

WORKSHOP AGENDA

Telling Our Stories: Introduction to Museum Interpretation


Monday, 23 October 2023, 9:00am–5:00pm

Utah Museum of Fine Arts, 410 Campus Center Drive, Salt Lake City, UT 84112

Facilitators: Virginia Catherall (Utah Museum of Fine Arts) and Lisa Thompson (Natural History Museum of Utah)

8:30–9:00 am	Arrivals so we can start promptly
9:00–9:15 am	<p>Welcome and Introductions (Virginia and Everyone)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome from host and housekeeping details • Introduce selves and exhibit projects • Overview of schedule and goals for today
	<p>Workshop Context and Logistics (Virginia)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National standards for interpretation - discuss interpretation challenges • Workshop series context, structure, content, goals, logistics • Resources at hand: online materials and people in the room
10:15–10:30 am	BREAK
10:30–11:30 am	<p>Introduction to Interpretation (Lisa)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is interpretation? • Who is interpretation for? • A word about evaluation • Your interpretation toolkit
11:30 am–12:30 pm	<p>Interpretive Exploration and Critique at the Utah Museum of Fine Arts (Lisa and Everyone)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACTIVITY: Explore the galleries with an eye toward interpretative strategies (30 minutes) <p><u>Last 30 minutes:</u> Reconvene to share comments</p>
12:30–1:30 pm	LUNCH (on your own)
1:30–2:30 pm	<p>Exhibit Planning and Management (Virginia and Lisa)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exhibit Planning Worksheet is our friend • Team & Timeline Management tool
2:30–2:45 pm	BREAK
2:45–4:45 pm	<p>What's the Big Idea? (Lisa and Everyone)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do we need a Big Idea? • How do you write a good one? • How can you use it? • ACTIVITY: Break-out to museum partner teams to draft your Big Idea (20 minutes) <p><u>Last 55 minutes:</u> Report from each team on Big Idea and group discussion</p>
4:45–5:00 pm	<p>Wrap-up (Lisa and Everyone)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer to syllabus – discuss assignments for next session • Questions? Comments?

**TELLING OUR STORIES:
INTRODUCTION TO
MUSEUM INTERPRETATION**



UTAH HUMANITIES
Ideas in Action

UTAH HUMANITIES HERITAGE WORKSHOP
October 23, 2023 | Utah Museum of Fine Arts, SLC, UT

Workshop Overview

SCHEDULE

Morning

- Introductions & Housekeeping
- Interpretation Standards Discussion
- Workshop Logistics
- What is Interpretation?
- Interpretive Exploration & Critique

Afternoon

- Exhibit Planning & Management
- What's the BIG IDEA?

Wrap-Up

- Questions & Comments
- Assignment
- Post-Workshop Survey

GOALS FOR TODAY

Museum Interpretation

- National Standards
- Interpretation Concepts
- Elements of Interpretive Exhibits
- Exhibit Evaluation

Project Management Tools

- Exhibit Planning Worksheet
- Time & Team Management Form

Thanks to our hosts



**WORKSHOP
CONTEXT & LOGISTICS**

Virginia Catherall | Education Curator
Utah Museum of Fine Arts
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Utah's Museum Environment

- 250+ museums plus other collecting institutions
- Fascinating collections with strong local connections functioning as community anchors
- Small museum = operating budget <\$250K
- 70% Utah museums are <\$100K; 45% are <\$25K
- 62% historical in nature; 32% DUP affiliates
- 80% have 4 or fewer paid staff, 54% have no full-time paid staff
- High turnover leads to inconsistent understanding of museum practices
- Minimal interpretation in exhibits & education
- 80% rank interpretive programs as highest priority

Utah Division of Arts & Museums surveys, 2006 to 2019

Museums are Crucial Partners for Utah Humanities



- Cultural anchors in communities all over Utah
- Work together through partnerships and give grants
- Smithsonian Museum on Main Street (MoMS) traveling exhibitions since 1995 (collaborated on 10 tours benefitting more than 50 communities)
- Many have challenges hosting MoMS, creating interpretive programs, applying for grants, etc.

How might this group benefit from training, consultations, professional development to strengthen their organizations & therefore strengthen our partnership opportunities?

