing of many centuries of culinary material.

Associations

Association for Living Historical Farms and Agricultural Museums. ALHFAM has a vigorous foodways committee which ensures food history presentations at all its annual conferences, and often at regional meetings as well. For membership information write: Judith M. Sheriden, Sect/Treas., 8774 Route 45, NW, North Bloomfield, OH, 44450. ALHFAM's web page: http://www.mystic.org/alhfam

Culinary Historians: There are culinary historian groups in Boston, New York, Ann Arbor, Houston, Chicago, San Diego, Washington, DC, Delaware Valley, Hawaii, and Toronto. If you wish a list of addresses and membership information please send a SASE to S.L. Oliver, Food History News, HCR 60 Box 354A, Islesboro, ME 04848.

Replicas, Reproductions, and Books

Replica Resource List. Compiled by ALHFAM's Replica Resource Committee. Send $12.00 ($7.00 for ALHFAM members) to Museum Research Associates, Ron Kley and Jane Radcliffe, 11 Spring St., Hallowell, ME, 04347.

Early American Homes publishes an annual list of craftsmen many of whom produce museum quality reproductions.

Prospect Books and *Food Heritage Press.* These two publishers are leaders in the ever-growing field: Prospect Books is one of, if not the, first publishers of annotated reprints. To send for the catalog, write: Prospect Books, Allaleigh House, Blackawton, Totnes, Devon, TQ9 7DL, Great Britain. Food Heritage Press is a new mail order business but has the *most* comprehensive selection of historical cookbook reprints and scholarly work on food history. For a catalog send $1.00 to Food Heritage Press, PO Box 163, Ipswich, MA 01938-0163

Early Cookbooks

Specialty sellers of period cookbooks, and wine and food books, abound in virtually all regions of the country. Look for advertisements in the same places you see information about antiques and collectibles.

Publications

Petits Propos Culinaire. For nearly two decades PPC has addressed food and food history for all periods and places, regularly reviews books, invites inquiries, and broadens considerably one's perspective of the field. For current subscription information and instructions inquire at PPC, 45 Lamont Rd., London, SW 10 HO, England.

Food History News. Founded in 1989 for historic cooks in museums, the quarterly newsletter FHN continues to serve museum audiences as well as food professionals and culinary historians with regular pieces on military and domestic foodways, news in food history scholarship, sources for equipment and information. Send $15 for one year, $28 for two years, to FHN, HCR 60 Box 354A, Iselsboro, ME 04848.

Culinary historian groups frequently have fine and informative newsletters.

Sandra Oliver is a food historian and editor of *Food History News.* Her recent publication, *Saltwater Foodways: New Englanders and Their Food at Sea and Ashore in the Nineteenth Century,* was published by Mystic Seaport Museum. She can be contacted at HCR 60 Box 354-A, Islesboro, Maine 04848; (207) 734-8140.

AASLH
TECHNICAL LEAFLET
A PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR STATE AND LOCAL HISTORY
#227

Theater 101 for Historical Interpretation

By Dale Jones

BEING "HIPP"
USING HEART, IMAGINATION, PLANNING, AND PHYSICALITY IN HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION

All understanding interpreters know as well as I what the ideal interpretation implies: re-creation of the past, and kinship with it. The problem is how to achieve this desirable end. It is not easy…So, in interpretive effort we are constantly considering ways and means of bringing the past to the present, for the stimulation of our visitors…

Freeman Tilden—*Interpreting Our Heritage*

Interpreters at historic sites and history museums and the visitors to those sites have quite similar goals. Both want an engaging experience that brings the past alive and makes it understandable. Interpreters want to create those experiences, and visitors want to enjoy them.

Creating those experiences, as Tilden says above, "is not easy," but he does suggest a way out of this difficulty—through art:

Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical, or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.

One of those arts, that far too often goes unrecognized in the history field, is theater. If the goal of historical interpretation is to engage and inform visitors, then some of the best tools for achieving those goals come from the world of theater. Whether you are playing a costumed character in first or third person interpretation,[1] performing in a scripted museum theatre production, talking to visitors on the floor of the museum, or designing interpretation, four key factors from the world of theater are essential for developing quality interpretation. While you can have some success by not incorporating all four, or by incorporating them half-heartedly, those who excel in their interpretation display strong elements of each: heart, imagination, planning, and physicality.

Heart is the passion, the love you bring to your work. That heart or passion may be found in your love of history. It may be your commitment to a museum or site. Or it may be fueled by your love of performing for an audience. No matter what the reason, to succeed with style in museum interpretation, you have to have passion and a desire for doing a great job—you gotta have heart.

Imagination provides the spark of creativity that lifts your ideas and presentations out of the ordinary and into the realm of greatness. Imagination gives you the capacity to see new, exciting ways to do something or to show connections that will help the audience understand your ideas.

Planning ties everything together. It is the careful design and organizational structure that allows you to utilize all the other components in a logical, systematic way to achieve your interpretive goals. Planning forces you to think ahead, to assess your interpretive goals, your audience, and the best way to reach them. Planning then helps you design a process for a successful, engaging interpretation and allocate time for practice or rehearsal until you get it right.

Physicality, or control of your body and voice, leads to a presentation that visitors can understand. What good will it do you to have created the most engaging and thoughtful presentation, only to discover that people did not hear or understand what you said or that you bored them with a monotonous voice? Knowing how to use your tools, in this case your physicality, lets you construct a presentation that audiences can see, hear, understand, and enjoy.

If you have all four—Heart, Imagination, Planning, and Physicality—then you are "HIPP" and ready to present your best image, and the museum's best image, to the public. Let's examine these four elements below.

The Heart in "HIPP"

The heart in "HIPP" is the passion you bring to your work. It is the inspiration you have and that you pass along to others. It is the caring you have for the quality of your work and the concern you have that you succeed.

Interpreters have many reasons for their "heart." A living history interpreter might be passionate about open-hearth cooking or costumed interpretation. An actor may care deeply about the craft of acting. Some interpreters are passionate about working with children. Many interpreters care deeply about a museum or exhibit.

What if you are lacking heart or passion for your interpretative work, either because you have lost it or never had it? The time has come for you to begin some exploration to discover, or rediscover, passion. You might begin by reading books that you find inspiring—try Freeman Tilden. His thoughts about passion and interpretation are still relevant today. As he writes in 1957 in *Interpreting Our Heritage*, "If you love the thing [that you interpret], you not only have taken the pains to understand it …, but you also feel its special beauty in the general richness of life's beauty." He likewise advocates that you "love the people who come to enjoy it…in the sense that you never cease trying to understand them…."

You might also talk to some people you respect. What is the source of their passion? What books or articles do they recommend? Inspiration is often waiting for you just by wandering around a site or exhibit after everyone has left or before they arrive. Let your imagination roam. The quiet times you spend alone on site can help you connect with your historical passion.

But "heart" is not enough, unless you combine it with the essence of theater—imagination.

Using Imagination: Storytelling and Motivation

Perhaps the most powerful tool in your interpretive kit is an active and vivid imagination. That does not imply that you create fictitious information or events to engage your audience. What it does mean is that you develop "historically plausible"[2] interpretations and stories and use vibrant, descriptive language. A story, scene, or interpretation is "historically plausible" if it is based on primary and secondary sources and is a reasonable extrapolation of what might have happened.

Storytelling

A practical imagination exercise and interpretive technique is incorporating storytelling and evocative language into your work. Storytelling and associated

[1] In first person interpretation, the interpreter pretends to be a character from the past, speaks in first person, and attempts for the most part to stay in character. In third person interpretation, the interpreter dresses in period costume but does not attempt to be a character.

[2] "Historical Plausibility" is a term coined by Dr. Ira Berlin, University of Maryland, College Park, while serving as a consultant at the Baltimore City Life Museums for a museum theater project.

skills do not have to be limited to the stage or to fictional stories. The techniques below are appropriate to use in your interpretation to tell a story as part of your interpretive message. The story might be about a well-known figure such as George Washington as he braves the winter at Valley Forge or it might be about an unknown soldier who was in Washington's army. Alternatively, your story could focus on an object and how that object was created or used.

Your first step in telling such a story is to know the story and its details well. Here are some factors to consider in developing a story that will be a delight for you to tell and for listeners to hear:


Courtesy of the author

Brian Bagley plays the role of an African-American sailor in the War of 1812 in a play called "A Taste of Freedom." The author wrote and directed the play for the Star-Spangled Flag House in Baltimore.

Visualization. You want to paint a picture in your audience's mind about the story, and to help you do this, visualize scenes from the event or story so your telling becomes more vivid and engaging. Close your eyes and recreate the sequence of the story in your mind's eye. Stop in each mental sequence and look around. What colors and sounds do you notice? What descriptive words help convey what you are imagining? Describe some of the scenes to a friend, and then let that person ask you questions about the scene. Think about the most important objects in the story and describe them to a friend, using descriptive language. Doing this exercise can also help you understand some of the missing information you might be able to fill in with a little research.

Characters. The people in your story were once alive, and you want to pass that sense of "aliveness" to visitors. Begin by identifying the most important person in the story and describe him or her to a friend. Detail their physical appearance and personality in a few evocative words. To help you dig deeper into the character, you might let a friend ask you questions about your character's physical appearance and personality. Find a place in the story where the character talks and try to speak as the character would. How would you describe the voice? Do the same with other main characters in your story. If you have found any relevant primary material, this is also a wonderful point to integrate some actual quotes from the character or about the character.

What is the major obstacle or success the character faces in the story or event that you are relating? How does the character react to this? Do they have any second thoughts about their actions? Describe the main challenges and the character's reactions to them to a friend and as before, let your friend ask questions.

Plot and meaning. The framework of the story on which everything else hangs is the plot. Just as a good historian creates interesting stories for the reader based on historical facts, so must you. To do so you need to understand the flow of events, or the plot. To help you get a firm understanding of the story and pare it down to its essence, try to relate it in three sentences in which you tell the beginning, middle, and end of the story. What is the context of the story? What is the most important moment?

Rhythm. Varying the rhythm and pacing is another way to heighten an audience's interest in your story. Identify the parts in the story where the pacing is fast and slow. Retell it, exaggerating the slow and fast parts. Tell the story again and notice where the pacing changes for the first time. Retell that part, exaggerating the change and paying more attention to the transition.

Language. Go back over the most important points of the story. Check to see if you are using powerful descriptive words that evoke the meaning of the story. Get out a thesaurus if necessary and substitute more interesting words for some of the less descriptive words you have used. This does not mean, of course, that you are choosing language that visitors do not understand, just more varied language.

Movement and Motivation

Another imagination activity from theatrical training that can be especially helpful to living history interpreters, but also to those who incorporate the storytelling outlined above, relies on imagination, motivation, and movement. Audiences learn more from you than just from the words you say. How you move your body also sends them information. As a very basic example, think about the difference in posture that you would have if given a hug by a favorite friend or relative versus your reaction if someone that you did not like gave you a big hug.

To get an idea of how your movements can send a message, try this classic acting 101 exercise, modified for historical interpreters. This is a good activity to do with a group, but you could also do it alone.

Pretend you are a living history interpreter standing just outside the parlor in a house from the 1840s. You hear visitors enter the parlor from the hall and turn back to enter the parlor. Should you walk into the room in the same way you would if you were in your present-day house, or should you enter as an 1840 person would enter their parlor? How would a person from 1840 enter the room? Each of these ways to enter a room conveys a different message to visitors. Try these examples below, perhaps with a friend to assist. Notice that each of these has an interpretive theme associated with it.

- Quickly—you have misplaced a letter from a dear friend who is traveling to Indiana and you want to find it immediately to show to your husband (or wife). (Your interpretive theme may be to let visitors know about travel conditions in the 1840s).
- In anger—your daughter has just said to you that she wants to write books like Lydia Maria Child when she gets older, so she does not need to learn how to cook. (Theme: role of women in antebellum America).
- With pride—a phrenologist has just read your head and told you that your faculty of courage is well developed. (Theme: interpretation of phrenology and other "philosophical" ideas of the period).