Utah's Museum Interpretation Initiative

- Training & professional development
 - ✓ Shift exhibit model from 'Antique Shop' to 'Interpretive Exhibits' so museums become sites of story instead of depositories of "stuff."
 - ✓ Strengthen curatorial, interpretive, educational best practice to museum staff and volunteers to benefit them and their audiences.
- Get museum staff connected
 - ✓ With each other & with local partners – help build regional networks.
 - ✓ With state & national associations that provide access to best practice (e.g. UMA, WMA, AASLH, AAM).
- Funding & onsite support
 - ✓ Equipment, resources, mentors to help with onsite exhibit projects.

Strengthen the fabric of Utah's cultural sector

Meeting Standards of Public Trust

AAM Code of Ethics for Museums

- Museums make their unique contribution to the public by collecting, preserving and **interpreting** the things of this world.
- They own and use natural objects and human artifacts to advance knowledge and nourish the human spirit. Collections are the basis for research, **exhibits, and programs that invite public participation.**
- Museums serve society by **advancing an understanding and appreciation** of the natural and cultural common wealth through exhibitions, research, scholarship, publications and educational activities.
- These programs **further the museum's mission** and are responsive to the concerns, interests and needs of society.

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

American Association for State & Local History

Interpretation Standards (Programs, Exhibitions, Publications)

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

(AASLH, Standards & Excellence Program for History Organizations, 2010)

AASLH StEPs Interpretation Standards

Unacceptable Practices

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

(AASLH, Standards & Excellence Program for History Organizations, 2010)

What About Your Museum?

How are you doing with these standards?

Successes?

Challenges?

Ambitions?

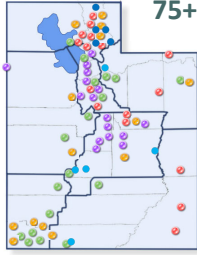


Benefits to Participants in MII

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

Expectations of Participation

- ✓ Take part in whole workshop series and prototype site visit in April-May 2024.
- ✓ Complete interim assignments and onsite exhibit project by summer 2024.
- ✓ Spend \$1500 exhibit development stipend (of that, up to \$150 for professional membership or books).
- ✓ Update exhibit project based on feedback from site visit and audience response.
- ✓ Submit final report by August 1, 2024



75+ Interpretive Exhibit Projects

Since 2010... and Counting...

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

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

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

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

2023-2024 Workshop Facilitators



Megan van Frank
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2023-2024 Workshop Schedule

- OCTOBER 23** Interpretation Intro
- NOVEMBER 13** Research
- JANUARY 8** Exhibit Design & Safe Object Display
- FEBRUARY 12** Writing & Labels
- MARCH 11** Education
- MARCH & APRIL** Keep working on exhibit projects
- APRIL & MAY** Site Visits to see *prototype* exhibits
- JUNE & JULY** Complete exhibits based on feedback
- AUGUST 1** Final Project Reports Due

#1 Interpretation

Telling Our Stories: Introduction to Museum Interpretation

- ✓ Interpretation concepts & tools
- ✓ Elements of interpretive exhibits
- ✓ Exhibit evaluation
- ✓ Exhibit planning & management tools



#2 Research

Finding Our Stories: Researching Collections & Communities

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



*"We discovered
we were telling lies..."*

#3 Exhibit Design

Designing Our Stories: Well-Structured Exhibits

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



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

#4 Writing

Writing Our Stories: Exhibit Labels

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



#5 Education

Teaching Our Stories: Museum Education

- ✓ Museum education philosophy
- ✓ Integrate educational elements
- ✓ Preparation of self-guides and education plans
- ✓ Inquiry-based, interactive teaching strategies to engage visitors (virtual & live)



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

Your Exhibit Project

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



Small cabinet exhibit, Springville DUP Museum



Large gallery exhibit, JWP River History Museum



Interpretive Exhibits on a Shoestring

DOESN'T TAKE MUCH \$ TO:

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

But it does take TIME & planning, thought, and organization

Learning Materials Online

- **Overview Section**
 - ✓ Workshop Schedule
 - ✓ Participants & Facilitators
 - ✓ Interpretation Standards from AAM, AASLH
- **Workshop Sections 1-5**
 - ✓ Bibliography & Readings
 - ✓ Each session you will get:
 - Daily Agenda
 - Presentation Notes
 - Assignment Example
- **Forms – Organizational Tools for You**
 - ✓ Exhibit Planning Worksheet
 - ✓ Team & Time Management
 - ✓ Research Log & Object Info Sheet
 - ✓ Rough Outline & Label Trackers
 - ✓ Audience Evaluation Samples
 - ✓ Final Report Form – *REVIEW NOW*

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

Museum Interpretation 2023-2024 Workshop Resources



Participants in Museum Interpretation Workshops learn how to research, design, and create interpretive exhibits and educational activities. This series of five full-day linked workshops offers staff and volunteers working in Utah's museums hands-on learning in curatorial practice and exhibit development. Participants attend the entire series and complete a small exhibit project at their own museum. The program includes reading and project-related assignments, as well as a small stipend to support exhibit development. Agendas and presentation notes will be posted just prior to each workshop.

Overview:

- Workshop Schedule
- National (AAM) & AASLH Standards for Museum & Historic Interpretation
- Workshop 1 - Telling Our Stories: Introduction to Museum Interpretation
 - Interpretation Workshop Agenda & Presentation Notes
 - Interpretation Bibliography & Readings
- Workshop 2 - Finding Our Stories: Researching Collections & Communities
 - Research Workshop Agenda & Presentation Notes
 - Research Bibliography & Readings
- Workshop 3 - Designing Our Stories: Well-Structured Exhibits
 - Exhibit Design Workshop Agenda & Presentation Notes
 - Exhibit Design Bibliography & Readings
- Workshop 4 - Writing Our Stories: Exhibit Labels
 - Writing Workshop Agenda & Presentation Notes
 - Writing & Labels Bibliography & Readings
- Workshop 5 - Teaching Our Stories: Museum Education
 - Museum Education Workshop Agenda & Presentation Notes
 - Museum Education Bibliography & Readings
 - Form Templates
 - Exhibit Planning Worksheet Template (Word Form)
 - Team & Timeline Management Template (Word Form)
 - Research Log Template (Word Form)
 - Object Information Worksheet Template (Word Form)
 - Rough Outline Template (Word Form)
 - Exhibit Label Tracker Template (Word Form)
 - Evaluation Sample - General Exit Survey (Word Form)
 - Evaluation Sample - Internal Exhibit Critique (Word Form)
 - Evaluation Sample - Audience Exhibit Survey (Word Form)
 - Final Project Report Form (Word Form)

WILL UPDATE AGENDA & NOTES AS WE GO

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

Assignments

- Refer to Workshop Schedule in your materials for details.
- Readings support your work and understanding.
- Assignments are to help keep you moving on milestones.
- Please complete the assignments given for each workshop to the best of your ability – no grades here!
 - ✓ We aim to give you feedback on every assignment within 2 weeks.
 - ✓ Email assignments to Megan vanfrank@utahhumanities.org
 - ✓ Facilitators are doing an exhibit alongside you so always an example of the assignment given with your materials.
- Completion of exhibit project is important.
- Project reports due by **August 1, 2024**.

Logistics & Support

- **Exhibit Development and Equipment Funds**
 - ✓ Coordinate with Megan to clarify your needs for the \$1500 equipment & fabrication stipend – she will issue a check
 - ✓ Professional assoc. membership / books up to \$150 of that
- **Communication**
 - ✓ Email (please check regularly and clear us from junk settings)
- **Facilitators**
 - ✓ Detailed assignment feedback.
 - ✓ We are always available to help!

MORNING BREAK – 15 minutes



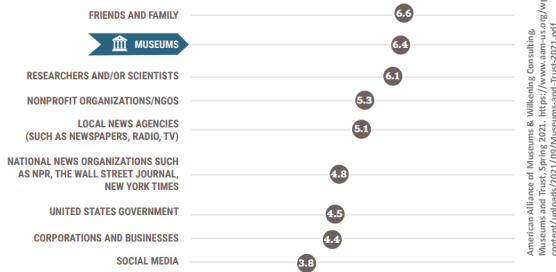
INTERPRETATION

Lisa Thompson | Exhibition Planner
 Natural History Museum of Utah
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GOOD NEWS: People *Still* Trust Museums

? How trustworthy do you find ...
 (respondents indicated on a scale of 0 to 10; average scores presented)



Reasons people gave that contribute to trust in museums:





OUR CHALLENGE: Antique Shop Syndrome

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

(Patrick A. Foltz, Ohio Historical Society Local History Notebook, November/December 1985)



OUR CHALLENGE: Tombstones Aren't Interpretation Either

What Is Interpretation?