Depending upon the circumstance, you will find yourself entering at a different pace, with a different degree of tension, and with a different force behind your movements. Also, be aware of your posture—how you hold your head and shoulders—and what you do with your hands. You might want to hold a relevant prop (perhaps a letter, a book, or some other object) to give you something to do with your hands and to help convey some meaning to the audience.

Too often, living history interpreters are not aware that when playing a character they can greatly expand their interpretive repertoire and engage visitors better by developing motivations for their character, even for such a simple thing as entering a room. When that happens, the character becomes more interesting to the audience, and when coupled with a carefully designed interpretive theme, the whole interpretation is much stronger.

Using Imagination: Creating a Scene

One of the most important aspects of being "HIPP" is "imagination," and there is no better way to exercise and grow your imagination than in creating interpretive scenes. Using primary and secondary sources to develop a scene is a logical extension of the storytelling activities above. The key to creating these scenes is using your imagination and letting it run wild. Of course, as you move toward creating a scene for presentation, you should keep in mind the concept of "historical plausibility."

To begin this exercise, start with a primary source. Below is one such primary source, taken from an article in the February 1840 *Baltimore Clipper*, which describes an accident on the streets of downtown Baltimore in which a boy is run over by a suction engine. A key to doing this exercise effectively is to keep in mind that for any incident that happens, there are multiple perspectives from which to describe and interpret that event. Read over the article below from the *Clipper*:

> **Accident**. A lad about sixteen years of age named Michael Laurence, was yesterday afternoon run over by the suction engine of the Patapsco,[3] while coming down Fayette. His head was considerably lacerated. He was taken into Dr. Alexander's office, and such aid rendered him as his wounds required. We are only surprised that more accidents of the kind do not happen.

Now, reread the article and try to identify all the various points of view or perspectives that could be used in telling this story. Pretend that you might be interpreting this event for an audience and you want to make it interesting and still accurately tell the events as described. An obvious perspective to choose would be that of Dr. Alexander, who treated the boy. Take a minute or two and make a list—some perspectives are obvious and others are more subtle. Below is a partial list, but don't peek until you have created your own perspectives.

People:
Michael Laurence
Driver of the suction engine
Reporter who wrote the story
Editor of the paper
Michael's mother (and other family members)
Bystanders

Animals:
Horses that pulled the engine
Pigs (American streets were covered with pigs roaming freely at this time)
Dogs

Inanimate objects:
Suction engine
Road
Sky

An important concept to remember is that if you are creating a museum theater scene or a story to tell, you

[3] A suction engine is a nineteenth-century fire engine pulled by horses that pumped water. The "Patapsco" was the name of one of many volunteer fire departments in the city.

Courtesy of Conner Prairie

Dan Shockley working as Col. Harrison Hamlin Whitley outside the Tent of Wonders for Country Fair.

have some flexibility in applying your creative juices. For example, you do not have to be limited in time and space. You could move your interpretation through time to a few months (or even years) later and have a friend of Dr. Alexander relate the story of Michael to a group of people. And since you have moved the telling of the story through time, you could also move it to another location. Perhaps the friend is on a wagon train heading west and tells the story around a campfire.

Once you have established a point of view, take five minutes or so, ideally with a few others, and create a scene that tells the story from the perspective you have chosen. Be sure to include elements that we have mentioned earlier, including thinking about variation in movement, pacing, and vocal expression. As an alternative activity, you could create a story that is told by one person. Remember in both cases to use evocative language to help paint a verbal image of what you are saying.

Your imagination in many ways is like any other part of your body or mind. The more you use it, the stronger and more agile it becomes. Look for opportunities to use it by finding elements of your interpretation or presentation that lend themselves to storytelling and then practice by telling the stories you create to family members or friends. As you begin to finalize your presentation, keep the concept of "historical plausibility" in mind, so you do not stray from your interpretive message.

Planning for Imaginative Interpretation

Up to this point, the discussion has focused on specific, personal elements of your interpretation. It is now time to step back to view the whole process. Inevitably, some of you will at some point be asked to create a character, a scene, an interpretation, a demonstration, a story, or a welcome greeting. When those occasions arise, it is valuable to be able to take a much broader look at what you are trying to do and how best to do it so your efforts support the museum's mission and the program or exhibit's interpretive goal. Below are some elements to consider as you create that presentation, whether it is a museum theater presentation, a living history interpretation, a tour, or a special program.[4]

What is your goal? Asking this question should be obvious; on the other hand, museum interpreters often fail to do so, and the answer affects all the other aspects of the project. You need to identify clearly your mission, your goal, and your "spire of meaning"—the essential point you want to get across to visitors.

Who is your audience? Are you designing this for elementary school children, for families with young children, adults interested in a specific topic, or a general audience including adults and children? Once you know who the audience is, you can begin making decisions about whether the piece should be interactive, dramatic, a more traditional interpretation, or something else entirely.

[4] These planning elements are based on a workshop conducted by Dale Jones and Margaret Piatt, "Planning Effective Living History Performances" at A Union of Spirits: A Conference for Interpreters. The Farmers' Museum in Cooperstown, N.Y., 1991.

What is your interpretive format? Will you be creating a tour; a living history interpretation for an interpreter that has a station, or specific spot; a short or long museum theater piece; a demonstration; or some other format?

Where will you perform or present? Is the space in an exhibit, outside, in the room of a historic house? Will visitors have benches, chairs, low walls, or steps to sit on? Will audiences be positioned so the sun or light is in their eyes or at their backs? Are there distracting sounds coming from another gallery? If so, your audience should be positioned to face away from that area.

How long will your presentation be? Long enough to accomplish your goals, but no longer, is the standard but unclear reply. The time range can vary greatly. It could be as short as three to five minutes, or as long as fifty minutes. There is no set answer, although many museums choose a range of seven to fifteen minutes for museum theater presentations. If you are creating a tour, there is also no magic length. Some short but poorly designed and presented tours seem to last an eternity and other long tours keep visitors totally engaged. It really depends upon your audience, your goal, your space, and other factors listed here.

How will your audiences be oriented? If you are creating a museum theater performance or a short living history interaction, it is important to let visitors know what is about to happen. Will visitors accidentally stumble upon the program? Will there be an announced time and place? Will an orientation, or description of what is to follow, be built into the presentation or will someone else need to do that?

How much interaction with visitors and families do you want? Do you want the audiences only to watch or listen? Do you want families to have some interaction during the presentation or tour? How much? Will it support the main goal? Do you have supplies and props for interaction?

Have you developed a written script or outline? While some presentations may successfully arise without conscious planning or scripting, you have a better chance of creating an effective presentation that can be passed on to future presenters or performers if you have planned it carefully and written it down.

If you are creating a museum theater performance and looking for a good playwright, you might contact local university drama departments, community theaters, and local professional companies for possibilities. To assist you in selection, you might ask for previous work or even invest a small amount of money and, after presenting your goals and some information to the playwrights, ask them to create a portion of a scene for you to look over.

Have you allocated time, money, and locations for rehearsal and practice? Whether this is a museum theater play, a short first person interpretation, or a demonstration, the staff who will be in front of the audience needs to have time and space to rehearse or practice. Be sure to set some rehearsal practice time for the actual space in which they will be performing or presenting.

Do you have a director for your production? Many museums fall into the trap of not using a director for their performances or a staff member with director-type abilities for their presentations and interpretations. A director can provide an objective perspective on your performance or interpretation that you can't possibly do yourself and can help you create a more interesting presentation by calling to your attention strengths and weaknesses of your interpretation:

- Effective and engaging parts of your presentation;
- Distracting or ineffective parts of your presentation;
- Points in your presentation where you need to add some variation to your movement—perhaps sitting, standing, leaning against a wall, or moving to a different space;
- Your pacing in case some parts are moving glacially and need to speed up or another part is presented at such a rapid pace that you lose intelligibility;
- Solid tips on how to create a better, more effective presentation.

If you are creating a museum theater piece, you may need to interview several directors to find one who understands the nature of museum education and how to combine that with a theatrical presentation. You might look in university or school drama departments, community theaters, or local professional theaters for a director. If you don't have the time or inclination to search outside your museum for a director, you might look to your own staff to find someone with those abilities. Someone with a good eye can improve staff's presentations tremendously by just watching a few times and giving some inspired coaching.

Have you considered the use of "prepared impromptus?" Interpreters or presenters have many opportunities to respond to questions from their audience—the same questions that are asked routinely. Rather than taking each one and answering anew or falling into a pattern of responses that haven't been well-thought out—why not prepare an engaging response that you practice and are ready to give when the occasion arises? A "spontaneous" reply prepared and rehearsed beforehand, a "prepared impromptu" is perhaps the most effective way of consistently making a strong interpretive statement. All good speakers do this, so why not museum interpreters? All it takes is a little bit of time and planning.

How much planning? As Mark Twain once said, "It usually takes me more than three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech." So it is with these "prepared impromptus." To the audience it appears to be a fresh response to the question they have just asked (from their standpoint, the question is new, of course). You, on the other hand, have prepared and practiced your best response.

In any interpretive situation, you can have a number of prepared impromptus, and when someone asks you a question or a topic comes up, you provide a transition/entry line, pull out your prepared impromptu, and off you go! Be sure to incorporate movement, engaging and descriptive language, and interactivity when appropriate.

Have you made sure your scene or presentation is interesting? It is worthwhile to stop periodically, look at your presentation or scene and ask yourself, "Is this interesting?" Jon Lipski, playwright for the Museum of Science, Boston, felt that it was so important to make museum theater interesting that he created a "Ten Commandments of Museum Theater" that apply to museum interpretation as well. These Ten Commandments are:

1. *Thou shalt not be boring*
2. *Thou shalt not be boring*
3. *Thou shalt not be boring*
4. *Thou shalt not be boring*
5. *Thou shalt not be boring*
6. *Thou shalt not be boring*
7. *Thou shalt not be boring*
8. *Thou shalt not be boring*
9. *Thou shalt not be boring*
   And
10. *Thou shalt always deliver the information.*[5]

Unfortunately, too many museum presentations place all their emphasis on number ten and load up the presentation with facts and dates. They fail to keep in mind the simple adage to engage and not bore the audience. Note that "engaged" does not mean just "entertained" but implies relevant interpretive content as well.

Physicality

All thought and imagination will be for naught if the audience or visitors cannot hear or understand you. This is where the "Physicality" aspect of theater comes into play—making yourself understood through your voice and body. We touched on some movement elements above and below we will briefly review some thoughts and exercises related to voice.

Many of you have probably had the unfortunate experience of straining or losing your voice at the end of a long day of interpretation. Others may have difficulty finding enough volume to reach the back of a room in which you are speaking, while others lose their audiences attention because they mumble and do not enunciate their words. In addition, everyone has had the mind-numbing experience of listening to someone who speaks in a monotone with little or no inflection or expression and who lulls us into inattention and boredom.

The above problems are common throughout the world of museum interpretation and can all be addressed through voice training techniques commonly used in theater. Five important elements can bring success to your speech efforts: warm-up, breathing, relaxation, articulation, and expression.

Courtesy of Conner Prairie

The Fall Creek Massacre Trial. One of many performances at Conner Prairie.

Warm-up. Just as a dancer or anyone about to do strenuous activity stretches and prepares his or her body for dancing or exercise, so should an interpreter prepare their voice. One of the most effective ways to loosen up and relax your voice is humming, an exercise you can do in the privacy of your car as you drive to work. First hum just a single note, then a favorite song. Next, try humming up and down the scale and dropping down one tone each time.