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

Interpretation

Telling stories that are interesting & relevant

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

(from Sharing Our Stories: Guidelines for Heritage Interpretation, 2007)

How is Interpretation Different from Providing Information?



An Example of Information

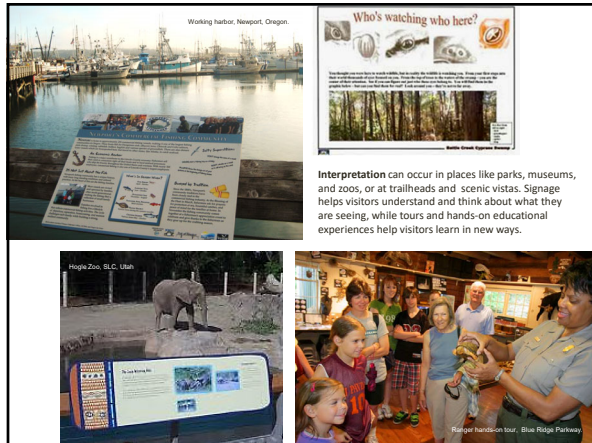
FLUORITE CaF_2

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

An Example of Interpretation

Fluorite is dazzling in its diversity

From blazing yellows to brilliant purples, fluorite (CaF₂) comes in many beautiful colors. Some specimens are multicolored, containing bands of different hues or bits of other minerals. Fluorite also comes in a variety of shapes. Look for crystals with four, eight, or even 12 sides. The special property of “fluorescence,” or glowing under ultraviolet light, was named after fluorite. You can make fluorite specimens glow in the Museum’s Gems and Minerals exhibit.



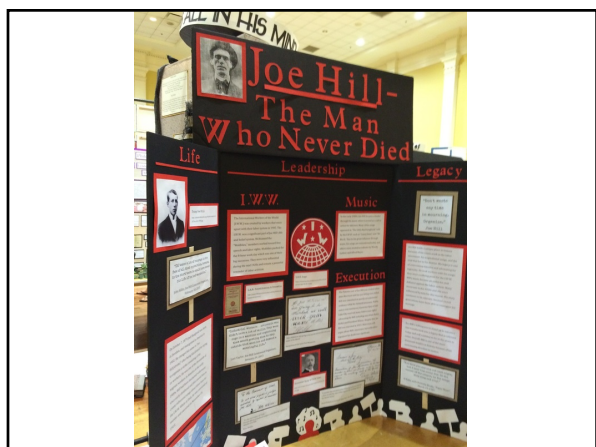
What is an Interpretive Exhibit?

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

(Based on Tom McKay, "Exhibiting Local Heritage" Wisconsin Historical Society, Exchange 24, 1982)



Above: **Interpretive exhibit** organized around an explicit theme using objects in combination with photographs, artwork, maps, and archival documents, with clearly structured labeling and educational elements
ALL WORKING TOGETHER TO TELL A STORY.



Who is Interpretation For?

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

Who is Interpretation For?

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

What Do We Know About Museum Visitors in General?

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

What Do You Know About Your Visitors?



Evaluation

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

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

- Front-end evaluation

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

- Formative evaluation

- ✓ Share your draft labels and prototype your interactive activities
- ✓ "What was the main message of that label?"
- ✓ "What interested you most?"
- ✓ "Was there anything that was unclear or confusing?"

Summative Evaluation

What was that about?

- Summative evaluation

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

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

What has worked for you?

**What Is In Your
Interpretive Toolkit?
TELL ME!**







HANDS-ON ACTIVITY

INTERPRETIVE EXPLORATION OF MUSEUM

Museum Interpretation Workshop
Telling Our Stories: An Introduction to Museum Interpretation

HANDS-ON ACTIVITY #1 - 60 minutes
Interpretive Exploration of the Museum

Objectives:

- 1) Explain how to use the interpretive process with these questions in mind:
 - What story is being told?
 - What message or point are you trying to tell?
 - How do you know what you know about the story?
 - What are the key elements of the story?
 - How do you know what you know?
 - How do you know what you know?