Breathing is the core of your voice. Proper breathing enables you to have sufficient volume to project to those standing in the rear of your group and enough endurance to speak for a long period of time—all of this without straining your voice. When you breathe in properly, you take in enough air for exhalation, and control of that exhalation gives you control of your voice. To give you an idea of how breath affects your volume, try doing this experiment. Take a deep breath, exhale until your lungs are empty, and then try to say as loudly as you can, pushing the sound from your lower abdomen, "History is fun." If you have emptied your air, you can barely do it. Now take a deep breath, filling your lower lungs (not your chest) and try saying the same thing. Not so hard, is it, when your lungs are full? You can even add volume if you have enough air. The trick is to breathe in so your stomach expands and not your upper lungs.

Relaxation affects the pitch of your voice, your vol-

[5] Jon Lipski, "Playwriting for Museum or: How to Make a Drama out of Slime Molds" in *Case Studies in Museum, Zoo, and Aquarium Theater*, Laura Maloney and Catherine Hughes, eds. (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 1999).

ume, and the strain you put on your vocal chords. Try the humming exercise above, with the idea of relaxing your vocal chords and your neck. Notice that your voice should relax and your pitch should be a bit lower. As you learn to control your breathing and relax your voice, you should also lessen the strain on it.

Articulation is indispensable for allowing audiences to understand what you are saying and enabling you to be heard without having to speak as loudly. You can increase your verbal dexterity by trying any of the old stand-by practice phrases such as "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers," or make up your own to practice your enunciation. Try saying the phrases clearly and cleanly, paying attention to the consonants.

Expression in your voice gives you nuance, emotion, and emphasis and helps audiences understand your meaning. It makes the sound of your voice more pleasant to the ear—more interesting and less boring. This is clearly one area where many interpreters are remiss. One of the best ways to learn to become more expressive is to read aloud. Try reading to children or to a friend. You might choose some poetry you like, for example Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken." Read it as if you are very sad and then try reading it as if you are quite happy. Try a variety of different emotions. The purpose is to learn a variety of expressive ranges in your voice to help engage your visitors.

Also try to vary your pace—sometimes it makes sense to talk slowly, other times more rapidly. What does not make for an interesting interpretation or talk is to speak at the same pace all the time. Keeping some variation—in pacing, expression, and volume—makes you more interesting to listen to.

Coming Back to "Heart"

Our brief tour through theater and interpretation has taken you through the elements of being "HIPP"—heart, imagination, planning, and physicality. As you begin to look at all four of these and integrate them into your interpretive work, it is useful to keep a couple thoughts in mind. Without proper planning, your efforts will probably not reach the interpretive success you desire. If you do not have the imagination to create engaging interpretation, whether in museum theater, living history characters, guided tours, or other interpretations with visitors, then you run the risk of being boring. If visitors cannot hear or understand you, you will have lost them even with the best-designed interpretation.

Even with all three of the above in place, however, unless you have "heart," you will find your enthusiasm and energy flagging in the end. Your heart might be tied up with the mission of the museum, or it might be based on the fact that you like talking to people. It might even be based on your enthusiasm for interpreting or performing. In many ways, it doesn't matter what makes you passionate about your work. It is only important that you have that passion or heart that you can transfer to others. For without heart, you will not have the motivation or the energy to care enough about your work to plan, practice, rehearse, and make it better. And that would be a loss for you and the public.

Bibliography

Bridal, Tessa. *Exploring Museum Theatre*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004.

Hughes, Catherine. *Museum Theatre: Communicating with Visitors through Drama.* Portrsmouth, NH: Heinmann, 1998.

Jones, Chuck. *Make Your Voice Heard: An Actor's Guide to Increased Dramatic Range Through Vocal Training*. New York: Back Stage Books, 1996.

Jones, Dale. "Living History in the City," *History News* Vol. 50, #3, pp. 10-13.

Levy, Barbara A., Sandra Mackenzie Lloyd, and Susan Schreiber. *Great Tours!: Thematic Tours and Guide Training for Historic Sites.* Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2001.

Maloney, Laura, and Catherine Hughes, eds. *Case Studies in Museums, Zoos and Aquarium Theatre.* Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums/International Museum Theatre Alliance, 1999.

Roth, Stacy F. *Past into Present: Effective Techniques for First-Person Historical Interpretation*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

Tilden, Freeman. *Interpreting Our Heritage.* 3d. ed. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1977.

Dale Jones is a senior associate at the Institute for Learning Innovation, where he conducts research and evaluation, focusing on history museums and organizations, and designs materials and programs for museums. He has designed museum theatre, living history, hands-on, and interpretive experiences for a variety of museums and has a background in folk studies and theater. You can reach him at jones@ilinet.org.

AASLH
TECHNICAL LEAFLET
A PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR STATE AND LOCAL HISTORY
#254

Designing Education Programs that Connect Students to Collections

By Jody Blankenship, Mike Deetsch, Stacia Kuceyeski, and Megan Wood

Collections are the primary competitive advantage that history organizations have over other educational institutions. Collections allow visitors to make tangible, authentic, and personal connections to the past. However, history organizations must deliberately create opportunities, and are required to consider several factors. For grade K-12 school audiences, typically these center on the educational environment within a community and include: federal educational mandates; state learning standards; local curricula; school district calendars; the structure and availability of pre- and inservice teacher training; and the knowledge, skills, and interests of the local education community.

While designing educational programs that connect students to collections is not complicated, it involves thoughtful consideration of several variables, many outside of an organization's control. This technical leaflet will provide a list of issues to consider when developing programs that connect students with collections. These include:

1. Aligning programs and services with priorities and restrictions within the larger educational community;
2. Identifying your organization's resources (as they align with these priorities and restrictions) and making them attractive to educators; and
3. Developing programs around these resources that will create the most value for students.

In addition to identifying the issues, this article includes tips and examples on program planning methods, evaluation, and adjusting programs based on evaluation data.

Aligning Programs with Priorities: Restrictions, Curricula, and Standards


Ohio Historical Society

Students examining photographs at the Ohio Historical Society.

In the last decade, teachers, principals, and school districts have come under increasing pressure to quantify student academic progress. School districts must show they are meeting annual yearly progress as shown on state standardized tests. *No Child Left Behind*, the most recent iteration of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* mandates student performance standards in reading, writing, and math. It contains no requirements for the disciplines that make up social studies. What does this mean? In order to remain relevant, history organizations must make a strong argument to teachers that historical collections and content have educational value and are necessary for student success in social studies, but also in such areas as reading, writing, and the emerging area of twenty-first century skills. In this section we will address how to become familiar with local education standards and curricula and how to enter into the educational community through organizations, institutions, and individuals. The first step to making your organization relevant to the educational community is to become familiar with the local needs. There are several steps you can take to do this.[1]

1. Know the state content standards and where your programs align.

While most teachers may value a program based on how much students enjoyed the experience and what they learned, before they are able to participate in your programming they will need to show their principal how the programming aligns to state standards. The National Council for Social Studies has issued new national standards, but these are generally less important to teachers than state and local requirements. When it comes to aligning programs to standards, **do not overpromise,** rather, accurately represent what content and skills the field trip or event will address. When it comes to standards alignment, more is not always better.

2. Find cross-curricular connections.

Often it becomes necessary to show where your programs and services fit within the reading, writing, arts, science, or math standards. Many states do not test social studies, and the unfortunate reality is, *what is not tested is not taught*. Cross-curricular connections make it easier for teachers to justify participating in programs and services. Continue to do what you do best; do not force a connection or change a program just to align it to more standards. Make sure you're taking full advantage of cross-curricular connections where they already exist.

3. Know the curriculum and pacing guide of the schools you serve.

If you routinely work within a geographically defined area, talk to local teachers in these districts about their curriculum, making special effort to know when in the school year they cover content related to your institution. By knowing the pace of your local districts, you can schedule programming at opportune dates. This "just in time" assistance can position your organization as a reliable and necessary resource for the teachers at a time when they most need your assistance.

Knowing state education standards and the aligning programs to them is a first step. Once this is complete, it becomes necessary to promote these resources to the education community. To do this efficiently and effectively, enter the education community through various means including the state education agency, statewide education organizations, and individual teachers. The education community can be intimidating when you first begin to enter into it because of its unique vocabulary and culture. Try one or more of the following to help you get started.

First, **look to your state education agency for guidance with state standards.** Social studies specialists, consultants, or curriculum directors are often open to discussing your institution's connection to the state standards. They are consistently searching for resources to share. Often state educational agency consultants in other disciplines (arts and humanities, literacy, math, and science, for example) will also be eager to help you make cross-disciplinary connections. In addition, making your organization or site visible to the state education agency may help open other doors.

Second, **get involved with the professional organizations that connect with teachers.** Each state will have a council for social studies (visit www.socialstudies.org to find your state contact) or history education (visit www.nche.net for your state coordinator). These organizations provide service to social studies teachers statewide and can help you better connect with the network.

Third, **build credibility by finding a teacher to work with or forming a teacher advisory committee.** The latter is a useful body to look to in order to inform planning and marketing of programs and services. Additionally, the committee can also advocate for your inclusion in district, county, and state-level curricula and standards. You will have greater success promoting programs working within an established web of relationships. Use this web not only to promote programs and services but also to improve program effectiveness by asking teachers to test and advise your work. Audience participation in program development will simultaneously create audience ownership and more tightly align your work to audience needs.

Identifying Your Organization's Best Collections

Once you are familiar with the educational community, now see what collections and content your institution has that may be of interest to this audience. As a collecting institution, history organizations offer a unique and valuable service to schools through their collections—including archive, library, and object collections, as well as buildings and landscapes. Teachers are always on the lookout for easily accessible primary sources to use in their classrooms. Teachers, however, are busy people. They are not likely to visit your institution and pore through manuscripts, photographs, or objects to find the perfect complement to lesson plans. They need interesting, standards-aligned primary sources that can be easily accessed. The following section will address:

1. How to identify collections for educational use
2. How to use collections in educational programming
3. How to make collections and resources accessible to educators

1. Identifying Collections

Who are you serving and what do they need? Your institution may have an amazing collection of photographs, but if it cannot make a case for how they align to educational standards, the collection is not valuable to teachers. Select collection items based on grade level, reading level, and interest. For example, your state's constitution is written at a certain reading level and contains too much text for a second grade student, but the manuscript may fit nicely into a high school course.

People are interested in things to which they relate so consider items students at different grade

Teachers analyzing maps at the Ohio Historical Society.

· EVALUATION ·

Evaluating programs and services is useful beyond refining offerings to better meet participant needs. Evaluation allows your organization to build a case for the educational value of programs for use in marketing and promotion. Your institution can also use evaluation to foster relationships with volunteers, using results to show their impact on the organization, that programs are reliant on them, and they help shape and nurture a young person's experience.

When evaluating programs and services, collect information from a variety of sources. Ask any staff or volunteers how they felt about the program. That immediate feedback can often be the most valuable. Send a survey or give a survey to the teacher or other adult chaperones (if appropriate). With school programs, teachers are the ultimate audience; they bring the students back year after year. By showing teachers that feedback is important, they will feel you are more invested in providing high quality services. If possible, get feedback from students. This can be as easy as asking students for thumbs up or thumbs down or as complex as distributing pre- and post-visit surveys.

Once information is collected, analyze it. (It is good practice to only collect information if it is actually going to be used.) Often, evaluations show several things. They:

- Identify components that worked and were popular with participants;
- Identify components that did not work and were least helpful to participants;
- Identify components that receive both praise and criticism without majority agreement; and
- Collect criticisms from participants unhappy (providing an outlet for those who need to vent).

When it comes to this type of feedback it is easiest to respond to obvious successes and failures. Use the evaluation as an opportunity to change.

There are often parts of programs that half of the room loved and the other half did not. How do you respond to this? Often the best answer is to go back to the goal of the program or field trip. In these situations it becomes necessary to use professional judgment. Are there small changes that would make it more effective for more participants? Was it worthwhile enough for those who liked it to keep it? At the end of the day no program will ever make everyone happy, but there is a difference between being reactionary and taking a critical look at offerings, using evaluation as a tool.

levels can connect to. What your institution's archivists and curators find historically significant and interesting may not necessarily capture who interest of a fourth grader. (Think about the customers that visit your institution regularly—genealogists, researchers, etc.—they are all following their own personal interests and passions, not yours.)