Take notes on your experiences to share with the group (30 minutes).

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

LUNCH BREAK – 60 minutes



EXHIBIT PLANNING & MANAGEMENT

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How do you normally
plan & implement exhibits?
Successful tips? Challenges?



Let's Plan an Exhibit

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



EXHIBIT PROJECT TEAM & TIMELINE MANAGEMENT
The role of each member is identified and delivery parameters and target dates, responsibilities, and duration.

Team & Timeline Management Form

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

Core team of 2-5 people

Form Exhibit TEAM

Team & Timeline Management Form

- Overall Exhibit Project Manager
 - ✓ Theme & Structure
 - ✓ Research (objects, images, topic)
 - ✓ Writing & Editing
- Content Development Team Roles
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DCI Model for Teams

ROLES

Who is going to do what on our team?
What is expected of me? What can I depend on others to do? What is my role?

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

GOALS

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

PROCEDURES

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

SOURCES OF CONFLICT ON TEAMS


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

ESTABLISH A TIMELINE

Team & Timeline Management Form

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



MAKE EXHIBIT PLAN

Exhibit Planning Worksheet

Museum Name:	
Project No.:	Version Date:
Exhibit Title:	
Location - within Museum:	
Exhibit Dates:	
Keywords:	
Abstract:	
Exhibit Themes:	
Exhibit Objectives:	
Supporting Concepts:	
Visitor Experience Objectives:	
Project Manager:	
Team Members:	
Attachments:	

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

Revised version due each month & used to evaluate at site visit

Exhibit Planning Worksheet Asks...

- What story do you want to tell?
 - What is the **TITLE** (working title is okay)?
 - State your **BIG IDEA** (or theme) in one active sentence
 - Develop **SUPPORTING CONCEPTS** (sub-themes) – like an essay (note that these will ultimately translate into physical exhibit sections)
 - Everything is in service to, relates back to, your Big Idea
- What is the **RATIONALE** for exhibit?
 - Make a case for this exhibit at this time
 - Trying to attract new audience?
 - Build new partnership?
 - Drive collecting or feature prize object?
- Who is your **AUDIENCE**?
 - Identify your audience beyond "everyone"
 - Plan for them

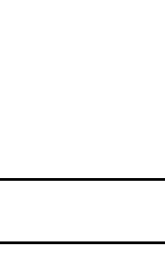


Exhibit Planning Worksheet Asks...

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

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

Exhibit Planning Worksheet Asks...

- What **OBJECTS** will help tell your story?
 - ✓ List candidates with object ID#s
 - ✓ Do you need to borrow objects?
 - ✓ Purchase or build props?
 - ✓ Augment with other items (images, etc.)?
- What are the requirements for **SAFE DISPLAY?**
 - ✓ Can objects be exhibited safely?
 - ✓ What are space and environmental needs?
- Begin to organize objects into **EXHIBIT SECTIONS**
 - ✓ According to subthemes (supporting concepts)
 - ✓ Reveals gaps in story balance



Develop a Prototype

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



Keep a Binder or Notebook

...and keep DATED COPIES of...

Team Organization Documents

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

Timeline and Milestones

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

Budget and Expenses

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

Evaluation or Feedback

- ✓ Record of any feedback or edits you've gotten from others (informal or formal).

Photos and Publicity

- ✓ Add photos as the project develops.
- ✓ Capture copies of any publicity that project generates. *...as well as...*

Evolving Versions of Exhibit Planning Worksheet

...and ATTACHMENTS...

Collection Object & Support Materials Checklist

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

Research Documentation

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

Exhibit Layout or Scale Model

- ✓ Attach sketches, including photographs of objects and supporting materials.

Exhibit Label Tracker & Other Written Products

- ✓ Rough Outline that refines research into the exhibit structure
- ✓ Evolving drafts of labels and other written materials
- ✓ Educational materials (self-guides, plans for hands-on interactives, etc.)

Evaluate & EDIT

...honestly THE HARDEST THING...