If you are unsure what types of items would be the best for students, consult local teachers. Visual items (photographs, posters, artwork), manuscript collections (maps, journals, letters), and objects (toys, clothing, home goods) work well for almost any grade level. You may, however, need to make some modifications or add supplemental aids to assist in translation. For example, always have a transcript for handwritten materials, and if the text includes words that may be out-of-date, provide a vocabulary list.

Finally, when identifying collections, be creative! Sure, your institution may have marquee pieces trotted out for every donor, dignitary, marketing piece, and event—and these items are great to use—but do not forget about hidden gems, items that students and teachers see every day but take for granted. These have strong stories, are personal, and memorable for different reasons.

2. How to use collections in K-12 programming

Once you have identified some great items, digitize and make them available to teachers online, on CD-ROMs, or other means. Teachers use digital images from online repositories, and making collections accessible online is a great way to get them in their hands. *However, collection items on their own are not valuable to educators unless you contextualize them.* For example:[2]

- **Item Analysis Activities:** Show a primary source from your collection and ask questions or provide a worksheet that helps teachers and students analyze and interpret the item. This spiral curriculum model helps students understand the historical value of col-

· LOGIC MODEL ·

The National Science Foundation pioneered logic models. Their purpose is to assist in the creation of focused, efficient project plans. Logic models force program planners to keep a program's primary goal in mind at all times and eliminate activities and costs that do not directly contribute to accomplishing the goal. They are the perfect tool for developing educational programs.

A simple Google search yields dozens of formats. Choose the layout that is most applicable and appealing. All logic models have the same basic components:

1. **Goal:** The goal is the entire point of the project, or what will ultimately be produced. Keep the number of goals limited. One goal is ideal. (While a goal may lead to additional indirect goals, the point is to remain focused.)
2. **Objectives:** Objectives are the short-term building blocks of a goal. Where a goal may be complicated and subjective or abstract, objectives are straightforward and tackle only one piece of a goal. A project may have as many objectives as necessary to complete the goal.
3. **Actions:** Actions are what you actually do to bring about the objective. A single objective may have multiple actions.
4. **Outputs:** Outputs are what results from the action, and, like objectives, are straightforward (e.g. a lesson plan or a brochure). An action may not have an output, but most will have them. If an action does not have an output, be sure to note how you will measure the completion of the action.
5. **Outcome:** Outcomes are the resulting behavior or attitude changes in the intended audience. They should clearly connect to the accomplishment of the objective. Imagine the logic model as a circle where the beginning is the objective and the end is the outcome leading back to the objective.
6. **Timeline/Deadline:** Timelines are necessary to show how actions relate to one another in a sequential manner, and allow for "if/then" scenarios to evaluate success and change course or strategy, if necessary.
7. **Evaluation:** Evaluation refers to how one measures the success of an action in relation to the objective. The evaluation method may be as simple as completing an action, meeting a revenue target, or a combination of participant surveys, focus groups, and other methods.
8. **Budget:** Budgets should reflect all costs including direct, in-kind, and staff time necessary to complete an objective and the related actions. Budgets, like timelines, allow project managers to monitor the success of a program in terms of return on investment, or in other words, whether the project is accomplishing enough to justify the costs.
9. **Person/Party Responsibility:** Identifying the person responsible for completion of an action is necessary to hold the project team accountable. It is also a way to monitor success, create buy-in, and fend off failure by making changes to responsibilities if one party is unable or incapable of completing an action.

· CREATING TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES ·

One way to highlight programs and services for the educational community is to host professional development opportunities for teachers at your facility. If you choose to provide such programs, be sure they align to state education standards and offer true professional development and not just a commercial for your organization.

- **Contact Your Local School District.** Many times school districts have professional development days. See if the district will allow teachers to attend workshops at your facility. (Some districts strictly manage such activities, so they may only be willing to use your space.) Other districts allow partners to develop content, providing an opportunity to customize content to your organization. No matter the situation, ask the district to distribute information about professional development programs that your organization has created independently. The district will likely help you promote your programs to teachers.
- **Remember Logistics.** When planning professional development programs, keep in mind the hours teachers normally work. Staying within these hours both shows respect for teachers' professional and personal responsibilities and shows that your institution is aware of how the educational environment functions. While teachers typically work long hours that include work at home, programs should align to the formal school day. Food is important, so have a plan if your program spans the lunch hour. Make treats and beverages available at all times.
- **Create an Agenda, and Keep to It!** When drafting an agenda, think about what you would like if you were attending a professional development seminar, and do that.
- **Think about Incentives.** It would be great if people were driven to attend professional development only because they wanted to improve their knowledge of the field, but sometimes attendance is motivated by the "swag." It is easy to offer teacher contact hours. Talk to the school district to see if they will offer continuing education units to teachers who attend. Give the teachers copies of the activities.
- **Ask Teachers What They Think.** Evaluate your programs. Ask teachers what they liked and what can be improved, and then use this information to make programs better. Also, ask what topics or skills teachers would like covered in additional opportunities.

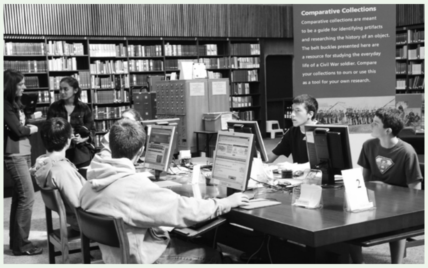
lections items by challenging them to first describe the item, then analyze it, and finally interpret it.[3]

- **Multiple Perspective Activities:** This activity, modeled on Mark Carnes's *Reacting to the Past* curriculum, involves creating packets of primary sources that reflect different perspectives on a particular event. Participants are divided into groups and are assigned a particular perspective about the issue. Utilizing the sources in each packet, groups construct an argument promoting the viewpoint represented in their materials. Finally, groups present their arguments and debate the issue. Besides modeling how to interpret different types of primary sources in combination (linking visuals, manuscripts, and objects), this activity and ensuing mediated discussion helps students understand issues of perspective, context, and complexity—all critical components in the study of history.[4]
- **Compare/Contrast Activities:** These activities are great for utilizing items such as maps, street-scene images, and objects. Participants can compare maps of a particular city over a period of time, highlighting certain neighborhoods or buildings. Starting with a current map, work backwards through time, tracking chosen buildings, streets, or neighborhoods. As students work through the visual landscape transformation, contextualize social, political, and economic changes by adding items that deal with everyday life of people living in the location. Discuss and highlight the continuous change throughout the activity. This helps the audience to understand cause and effect and change over time in a more gradual and relatable manner.

Keep in mind that state education standards may not emphasize local history content, and it may be difficult for teachers to see your organization's relevance, especially if standards seek to address national and global history. For example, a standard about World War II in the European theater may not immediately conjure up connections to a small midwestern town. However, connecting the war to the support infrastructure built on the home front opens up a wide area for study and discussion. Students find it interesting and relatable to make local connections to national events. Your institution will most likely have military uniforms, war bonds, newspapers, letters, diaries, and images of changes to the local landscape in relation to the war effort that can illustrate the impact of the event and the interconnected nature of society.

· HISTORY DAY ·

National History Day (NHD) is geared towards students in grades 6-12 who compete with other students across the country through research projects. The Ohio Historical Society (OHS), NHD's state affiliate and state program coordinator, works with grade 6-12 educators to prepare students for the district, state, and national contests. In 2007, the OHS National History Day staff sought to increase participation in the program. In order to achieve this goal, staff provided services that helped improve student social studies skills. The objective was to improve skills in historical research through the NHD program. Specifically, we believed we would achieve this goal by improving students' ability to read and analyze primary source materials.



Ohio Historical Society

Students participating in a History Day workshop at the Ohio Historical Society.

OHS created two programs. First, an outreach presentation for both teachers and students delivered in schools. The second was a field trip to OHS that focused on using the society's Archives/Library Reading Room to develop primary source research skills.

Program Design

OHS staff developed the in-school program as a slideshow that included basic NHD information and digitized primary sources that corresponded with the annual program theme. Staff worked with students to define and clarify the definition of primary sources and how to analyze them.

The onsite program built on the in-school program and reinforced existing knowledge while also providing an opportunity to experience history research and analysis in a museum/archival facility. Staff designed it in three parts, which students rotated through sequentially. Part one involved an in-depth explanation of NHD and reviewed and reinforced the material covered in the school-based program. Part two took place in the museum's exhibitions and used questions relating to the NHD theme to challenge students to think about how artifacts and other primary sources on display could be used when creating NHD projects. Students spent part three in the Archives/Library reading room where they learned how to use an archive and the materials housed within to locate existing research and begin their own.

Evaluation

Onsite program evaluation involved a simple teacher satisfaction survey that sought to identify the most and least beneficial components of the program. In-school programs involved a student pre- and post-test at the beginning and end of the school year. The test measured students' ability to distinguish between primary and secondary sources, develop thesis statements and bibliographies, and change their attitudes about the value and relevance of history and social studies.

Responding to Evaluation Results

The evaluation indicated that onsite programs, especially the archives component, needed to be more active. In subsequent years OHS re-engineered the program to allow students to experience multiple types of archival material, including cycling through stations using guided questions in order to examine the sources. A follow-up evaluation showed that the revised program resulted in students gaining a greater knowledge of primary sources available in an archive and greater confidence in using such facilities for research purposes.

In-school program evaluations resulted in new, more flexible program preparation. Staff over-prepared for classroom visits in order to accommodate differences in student abilities. Additionally, we developed an outreach request form that allowed teachers to address student skill levels and intended learning outcomes for the day, providing staff a better idea about the type of classrooms and students they were likely to encounter at the visit.

A greater variety of digitized primary sources augmented the in-school presentation. Evaluations revealed that middle school students responded to sources differently than high schoolers and urban students related to different sources than rural students. In order to help students understand how to analyze primary sources, they needed to feel connected to or see relevance in the source. OHS staff varied themes and materials in order to gain more flexibility and a stronger connection to student interests. Finally, staff made regular use of the Ohio Historical Society's Teacher Advisory Committee in order to solicit teacher feedback on programs and services before implementation.

Moving Forward

In the five years that these services have been offered, the OHS staff continues to change and refine onsite and in-school programs in order to better meet the goal of improving skills in history and historical research through National History Day.

3. **Making Collections Accessible to a K-12 Audience:** While you may be able to use small groups of items from your collection for specific student or teacher programs, don’t forget about one of your largest and most visible collections-based resources, exhibitions. Many history organizations have a diverse set of artifacts and archival material on display within their exhibitions. Making use of collections on display to connect children to objects can be challenging but not impossible—especially considering that many exhibitions were designed for visitors to steadily move through the space linearly in order to “experience” history. However, make sure that programming content is derived from the entirety of the collection. Some programs may benefit from specific periods of history that are chronologically unrelated while others take advantage of this flow.[5]

Remember, history institutions’ abilities to use collections in order to bring history to life is the *competitive advantage the field has* over *similar educational organizations*—one can take an art class or read a book about history anywhere, but participating in activities within an authentic, collections-rich environment provides an incredible opportunity to make tangible connections to the past.

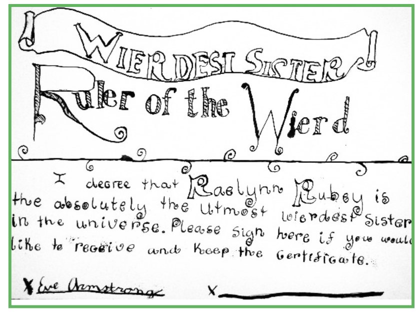
Developing Programs around Collections

When working within exhibitions, create programs that keep the following three components in mind: (1) *the learning outcome* (content and skills attainment), (2) *the collection items* that relate to and illustrate the learning outcome, and (3) *the instructional techniques* to connect students to collections and content within exhibitions. (Activities may draw directly from the history discipline or from related fields such as art, for example, observational drawing, storytelling, etc.)