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

WILLARD WHITSON
(Planning an Exhibit, p.210)

AFTERNOON BREAK – 15 minutes



WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

Lisa Thompson | Exhibition Planner
Natural History Museum of Utah
lthompson@umnh.utah.edu



What's the Big Idea?

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

Why Do We Need a Big Idea?

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

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

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

Some Big Ideas

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

(From Beverly Serrell, Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach, second edition)

Some NOT Big Ideas

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

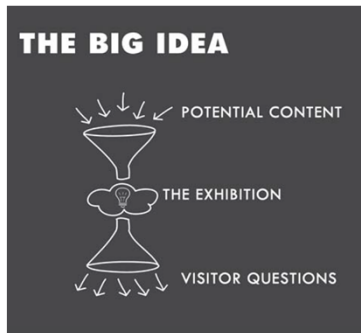
(From Beverly Serrell, *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach*, second edition)

How Do You Write a Big Idea?

- Invest the time up front
 - Start with your mission
 - Sources of inspiration:
 - ✓ Objects
 - ✓ Story
 - ✓ Historical event
 - ✓ Current issue
 - ✓ What else?
 - Test it out on anyone who will listen
 - Revise
- ...and revise again**

How Can You Use Your Big Idea?

- A Big Idea is a litmus test for every element of your exhibit
 - ✓ "What's this got to do with the Big Idea?"



(From Briano Cutts, *The Sibbett Group*)

How Can You Use Your Big Idea?

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

VISITOR SURVEY
[YOUR MUSEUM NAME]
[EXHIBITION TITLE]

EXHIBIT PLANNING WORKSHEET

What Questions do you have about Big Ideas? LET'S DISCUSS!



HANDS-ON ACTIVITY START DRAFTING YOUR BIG IDEA

Museum Interpretation Workshop
Telling Our Stories: Introduction to Museum Interpretation

HANDS-ON ACTIVITY #2 - 75 minutes
Begin Drafting Your Big Idea

1) Draft your own organizational chart

Use the space below to start drafting.

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

Anasazi State Park – Project Title

- Big Idea
- Thoughts from the group

Brigham City Museum – Project Title

- Big Idea
- Thoughts from the group

JWP River History Museum – Project Title

- Big Idea
- Thoughts from the group

Murray City Museum – Project Title

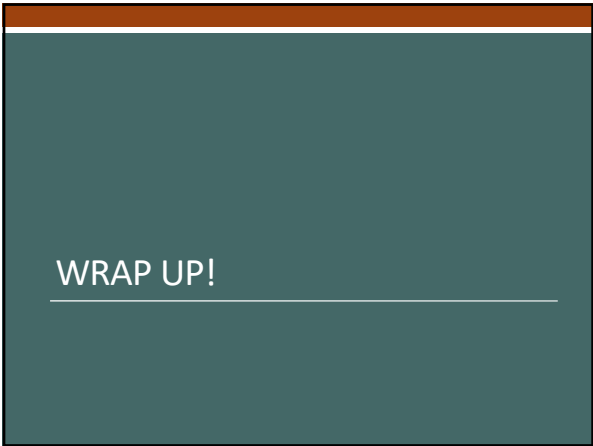
- **Big Idea**
- Thoughts from the group

Summit County Museum – Project Title

- **Big Idea**
- Thoughts from the group

Uintah County Museum – Project Title

- **Big Idea**
- Thoughts from the group



WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

Month	Workshop Dates	Workshop Title	Workshop Description	Workshop Location
October 2023	October 23-25	Research for Museum Interpretation Workshop	Research for Museum Interpretation Workshop	Utah Valley University
November 2023	November 1-3	Historical Research	Historical Research	Utah Valley University
December 2023	December 1-3	Exhibit Design	Exhibit Design	Utah Valley University
January 2024	January 1-3	Writing Our Stories	Writing Our Stories	Utah Valley University
February 2024	February 1-3	Teaching Our Stories	Teaching Our Stories	Utah Valley University
March 2024	March 1-3	Designing Our Stories	Designing Our Stories	Utah Valley University
April 2024	April 1-3	Final Project	Final Project	Utah Valley University

Museum Interpretation 2023-2024 Workshop Resources

Participants in Museum Interpretation Workshops learn how to research, design, and create interpretive exhibits and educational activities. This series of five full-day linked workshops offers staff and volunteers working in Utah's museums hands-on learning in curatorial practice and exhibit development. Participants attend the entire series and complete a small exhibit project at their own museum. The program includes reading and project-related assignments, as well as a small stipend to support exhibit development. Agendas and presentation notes will be posted just prior to each workshop.