Participants do not have to experience your institution’s entire collection; depth is more important than breadth. However, your goal should be to develop a number of programs that collectively connect with every aspect of your institution. This not only diversifies programming content, but also encourages students to participate in multiple programs.

The Kentucky Historical Society regularly uses the arts as its primary vehicle to connect and engage students with its collections in the study of history. The arts provide participants with a very distinct way of engaging with and interpreting collection items, including: (1) thematic interpretation, (2) direct translation, and (3) re-contextualization of the subject. Each of these methods is a unique form of interpretation that overlaps the disciplines of history and art.

1. **The thematic interpretation** of an artifact or a document is a way of taking the content, topic, or subject and repurposing it into another medium or format. For example, students may learn about military awards and certificates, specifically how and why they were given to various service people. Understanding the function of a certificate given to a sailor after crossing the equator—a significant milestone in a sailor’s career—the students are then asked to create a certificate to give to someone for a designated event or accomplishment. This method of interpretation is closely linked to the ability to “develop… explanations of historical events and processes based on…interpretation of evidence.” In this instance, a student is able to analyze a primary source (evidence) and interpret (explain) it through an unrelated event. Here is one example of a student creating a certificate for her younger sister—for being the weirdest sister in the world.[6]



Kentucky Historical Society

Camp ArtyFact student work.

2. **Direct translation** is a way for students to recreate an artifact or other part of the collection with as much accuracy as possible. Similar to a pastiche, students study objects in the collection and create their own versions, often to scale and with many of the features imitated in the design. This process of investigation is History 101, because students are required to **describe** an artifact (“What does it look like? What is it made from?”), **analyze** (“Who used it? How might it have been used?”), and **interpret** (“Can you replicate the object using the materials you have? How are your versions different from the original?”) While it is not always possible, encourage students to use the same materials used in the collection item for the art project.
3. **Re-contextualizing** is a way for students to take a topic from the past and place it in a contemporary format. While each of the aforementioned approaches attempts this to a degree, re-contextualization challenges students to take the historical

Kentucky Historical Society

Camp ArtyFact student work.

content and repurpose it into an unusual (but plausible) vehicle or format while staying true to the original content. For example, this image documents a student taking information and pose from a nineteenth-century gubernatorial portrait to create a campaign button using the same pose and information related to that governor. This requires students to engage in a deep study of artifacts, understanding their importance and context in order to offer alternatives.

These provide three approaches for students to interact with history through hands-on experiences that require them to describe, analyze, and, finally, interpret collections. In fact, many museums and historic sites already provide hands-on experiences to get at just this. While these approaches originated from camp programs at the Kentucky Historical Society, based on staff member experiences at other museums, they can easily be repurposed to fit a school's needs and interests.[7]

Conclusion

One cannot overstate the importance of collections within the value and role of history organizations as educational institutions. Not only do collections allow visitors to make a tangible, authentic, and personal connection to the past, but the skills attained through carefully designed educational activities and programs are transferable to most other disciplines and industries, and allow students a more complete liberal arts experience. Creating education programs that require interaction with collections sharpens students' ability to (1) **Think Critically**, (2) **Understand Context and Complexity**, and (3) **Learn to Effectively Communicate and Collaborate with Others**.

Mike Deetsch is the Interpretive Education Administrator for the Kentucky Historical Society in Frankfort, KY. He can be reached at mike.deetsch@ky.gov. Stacia Kuceyeski is the Faculty Services Unit Manager at the Ohio Historical Society in Columbus, OH. She also serves on AASLH's Gen X and Y Advisory Committee. She can be reached at skuceyeski@ohiohistory.org. Megan Wood is the Manager of Education Programs and Partnerships at the Ohio Historical Society in Columbus, OH. She can be reached at mwood@ohiohistory.org. Jody Blankenship is Director of the Kentucky Historical Society's Education Division. He also serves as the chair for AASLH's Professional Development Committee and StEPs Curriculum Advisory Committee and a member of the AASLH 2010 and 2011 Annual Meeting Program Committee. He can be reached at jody.blankenship@ky.gov.

Additional Resources

Bruner, Jerome. *Acts of Meaning.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990.

_____. *The Process of Education.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960.

Deetz, James. *In Small Things Forgotten: An Archaeology of Early American Life.* New York: Doubleday, 1977.

Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education.* Reprint. New York: Simon and Brown, 2011.

_____. *How We Think.* Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1997.

Falk, John and Lynn Dierking. *Learning from Museums.* Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2000.

Falk, John and Beverly Sheppard. *Thriving in the Knowledge Age: New Business Models for Museums and Other Cultural Institutions.* Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006.

Lubar, Steven, and W. David Kingery, eds. *History from Things: Essays on Material Culture.* Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1993.

McRainey, D. Lynn and John Russick, eds. *Connecting Kids to History with Museum Exhibitions.* Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2010.

Pink, Daniel. *A Whole New Mind: Moving from the Information Age to the Conceptual Age.* New York: Riverhead Books, 2005.

Shuh, John Henniger. "Teaching Yourself to Teach with Objects," in *The Educational Role of the Museum*, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, ed., London: Routledge, 2001.

Smith, Nancy R. and the Drawing Study Group. *Observational Drawing with Children: A Framework for Teachers.* New York: Teachers College Press, 1998.

Wood, Elizabeth and Kiersten F. Latham. "Object Knowledge: Researching Objects in the Museum Experience." *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture.* 9:1 (2009), 16; http://reconstruction.eserver.org.

[1] *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001, Public Law 107-110, 107th Congress (8 January 2002), www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/107-110.pdf.

[2] These samples are not intended for every audience; adjust as necessary to meet audience needs and intellectual levels.

[3] Jerome Bruner, *The Process of Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977).

[4] A full description of this curriculum is available at: www.barnard.edu/reacting/index.html.

[5] For example, an institution may employ Comparative History methods in studying civil rights propaganda in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries or it may be advantageous to take a chronological approach when examining the treatment of African Americans following the Civil War and implementation of Jim Crow.

[6] Thomas Andrews and Flannery Burke, "What Does It Mean to Think Historically?," *Perspectives Online* 45:1 (2007), (accessed December 14, 2010).

[7] The Brooklyn Museum's Gallery/Studio Program has been using many of these approaches for years and served as inspiration for KHS's new approach.

AASLH
TECHNICAL LEAFLET
A PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR STATE AND LOCAL HISTORY
#263

What's the Big Idea? Using Listening Sessions to Build Relationships and Relevance

By Janeen Bryant and Kamille Bostick

The Challenge of Listening and Intentionality

Museums have good intentions. Whether preserving history, educating the public, collecting artifacts, interpreting perspectives, or creating community programming, museums nationwide have long settled into the niche of providing expertise. Too often, "museums tell stories about human experiences or situations that the curators or developers have not experienced personally–historic events, cultural developments, scientific discoveries." Telling contemporary stories with authenticity requires museums to build capacity for understanding based on building relationships and listening.[1]

When Charlotte, North Carolina's Levine Museum of the New South and its two partner institutions, the Atlanta History Center and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, joined forces to look at how to engage Latino audiences, we had to find a way to listen that was both effective and replicable. Our *Latino New South* listening sessions were fertile grounds to learn to listen and how to listen best.

One Museum's Response to Changing Demographics

A major demographic change has swept across the American South since 1990. It is a particular case pointing to a national demographic transformation. Within a generation, the entire U.S. will have no single racial or ethnic majority. Rather this country will be mix of people from multiple backgrounds.[2]

The Center for the Future of Museums of the American Alliance of Museums urges all of America's cultural institutions to engage directly with this demographic transformation, to boldly rethink what audiences they aim to reach, the programs they will undertake, and what tools they will use. The center writes that currently barely 10 percent of core museum visitors are people of color. If that does not change quickly, museums will find themselves marginalized and irrelevant.

An Opportunity for Authentic Listening

Listening has many connotations and implications, many negative. Below are some responses from sessions when we asked museum professionals, "When I say 'listening session' what comes to mind?"

- Inviting
- Assumptions
- Public relations
- Survey
- Necessary evil
- Sense of obligation
- Internal vs. external listening
- Complicated
- Hard
- Group selection
- Focus group
- Control
- Don't want to/Not critical

Unfortunately, the prevailing notion that listening is simply a waste of staff time, resources, and energy permeates the field. Indeed, it is difficult, time-consuming, and hard work, but ultimately rewarding, authentic, and increases institutional relevance. An

CASE STUDY: *The Latino New South Project*

Having learned many valuable lessons from the exploration between Latinos and African Americans with past projects and ignited by a hunger in the community to continue with authentic relationship-building, particularly the process that some call "Latinization," Levine Museum embarked on a multi-year exploration of Latinos in the New South. The *Latino New South Project* is a learning network of three history museums in the southeastern U.S. The Atlanta History Center and Birmingham Civil Rights Institute joined Levine Museum of the New South to conduct on-the-ground research to gain a better understanding of this historic shift.

Our process started in May 2012 as all three institutions grappled with ways to approach learning more about the Latinos in their communities. We began with a research phase in which we recognized that relationships and connections were vital. We began to understand that each city had vastly different stories to tell, if we were only willing to listen. Our innovation team, including museum staff members from our three institutions, Latino community members from our three cities (Atlanta, Birmingham, and Charlotte), and an urban geographer, planned two-day listening sessions in each city. The entire team visited each city to learn more about Latinos and their communities as well as better understand the local context of the receiving communities. Based on our findings, each institution will develop programming to engage Latinos in the activities of their museums and help build bridges between Latinos and non-Latinos.[3]

Levine Museum utilized a process of listening that it had used before to begin to understand the process of what immigrant integration will look like in our city. Having observed the model since its beginning, our partners in the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and the Atlanta History Center used the same model with a few modifications to fit their respective communities.

As the museum continues to work facilitating recognition of multiple perspectives used by people of different backgrounds to explain the past, evaluate the present, and project the future, we had a core question: Will our cities be welcoming places, creatively involving newcomers, or will our communities fragment? We listened for the answers.

A *Latino New South*

The South did not receive the great waves of European immigration in the early twentieth century and, consequently, is not as adequately prepared to address the shifting demographic makeup within its borders. The southeastern U.S. is now experiencing the nation's highest percentage growth in Latino newcomers and has since 1990. This is a great change for a region long known for its white and black racial landscape. Scholars suggest that this demographic and cultural shift may be the biggest story in southern history since the Civil Rights Movement.

—Dr. Tom Hanchett
Staff Historian
Levine Museum of the New South

Alexandra Vilchez for Levine Museum

Latino leaders in Charlotte share their opinions of how museums can play a role in relationship-building between the community and cultural institutions during a listening session.

What is a listening session?

When we decided to listen to our audience, we wanted to do more than conduct surveys or merely gather feedback on our ideas. The goal was to go beyond just tapping a demographic set for answers but to fully engage in the questioning process and use their thoughts as a way to further future conversations and actions.

For our listening sessions we wanted to create structured events where we could, as institutions, invite stakeholders to share ideas, insights, and input in an open forum.

important component of listening includes involving internal stakeholders (staff, board, members, and donors) as well as external stakeholders, and even those who have never been to your museum.

So how do you listen effectively and authentically?

Planning the Listening Session

Part 1: Set up a Framework

What idea is your institution looking to explore? Think broadly. What are the issues facing your community? Every institution will have issues emerge from the economic, demographic, ecological, social, and political environment of its community. The issues will be unique to your community.

So what does it take to frame your big ideas?

Ask 1: What issues need to be addressed in your community and how could your museum have relevance to those issues? Where can your museum add value to community conversations and decision making?

Ask 2: Who needs to be in the room for you to deeply understand the experience in your community? Ask stakeholders, "Who else do we need to talk to?"

Ask 3: How can you use listening strategically to approach your big idea?

Ask 4: How will you create an environment conducive to listening and when?