Learning Materials Online

- Overview
- Workshop Schedule
- National IAAH & AASLH Standards for Museum & Historic Interpretation
- Workshop 1 - Telling Our Stories: Introduction to Museum Interpretation Workshop Agenda & Presentation Notes
- Workshop 1 - Telling Our Stories: Researching Collectors Interpretation Biography & Readings
- Workshop 2 - Finding Our Stories: Researching Collections Workshop 2 - Finding Our Stories: Researching Collections Research Workshop Agenda & Presentation Notes
- Workshop 2 - Finding Our Stories: Researching Collections Research Biography & Readings
- Workshop 3 - Designing Our Stories: Well-Structured Exhibits Exhibit Design Workshop Agenda & Presentation Notes
- Workshop 3 - Designing Our Stories: Well-Structured Exhibits Exhibit Design Biography & Readings
- Workshop 4 - Writing Our Stories: Exhibit Labels Writing Workshop Agenda & Presentation Notes
- Workshop 4 - Writing Our Stories: Exhibit Labels Writing & Labels Biography & Readings
- Workshop 5 - Teaching Our Stories: Museum Collaboration Museum Education Workshop Agenda & Presentation Notes
- Museum Education Biography & Readings
- Form Templates
- Exhibit Planning Worksheet Template (Word Form)
- Team & Timeline Management Template (Word Form)
- Research Log Template (Word Form)
- Object Information Worksheet Template (Word Form)
- Storyboard Template (Word Form)
- Exhibit Label Tackler Template (Word Form)
- Evaluation Sample - General Exit Survey (Word Form)
- Evaluation Sample - Internal Exhibit Curator Survey (Word Form)
- Evaluation Sample - Audience Exhibit Survey (Word Form)
- Final Project Report Form (Word Form)

<https://utahhumanities.org/index.php/center-for-community-heritage/museum-interpretation-workshop-resources.html>

FORM TEMPLATES



YOUR ASSIGNMENT

SEE WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

- 1) Draft your first version of the **Exhibit Planning Worksheet**.
(See example at end of notes.)
- 2) Draft your first version of the **Team & Timeline Management Worksheet**.
(See example at end of notes.)
- 3) Bring to next session or email to Megan by **11/13/2023**.
- 4) Check out the **readings** for this session.
- 5) Don't forget to holler for help if you need to!

Thanks! Bye!

- Support for this project provided by the Utah Division of Arts & Museums' Office of Museum Services, with funding from the State of Utah.
- We couldn't do this workshop series without the assistance of the Utah Museum of Fine Arts!
- Thanks to American Alliance for Museums, American Association for State & Local History, Museum & Galleries New South Wales, and Museums Australia Victoria for valuable resources.
- Hand in **evaluations** and **nametags** to the basket please.
- Questions? Anything else? See you next time!



Utah Division of Arts & Museums

UMFA
UTAH MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

MAIN CONTACT:
Megan van Frank | Utah Humanities | vanfrank@utahhumanities.org

EXHIBIT PLANNING WORKSHEET – First draft completed worksheet

For keeping track of your evolving ideas about exhibit content, structure, and visitor objectives. Refine as you go along.