Latino New South

At the start of this process, the *Latino New South* innovation team had to identify the motivating Big Idea for our needs. Here are our answers to the corresponding questions on the left:

Answer 1: What issues need to be addressed? Inspired by the 2011 study, *All Immigration is Local* by Cornell University professor Michael Jones-Correa, Levine Museum recognized a need to address immigrant integration, or full and meaningful inclusion of newcomers in community life. We were propelled by a belief that museums can play a vital role in that work, and that sharing information between institutions will help our organization find effective strategies to truly engage Latino partners.

Answer 2: Who needs to be in the room? For us, it was Latinos of all backgrounds as well as receiving community members.

Answer 3: How can we use listening strategically? It was necessary to think outside the walls of the museum, figuratively and literally. We designed a two-day approach that involved listening to groups all over Charlotte (in Spanish and English).

Answer 4: How will we listen and when? We decided to do this by starting with relationship building through individual meetings and we needed to start as soon as possible.

Part 2: Formatting the Session

Listening involves little technical knowledge, but much preparation, constant awareness, and plenty of follow-up. In planning for your listening session, adequate preparation and planning are paramount.

PLANNING
Research the dimensions of your topic
Identify barriers to participation
Identify opportunities to aid in participation
Prepare and plan for how you want to capture the information (include consideration of linguistic challenges)
Prepare questions (3-5 core questions are best)
Pilot first session with a group familiar with the museum and be open and honest with feedback
Consider promotional strategies to support session

DURING
Introduce your organization
Address the relevance of your Big Idea
Have participants introduce themselves to each other
Establish expectations of continued engagement
Share findings
Provide participants the opportunity to respond to questions in writing and verbally
Record and synthesize responses

FOLLOW-UP
Thank participants with an email after session (1 week)
Synthesize all transcripts and analyze for themes and suggestions (1 month)
Share findings and themes with key stakeholders (1 month)
Share the findings with participants and invite future engagement (2 months)

Part 3: Formatting the Session—Latino New South *Case Study*

SAMPLE AGENDA

- Welcome lunch
- Facilitated dialogue at each table
- Demographic presentation
- Bus Tour:
  - Compare Foods (grocery store)
  - Cooperativa Latina (credit union)
  - Norsan Multimedia (Spanish media center)
  - Camino Community Center
  - Latin American Coalition/United for the Dream Youth Group
  - Latino community members and teachers[4]

At each listening session, whether it was one person or a group, we provided key findings up to that point. This included demographic information about Charlotte and the U.S., relevant newspaper articles, and the opportunity to react and respond via bilingual paper (feedback) form. Sharing our research, articles, and time with them helped them to share their lived experience, hopes, and thoughts with us.

Checking In

Institutions usually ask: how is listening institutionally aligned or does this make you do more work? The short answer is to always start with the mission. By examining the mission of your institution you will quickly find out if your institution has a commitment to explore new strategies of community engagement and sustainable audience development. If the mission is aligned, listening sessions can be a powerful tool for you.

Alexandra Vilchez for Levine Museum

Dr. Tom Hanchett (far left) and members of the *Latino New South* innovation team, which includes the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and Atlanta History Center, participate in a listening session at Coopertiva Latina, a credit union in Charlotte, NC.

We were able to plug in social media. For instance, the Atlanta History Center had a social media campaign telling their followers about the project and letting them respond. They posted several tweets throughout the listening sessions as well as a follow-up blog post.

We recognized that each of our cities had a different community context; therefore, we knew we were going to examine perception about the museum both in the broader community and Latino community.

An Important Note about Questions

We created the set of questions for the *Latino New South Project* to demonstrate our willingness to learn more about Latinos, share historical perspectives, and to explore new engagement strategies not previously considered. We wrote questions in a simple, easy-to-read format, giving careful consideration to nuances found in translation from English to Spanish. Over the course of three months, the team conferenced at least eight times to draft these three questions:

1. Using a particular instance that you have encountered, would you describe Charlotte as a welcoming city to newcomers?
2. What do you think the perception is about Latinos in the broader community?
3. What role can the museum play in telling the story of Latinos in the Southeast?

Benefits of Listening

• **Authentic Connections.** Particularly with groups that don't typically have a history of engagement with your institution, it is important to ask questions that not only increase the number of people attending programs, but also to foster a relationship dynamic with give-and-take from both sides.

• **Responsive Relationships.** Much different from a traditional focus group (in which participants answer questions and never engage with the results), the institution is asking with the transparent motivation to be responsive to answers. (A museum's actions may or may not address participant suggestions, but they will overtly reference them.)

• **Alignment with Community.** Once you ask real questions and establish transparency, your institution will have knowledge to become more aligned with the community. In our case, listening helped us understand family, the importance of language, and much more.

• **Stretching Staff Capacity.** When interacting with any new individual or group, we are stretched on a personal and professional level. (For example, learning how to conduct basic introductions and point of sale exchanges at the front desk in Spanish is a crucial skill for creating a welcoming environment.)

What Happened for *Latino New South*?

As a demographic grouping, this group has been largely without voice for arts and cultural institutions in the South. Our listening sessions offered a valuable opportunity to build relationships through listening to Latinos and how non-Latinos responded to the welcome Latinos receive in our communities.

We planned two days of sessions, both in and out of the museum.* A group of museum representatives and project partners attended a session at the museum with fifty Latino and non-Latino community members. The museum actively sought out and brought in experts, community organizers, and everyday people to create a space where a multitude of perspectives and backgrounds could engage with us.

The museum representatives and project partners then embarked on a bus tour of the city, stopping to have conversations with a cross-section of participants from diverse areas.

Ultimately, these listening sessions provided a platform for reciprocity between the museum and Latinos in our communities.

**Organizations may not need to do such aggressive scheduling of listening sessions. A series of smaller sessions over time may prove more effective depending on project needs and time constraints.*

Some Frequently Asked Questions

• **What are the greatest challenges to conducting listening sessions?**

First, institutional buy-in is necessary. The board, leadership, and staff must understand how the institution will benefit and the logistics of how to conduct effective sessions. This is why we suggest the first listening sessions happen internally. Second, staff must be committed to conducting sessions and THANKING every participant. All sharing may not shape the final product, but it will inform the process.

• **How is this different from a focus group?**

Listening is a process of empowering your constituents and actually using their input in exhibit and program design. It is about establishing sustainable engagement. Changing responsiveness depends on reciprocity with newly engaged stakeholders and the museum. This is the start of building a long-lasting relationship and cultivating future museum goers.

• **How did you choose participants?**

Build a network by reaching out to traditional stakeholders and ask them for connections. Build relationships with new stakeholders and then go to the community, and create safe and welcoming opportunities to share and LISTEN.

GARNERING INSIGHTS: *Latino New South*

As we held our listening sessions, several trends emerged about the museum's role in creating a culture of welcome in Charlotte.

- Latino community members thought Charlotte was welcoming to newcomers. In contrast, Latino leaders almost unanimously said Charlotte was not welcoming.
- "Levine has a great responsibility to educate our community, letting them know we also make history. They need to get to know us so they can accept us." This respondent explained that he thinks the museum should do more to educate the entire community about Latinos. The receiving community needs to know Latinos so they can accept them. Another interpretation indicates that the museum has a responsibility to play the role to educate ANYONE in the community—to act as a bridge builder and catalyst.

As we listened and heard all of these responses—particularly from Latinos—in our community we realized we have to extend ourselves in new ways.

Seven Insights into Working with Latino Partners

The following insights reflect what we heard from Latino community members during our listening sessions. As such, while some of these insights support traditional and scholarly research on Latinos in the U.S., others do not and are to be interpreted as distinct to this project and the three cities upon which it focuses.

In our listening sessions, Latinos and non-Latinos both asked that museums help receiving communities understand these realities.

Laura Anderson for Birmingham Civil Rights Institute

Multiple groups representing receiving and Latino communities as well as staff took part in simultaneous facilitation in Birmingham, AL.

1. Latinos are here to stay

- Few people grasp the huge demographic change in the Southeast since 1990. Latinos have gone from 1-2 percent of the population to around 10 percent or more in many localities.
- Roughly half of Latinos counted by the U.S. Census are already citizens—not just documented, i.e., progressing toward citizenship, but have achieved citizenship. Many are born here in the U.S. and Latino youth are the fastest growing group in many school systems.
- Museums need to convey this new reality. They can both facilitate discussion of the stresses these demographic changes bring, and also point out the opportunities.

2. From many cultures

- Latinos want everyone to know that they come from many cultures. While Mexico has sent numerous immigrants, one-third to one-half are from elsewhere in Central and South America.
- The terms "Latino" and "Hispanic" (see also number six below) are U.S. creations. Latinos usually do not self-identify as Latino/Hispanic but rather as Cuban American, Colombian, or from their particular Mexican state, for example.
- They want receiving communities to appreciate these culturally rich backgrounds and are weary of being lumped together as Mexican, or answering questions like "Where in Mexico is Puerto Rico?" They also deeply desire that their Latino neighbors and their own children do likewise.

3. Biculturalism is growing

- Young people raised in the U.S. are typically, English-proficient and bicultural. They embrace U.S. food, entertainment, and so on, but do so without abandoning Latino culture and heritage. Adults, however, do not change as quickly or as completely.
- Latinos are more likely than the overall U.S. population to use the Internet and social

media. This is partly because communities have so many youth who are "digital natives."

- On the part of receiving communities, the perception that Latinos refuse to amalgamate into American culture (e.g., learn English, follow American laws and customs, etc.) is the single most expressed fear for Latino communities. Countering that misconception and fear can be a top museum goal.

4. Extended families are important

- Latinos usually experience cultural offerings as an extended family unit—mother, father, grandparents, several kids, cousins, plus maybe a friend or other relative.
- When choosing an activity, they look for things that will both bring pleasure and renewal or self-improvement and engage all family members.

5. Bridging is essential

- People urged us to get outside the museum, to go to places where people already are.
- They talked of the need for multiple introductions: Latinos to other Latino groups; Latinos to receiving community; Latinos to southern (especially African American) history; receiving communities to Latinos; and so on.
- Latino/African American bridging is especially needed. On the one hand, many Latino immigrants bring anti-black stereotypes spread by American media. And both groups often compete for entry-level jobs. On the other hand, civil rights history can be an inspiring model for immigrant efforts today. We heard that both groups are excited and grateful to learn each other's story, "Something we never heard in school."
- The organization Welcoming America emphasizes that communities become welcoming only when immigrants and non-immigrants *do things together,* and therefore get to know each other.

6. Language is a powerful symbol

- Spanish—words on the wall, personal greetings from a Visitor Services person—is a powerful signal that Latinos are welcome. For young people who are usually comfortable with English, this welcome is symbolic. For older people, it is functional—they do need some Spanish in order to be able to guide their group and teach their children, etc.
- Spanish text also signals to non-Latinos that the South is now increasingly bicultural.
- The terms "Latino" and "Hispanic" seem largely interchangeable. In Charlotte, we heard Latino more often; in Birmingham we heard Hispanic more often.
- The term "illegal" offends many Latinos, who say that acts may be illegal, but no person is illegal. We suggest using the terms "undocumented" or "unauthorized."

7. Becoming "documented" is difficult, often impossible

- People in receiving communities often ask, "Why don't immigrants just obey the law and work toward legal citizenship?" Along with "They don't want to learn English," this is the most common negative reaction to Latinos we hear.
- In fact, quotas and convoluted regulations often make legal immigration impossible. People pointed to a graphic, "What Part of Legal Immigration Don't You Understand?" as an illustration of the barriers. At best, it is an extremely lengthy process requiring expert assistance (a leading Charlottean from Mexico talked about the nineteen years it took her to become a citizen).
- These legal problems can split families. Youngsters born here can suddenly find their parents sent back to their home country. Youngsters born in their native country but raised here can suddenly be deported to a strange land they have never known.
- Post 9-11 fears and new "show your papers" laws in Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina have greatly increased problems for Latinos. Anyone who looks Latino—even a distinguished India-born surgeon in one case—can be jailed until they prove their legal status.

Conclusion

We have found that listening yields insights otherwise inaccessible to museums. In reaching out to hear thoughts and explore trends, listening also shows stakeholders—new and old—that their ideas and presence are valued.

In the case of the *Latino New South Project*, listening gave Levine Museum of the New South accessibility to participants we had not previously heard from. In addition, it gave voice to a community that heretofore had not been sustainably engaged. Because of our choice to listen, we have been able to create culturally relevant programming, develop culturally sensitive evaluations, witness an increase in our visitation, and learn about issues and practices that help us serve as a welcoming space for our community.

As museums seek relevance and to reflect their communities, we simply cannot afford *not* to listen, especially to a fresh set of voices. Regardless of a museum's size or demographic, a bounty of learning opportunities exists. Those with the most to say may not come directly to us, so we have to seek them out, openly hear what they have to say, and complete an authentic exchange by applying what we hear to everyday practice.

An advocate and catalyst for building community capacity and understanding culture, Janeen Bryant is Vice President of Education, collaborates, manages, and executes education experiences for Levine Museum of the New South. A graduate of Davidson College with a B.A. in anthropology, she completed her Master of Science in Leadership and Management at Montreat College. She joined the Levine Museum staff in 2007, after several years as a teacher in Charlotte. She can be reached at jbryant@museumofthenewsouth.org.

Kamille Bostick, kbostick@museumofthenewsouth.org, is a programs coordinator at Levine Museum of the New South. She facilitates and designs education programming that fosters civic engagement, connections between the past and contemporary issues, and builds community. In her position, she also works with schools and teachers on connecting curriculum to the museum's exhibits and initiatives.

Resources

Downs-Karkos, Susan. "The Receiving Communities Toolkit: A Guide for Engaging Mainstream America in Immigrant Integration." *Welcoming America.* (October 2011). Retrieved from http://on.aaslh.org/Downs-Karkos.

Gill, Hannah. *The Latino Migration Experience in North Carolina: New Roots in the Old North State*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.

Jennings, Gretchen. "The Empathetic Museum." Presentation at the annual meeting of the American Alliance of Museums, Baltimore, MD, May 2013.

Jones-Correa, M. "All Immigration is Local: Receiving Communities and Their Role in Successful Immigrant Integration." *Center for American Progress*. (September 2011). Retrieved from http://on.aaslh.org/Jones-Correa.

Lippard Cameron D. and Charles A. Gallagher, eds. *Being Brown in Dixie: Race, Ethnicity, and Latino Immigration in the New South.* Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010.

Mohl, Raymond A. "Globalization, Latinization, and the Nuevo New South," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 22:4 (2003): 31-66.

Singer, Audrey, Susan W. Hardwick, and Carolyn B. Brettell. *Twenty-First Century Gateways: Immigrant Incorporation in Suburban America*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2008.

Smith, Heather and Owen Furuseth, eds. *Latinos in the New South: Transformations of Place.* Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2006.

Stein, Jill K., Cecilia Garibay, and Kathryn E. Wilson. Engaging Immigrant Audiences in Museums. *Museums & Social Issues* 3:2 (2008): 179-196.

Suro, Roberto and Audrey Singer. *Latino Growth in Metropolitan America: Changing Patterns, New Locations*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2002. Retrieved from http://on.aaslh.org/SuroSinger.

[1] Gretchen Jennings, "The Empathetic Museum," 2013 American Alliance of Museums Annual Meeting, Baltimore, MD.

[2] Sharon R. Ennis, Merarys Ríos-Vargas, and Nora G. Albert. "The Hispanic Population: 2010." *U.S. Census Briefs*. (May 2011). Retrieved from http://on.aaslh.org/CensusHN.

[3] "Receiving Communities" refers to all non-Latinos, American-born Latinos, and Latino immigrants who have lived in the U.S. for more than twenty years.

[4] We met this group at a local Latino restaurant as it was a safe, comfortable setting. Two sessions were held simultaneously with the community member session being done entirely in Spanish with no translation to English while the teacher session happened on the other side of the restaurant.

AASLH
TECHNICAL LEAFLET
A PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR STATE AND LOCAL HISTORY
#272

How To Design Programs for Millennials

By Aleah Vinick and Rachel Abbott

Millennials are famously underrepresented in museum and historic site attendance and membership, and because of this, many museum professionals are working to better meet the needs of this audience. This is certainly the case at the Minnesota Historical Society (MNHS) where recent experiences with program development and audience evaluation have led to a set of institutional recommendations, as well as program development guidelines.

Peter Meyers, courtesy of MNHS

Who Are Millennials?

Millennials are people born between 1981 and 2000. In this document, we also call them "young adults."

Why Should Museums Care about Millennials?

To say that millennials are a hot topic doesn't do justice to the flood of market research and think pieces focused on them in recent years. Millennials make up approximately 25 percent of the U.S. population and have an estimated consumer purchasing power of $10 trillion. The first generation of digital natives and the most racially diverse group in American history (one in four millennials is a person of color), they challenge cultural institutions to create programming that is engaging and relevant. It is important to consider millennials in museum programming not only because they are the largest generation of our time, but also because they are driving buying and philanthropic behaviors across generations.[1]

Brady Willette, courtesy of MNHS

The Minnesota Historical Society partners with numerous community groups for its various outreach events. For the monthly *St. Paul Welcome Hat* event, MNHS partners with the group St. Paul Hello. Aimed at newcomers to Minnesota, the event fosters inclusion by showcasing community resources and offering each guest a warm, faux-fur lined hat.

What Do We Know about Millennials?

Although it's difficult to generalize about such a large and varied group, data suggest some shared behaviors and characteristics.

Millennials Are Technologically Exceptional. They rely on technology for socializing, giving, and purchasing. As early as 2010, 75 percent of millennials identified as active users of social networking sites, creating buzz by posting videos, tweeting, and sharing links. Millennials also use social media to become well-informed consumers, tracking and advocating for their favorite events, causes, and brands. Although they tend to donate in smaller amounts than older generations, they can be consistent with their contributions when they understand and care about the organizations they are supporting. In fact, researchers note that the success of crowdfunding applications such as Kickstarter and GiveMN is due largely to their popularity with millennials.[2]

Millennials Are Social Adventurers. They prioritize experience and interaction over things: more than three in four would choose to spend money on a desirable experience or event over buying something. Among millennials, 77 percent say some of their best memories are from attending an event or live experience. Given their familiarity with social media platforms to document and share these experiences, it is not surprising that many millennials report that FOMO (the fear of missing out) influences their social behaviors.[3]

Minnesota Historical Society Millennial Programs

The Minnesota Historical Society (MNHS) has had some success reaching millennials through public programs. *RetroRama* was a large (up to 1,200 people) annual event that ran from 2007 to 2014 and featured cocktails, an original fashion show inspired by MNHS collections, and other experiences to create a lighthearted, see-and-be-seen atmosphere. *RetroRama* consistently attracted a nontraditional audience: more than half were nonmembers, and 40-50 percent of attendees were age thirty-nine or under.

Another program, *History of Hip*, uses a familiar bar as the setting for an informal lecture series that explores the historic origins of trending cultural phenomena, from tattoos to video games to mid-century

Don't confuse millennials' interest in socializing with shallowness.

design. Speakers are external partners who often bring their own fan base with them, creating an intersection of audiences that increases the reach of both the speaker and MNHS, and fosters new connections. The program generally sells out, and organizational costs are minimal. MNHS covers its hard costs, and about 40-50 percent of attendees are millennials.

In 2011, MNHS's Alexander Ramsey House developed *History Happy Hour* as an informal lecture series with drinks and snacks, held after work on the last Thursday of the month. The program includes a balance of structure and autonomy, allowing time for socializing with fellow guests and with the speaker. *History Happy Hour* generally sells out in advance and gets excellent marks on exit surveys. However, since April 2012, 62 percent of program survey respondents have been over age forty. Despite the number of older attendees, program coordinators consider these series a success at serving millennials and at developing millennial awareness of MNHS.[4]

Most ticketed MNHS programs (including *History Happy Hour* and *History of Hip*) draw a much bigger segment of MNHS's older member demographic than millennials. Though it's difficult to know for sure why the programs haven't garnered even higher millennial attendance, anecdotally, program managers hear complaints about lack of advertising and high ticket prices. Delving deeper, it seems clear that people who have already made the commitment to become members of MNHS are more prepared to devote an evening to an MNHS program and pay an additional fee to participate.

In Summary

Programs at MNHS that have done well with millennials have a few things in common: they are social, flexible, and occur after work hours on weeknights. Programs at MNHS that draw the largest proportion of millennials still don't draw a majority of millennials. The majority is a traditional MNHS member audience, and we consider a program that draws half or more nonmember attendees a successful first step to attracting a new audience.

Sean Smuda, courtesy of MNHS

The Minnesota Historical Society's *RetroRama* fashion show offered designs inspired by the society's collection; the event also featured photo opportunities, shopping, refreshments, and access to its exhibits.

These case studies also bring up questions about how we define these programs.

- Is any program a millennial program if a certain number of millennials attend?
- Is a millennial program unsuccessful if nonmillennials are interested too?
- If these programs are attracting a broader audience than the millennial demographic, are we actually programming for a psychographic rather than a demographic?

Demographic or Psychographic?

A study by the Pew Research Center shows increased online traffic and cell phone use among seniors age sixty-five and older. Today, one in three online seniors uses social networking sites, and seven in ten seniors own a cell phone. As older generations adopt the technological behaviors of their children and grandchildren, their values and expectations about shopping, giving, and cultural experiences might also begin to change. Are millennials influencing other generations, or are so-called millennial traits simply a sign of an increase in a social-adventure-seeking psychographic?[5]

Millennial Research at the Minnesota Historical Society

In 2015, MNHS staff undertook an evaluation project to better understand the organization's millennial users. Research included intercept surveys at MNHS events, focus groups exploring the cultural behaviors of millennials in the Twin Cities, and a cross-departmental Team Based Inquiry process to develop recommendations for better serving this audience. In many cases, the research confirmed common conclusions about this age group and lessons learned through MNHS's programming experience.

- Millennials look for and expect good value.
- Millennials want programs to be social and flexible.
- Social media and word of mouth are important promotional tools that in many cases are thought of interchangeably.
- Millennials invest in institutions they care about, where it's clear what their money buys, both for the cause and for them.

Based on this feedback, MNHS staff revised their survey for millennial programs to include questions that relate to the social experience and the value of programs. At the Minnesota History Center, MNHS staff are also developing a regularly scheduled ticketed series for young adults and improving offerings on Tuesday nights, when admission to the museum is free. Staff members are also exploring the possibility of establishing a millennial steering committee that would help establish new strategies for promotion, membership, and development campaigns.

This millennial research, as well as MNHS staff experience managing programs that serve (or are designed to serve) millennials, provides the basis for the following program development guidelines.

Guidelines for Designing Millennial Programs

Content

- Ground the program in content, not just experience. Don't confuse millennials' interest in socializing with shallowness. This is an audience that cares about learning new things and being engaged. Our intercept survey showed that the top reasons for attending events were "interest in topic" and "interest in a unique experience."
- Look to social media and trusted advisors to find topics that might resonate. Think about current events and how your mission might intersect with them. Think about this audience's characteristics: a passion for social experiences, adventure, and self-expression. For example, a program on the history of tattoos was one of the organization's most successful events in terms of millennial attendance.

Peter Meyers, courtesy of MNHS

Guests applaud the speaker at *History Happy Hour,* an informal lecture series in the historic setting of the Alexander Ramsey House.

Sean Smuda, courtesy of MNHS

Vintage clothing vendors sell their wares at *RetroRama* events, another example of partnering with other organizations to attract new visitors.

Design

- Create a social experience. Millennials value opportunities to share, express opinions, and visit with friends. Find ways to actively engage guests, and provide time for informal questions and conversations. Most will be attending with a friend or partner, or as part of a group. Provide hashtags so your guests can share photos and comments on social media, which will also help spread the word about your event.
- Use a flexible format. Millennials like to "party hop" and attend multiple social functions in one evening. Programs with a firm start and end time can dissuade younger people from attending. As one of our focus group attendees observed, "I'm more likely to go if it's a shorter program within a more flexible schedule."
- Play up the uniqueness. Create a sense of urgency by providing an unusual experience (after dark! sneak peek! behind the scenes!) that may only be available for a limited time or for a limited number of participants. Tap the potential of FOMO, or the fear of missing out.

Partners

- Work with external partners for both content and promotion; association with others is powerful. While millennials do seek out new experiences, they want endorsement from an entity they trust, be it a college radio station or a local brewery. One focus group participant put it this way: "Something recognizable...puts a familiar name next to the unfamiliar thing."

Timing

- Happy hour is your sweet spot. Plan events between 6:00 and 9:00 p.m. on a weekday. Guests can attend on the way home from work, but it is also not too late to prevent them from doing something else afterward.
- Because happy hour is a popular time for older audiences, too, build in flexibility for (younger) last minute ticket buyers, who may decide on short notice to attend.

Price

- Offer programming that provides clear value for the money you charge. Millennials are optimistic about their financial futures and stand to build wealth through their careers, but they also came of age during a financial crisis. Thus, they are strategic about their expendable income. As a focus group participant put it, "I can do the $15 lecture, or I can do events where I can also get food, drinks, and have friends for $15."

Case Studies

As our research and experience have shown, programming for millennials is often more effective when partners and advisors play an essential role in program design. Two recent programs illustrate different, but equally successful, approaches to these partnerships.

Saint Paul Welcome Hat

Funded with a grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, this initiative delivers a series of information-fair-style events to show off Saint Paul's many amenities to new residents. In addition to (not embarrassing) ice-breaker activities, fun swag, and food samples from area restaurants, each guest is presented with a warm faux-fur hat and Minnesota pro-tips (flash cards on local lingo and customs). The programs are a partnership between the Minnesota History Center and Saint Paul Hello, a group dedicated to making Saint Paul a friendlier place. The first two events have generated between 150 and 200 guests each. The partnership with Saint Paul Hello has encouraged program staff to work toward making the history center even more inclusive of newcomers. Saint Paul Hello volunteer ambassadors in branded green tee-shirts, oversized wayfinding signs, local food, and live music create a welcoming vibe that's been well received by guests.

Although survey results aren't in for the second event, the first event's results show that the program hit its goals in terms of audience demographics: 60 percent of guests were between ages eighteen and thirty-nine, and 76 percent were attending their first event by the Minnesota Historical Society. Guests' observations were generally positive and appreciative: "I have never felt SO welcome in any Metropolitan Area. When I lived in California, it was more of a 'there's enough people here already' mentality towards new residents."

The *Spooky Side of Suburbia* Happy Hour

To develop a millennial-friendly event themed to the Minnesota History Center's new "Suburbia" exhibit, we engaged the Minnesota History Center's 2015 fellows, an intern group that conducts in-depth research and implements other longer-term summer projects with the museum. We settled on a free happy hour event, riffing on pop culture's fascination with creepy, weird aspects of suburban life. The fellows had input on all aspects of the event, including the DJ, collections tours, photo opportunities, makeup demos, film clips, and pop-up "food court." Attendee numbers were impressive: more than four hundred guests attended, and photos on Instagram (using the hashtag #SpookySuburbs) show young, excited participants. Additionally, history center staff collected new contacts with a younger following to tap for future programming.

Time Into Pixels Photography, courtesy of MNHS

At its *Spooky Side of Suburbia* happy hour, MNHS offered photo opportunities and a hashtag (#SpookySuburbs), so that guests could share their experiences with friends via social media.

Promotion

- Use word of mouth. Note that “word of mouth” can definitely include email and social media. Millennials look at trusted friends’ activities to determine whether “their people” are interested in attending a particular program.
- Promote events by collaborating with trusted external partners.
- Use the program itself as a promotional tool and your guests as promotional partners by creating opportunities to share images and comments during and after the program. Designate hashtags so that guests can share what they’re up to, and plan a few places for photo opportunities. Also, remember to include consistent language about membership on all printed materials.

Don’t underestimate the power of vibes

- Prep your staff and volunteers to be welcoming. A guest at an MNHS “millennial program” told the program manager about her discomfort around a volunteer who seemed unfriendly; for nontraditional audiences, it is vital that the energy at the program be warm and inviting.

Get advice

- Seek input on your ideas. An advisory group made up of millennial members, visitors, and/or supporters can be a great way to get external perspective on all of the above.

Conclusion

While these guidelines are based on audience research and some program management experience, they are certainly not exhaustive or fully tested. The future of millennial programming at the Minnesota Historical Society is still uncertain, and we will continue to learn about this audience as we move forward. Trial and error is an important part of any efforts at audience engagement, and building relationships with young adults can be an endeavor that creates rewards for decades to come.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Minnesota Historical Society 2015 Millennial Audience Research Fellows David Briese, Sam Bullis, Paul Kramer, Lauren Kitrell, and Khou Lee. They are also grateful to their MNHS colleagues Maren Levad, Kris Bergquist, and Wendy Jones for research and editing support.

Aleah Vinick is a Public Programs Specialist with the Minnesota Historical Society, where she manages an array of museum programs to engage young adults. She can be reached at aleah.vinick@mnhs.org.

Rachel Abbott is a Community Engagement Specialist with the Minnesota Historical Society’s Historic Sites and Museums Division, where she develops programs for various audiences and leads community engagement projects. She can be reached at rachel.abbott@mnhs.org.

Resources

Abbott, Rachel, Sheila Brommel, Erica Orton, and Aleah Vinick. Millennial Focus Groups. Minnesota Historical Society. April 13, 2015; April 16, 2015; April 20, 2015.

Abbott, Rachel. “Success with a Twist: The Unexpected Benefit of ‘Risky’ Programming.” *AASLH: Views from the Porch* (blog). July 22, 2014. http://blogs.aaslh.org/success-with-a-twist-the-unexpected-benefit-of-risky-programming.

Cary, William. “Millennials and Museums: Strategies for Short-Term Engagement and Long-Term Success.” November 21, 2014. www.slideshare.net/WilliamCary/millennials-and-museums-strategies-for-shortterm-engagement-and-longterm-success.

Engaging Beyond the Program

Developing the millennial audience is just like developing any nontraditional museum audience: programs can't do it alone. Public programs can be an important entry point for millennials at museums and historic sites, but cannot sustain engagement without supportive marketing, membership, and development strategies. Successful models at other museums illustrate the necessary components of a long-term relationship with the audience. They include strong, targeted marketing (including a consistent voice on social media); flexible or temporary membership options; and short-term, cause-focused development campaigns.[6]

Cohen, Norty. "Is Your Strategy Showing? Truth, Justice, and the Millennial Way." *2015 Moosylvania Millennial Report* (website), http://moosylvania.com/millennials.

Dilenschneider, Colleen. "Hot Topics: Millennials." *Know Your Bone* (blog). 2015. http://colleendilen.com/hot-topics.

Feldman, Derrick. "2013 Millenial Impact Report." *Millennial Impact* (website). http://casefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/MillennialImpactReport-2013.pdf.

"Millennial Impact Report." *Millenial Impact* (website). www.themillennialimpact.com/research.

"Millennials: Fueling the Experience Economy." *Eventbrite* (website). 2014. http://eventbrite-s3.s3.amazonaws.com/marketing/Millennials_Research/Gen_PR_Final.pdf.

Morgan, Blake. "NOwnership, No Problem: Why Millennials Value Experiences over Owning Things." *Forbes* (blog). June 1, 2015. www.forbes.com/sites/blakemorgan/2015/06/01/nownershipnoproblem-nowners-millennials-value-experiences-over-ownership.

Newton, Cara. "Millennials: The Giving Generation?" *USA Today: College* (blog). December 11, 2013. www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/12/11/millennials-most-giving/3962781.

Smith, Aaron. "Older Adults and Technology Use." *Pew Research Center: Internet, Science, and Tech* (blog). April 3, 2014. www.pewinternet.org/2014/04/03/older-adults-and-technology-use.

Solomon, Micah. "2015 is the Year of the Millennial: Five Traits These 80 Million Consumers Share." *Forbes* (blog). December 29, 2014. www.forbes.com/sites/micahsolomon/2014/12/29/5-traits-that-define-the-80-million-millennial-customers-coming-your-way.

Sundar, S. Slade. "Six Millennial Fundraising Ideas from Kickstarter." *SladeSundar.com* (blog). www.sladesundar.com/6-millennial-fundraising-lessons-from-kickstarter.

Taylor, Paul and Scott Keeter, eds. "Millennials: Confident, Connected, Open to Change." *Pew Research Center: Social and Demographic Trends* (blog). February 2010. www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2010/10/millennials-confident-connected-open-to-change.pdf.

Endnotes

[1] Many studies note millenials' buying power. See, for example, Micah Solomon, "2015 is the Year of the Millennial: Five Traits These 80 Million Consumers Share," *Forbes* (blog), December 29, 2014, www.forbes.com/sites/micahsolomon/2014/12/29/5-traits-that-define-the-80-million-millennial-customers-coming-your-way/.

[2] Paul Taylor and Scott Keeter, eds. "Millennials: Confident, Connected, Open to Change," *Pew Research Center: Social and Demographic Trends* (blog), February 2010, www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2010/10/millennials-confident-connected-open-to-change.pdf, chapter 3; Norty Cohen, "Is Your Strategy Showing? Truth, Justice, and the American Way," *2015 Moosylvania Millennial Report* (website), http://moosylvania.com/millennials/; Cara Newton, "Millennials: The Giving Generation?" *USA Today: College* (blog), December 11, 2013, www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/12/11/millennials-most-giving/3962781/; and S. Slade Sundar, "Six Millennial Fundraising Lessons from Kickstarter," *SladeSundar.com* (blog), www.sladesundar.com/6-millennial-fundraising-lessons-from-kickstarter/. The above referenced *USA Today* article discusses the impact of crowdfunding, while S. Slade Sunbar offers an interesting analysis of why it's effective. According to one survey, 52 percent of millennials were interested in monthly contributions to causes they care about. Derrick Feldman, "2013 Millennial Impact Report," *Millenial Impact* (website), http://casefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/MillennialImpactReport-2013.pdf.

[3] "Millennials: Fueling the Experience Economy," *Eventbrite* (website), 2014, http://eventbrite-s3.s3.amazonaws.com/marketing/Millennials_Research/Gen_PR_Final.pdf; and Blake Morgan, "NOwnership, No Problem: Why Millennials Value Experiences over Owning Things," *Forbes* (blog), June 1, 2015, www.forbes.com/sites/blakemorgan/2015/06/01/nownershipnoproblem-nowners-millennials-value-experiences-over-ownership/. Morgan uses research findings to argue that millenials value access over ownership. Shared cars and the success of Airbnb bear out this conviction.

[4] For a more in-depth discussion of the *History Happy Hour* audience, see Rachel Abbott, "Success with a Twist: The Unexpected Benefit of 'Risky' Programming," *AASLH: Views from the Porch* (blog), July 22, 2014, http://blogs.aaslh.org/success-with-a-twist-the-unexpected-benefit-of-risky-programming/.

[5] Aaron Smith, "Older Adults and Technology Use," *Pew Research Center: Internet, Science, and Tech* (blog), April 3, 2014, www.pewinternet.org/2014/04/03/older-adults-and-technology-use/.

[6] Though his conclusions are supported by similar efforts at museums including the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, William Cary's engagement strategies at the Portland Art Museum lay out a clear route to cross-institutional engagement efforts with millennials. William Cary, "Millennials and Museums: Strategies for Short-Term Engagement and Long-Term Success," November 21, 2014, www.slideshare.net/WilliamCary/millennials-and-museums-strategies-for-shortterm-engagement-and-longterm-success.