Museum Name:	Fictional County Museum		
Prepared by:	Megan, Virginia	Version Date:	1/31/2017
Exhibit Title:	“Artists as Workers”		
Exhibit Location:	Fictional County Museum – first floor, north gallery – case #1		
Exhibit Dates:	9/15-12/30/2017 (with prototype completed by 8/28/17 for evaluation)		
Rationale:	Exhibit developed as a local companion to national traveling Smithsonian exhibition <i>The Way We Worked</i> , which traces US work history and culture: “Whether we work for professional satisfaction and personal growth or to ensure the well-being of ourselves and our families, work is a part of nearly every American’s life.” Given the museum mission to explore community arts and history, this local companion exhibit will focus on folk artists as workers, as members of the diverse American workforce whose specialty jobs power our society and improve our community. This exhibit will help the museum further document its collections and present them from a new angle, as well as refresh museum’s relationship with some of the living artists.		
Audience:	Will be designed with local families and local folk artists in mind.		
Exhibit Theme (aka the BIG IDEA that will translate directly into your Main Introduction):	Folk artists are workers who contribute to the economic and cultural life of the community. Folk artists work in a variety of mediums and styles but as workers, they all use tools to get the job done. Tools range from the material that the art is composed of, to the tools used on that material, to the workplaces or other contexts in which their products are created.		
Supporting Concepts (sub-themes that will translate directly into physical Exhibit Sections):	<p>A. WHERE artists work: Workplace can be physical space, community context</p> <p>B. HOW artists work: Tools and materials can be natural or human-made</p> <p>C. WHY artists work: Personal identity, professional fulfillment, cultural &/or economic survival</p> <p>Other ideas: Connections to place could discuss how physical location influences materials used, how culture and tradition play a part in art, how that can translate into market for that work. Connections with Utah cultures e.g. Japanese community and Topaz, refugee communities, Polynesian migrants, American Indian tribes, European traditions arriving with pioneers, etc.</p>		
Visitor Experience Objectives:			
• What do you want the audience to learn?	The workmanship and skill that goes into making art requires artists to master the tools of her/his trade.		
• What do you want the audience to feel?	Pride in their community of artists and the creativity it takes to do this job. Wonder at the specialty tools and skills needed by all types of workers to do their jobs.		
• What do you want the audience to do?	Find related objects elsewhere in the Museum to get visitors exploring (self-guide?) Try out a variety of tools during public programs at the museum but also at home.		
Project Manager:	Megan		
Team Members:	Virginia, Lisa, Kimberleigh, Matt and Kathleen (see team and timeline for specific roles)		

Attachments:

- ✓ **Collection Object & Supporting Materials Checklist** Use the attached form or create your own list of collection objects and non-collection items that are under consideration for your exhibit. In addition to objects, this list may grow to include images, maps, documents, models, props, etc. You will progressively organize these into exhibit sections based on your supporting concepts/sub-themes. Track basic object safe display requirements here also.
- ✓ **Exhibit Project Plan & Timeline** Use this form or create your own method of tracking the tasks involved in creating your exhibit, the people assigned to each task, and the due dates. You can also use a Gantt chart or whatever is preferable.
- ✓ **Exhibit Research Log & Object Info Sheets** Use these forms to keep track of your exhibit and object research. Remember to consult both primary and secondary sources. For sources that prove rich, note citation, quotes, why helpful, etc.
 - ✓ **Exhibit Layout** Attach design sketches, including photographs of objects and supporting materials.
 - ✓ **Exhibit Label Tracker** Use this form to organize your labels, see gaps. Keep feedback and edits on file.

COLLECTION OBJECT & SUPPORTING MATERIALS CHECKLIST

For recording objects or other items under consideration or needed for exhibit. Add pages as necessary. This list will be refined as you go along.

	Photo	Collection ID #	Object Name	Object Summary (Maker, Culture, Location, Dates, Materials, Dimensions, Credit Line, etc.)	Must Acquire	Exhibit Section	Requirements for Safe Display
1		1995.8.1 a&b	Moccasins	Goshute people (artist unknown), Utah Buckskin and beads. Confirm bead material? Confirm dimensions?			
2		1997.8.4	Navajo Rug	Navajo people, Unknown weaver, Utah or Arizona – research location based on design W 20.5” x H 24” (min. W near center: 20.25”)			
4		1998.3.24	Pot	Acoma Pueblo (artist unknown), New Mexico Clay, confirm dimensions			
5		2006.2.235	Sun Katsina	Hopi (artist unknown), Arizona? Mixed Media, confirm dimensions			
6		2006.2.246	Doll, Weaver at Loom	Navajo people, Unknown artist, Confirm location, 20th Century, wool, cotton, wood. confirm dimensions			
7		2006.2.263 (D119)	Textile	Hmong (artist unknown), Vietnamese, Utah cloth, confirm dimensions			
8		2007.1.1	Picking Corn Retablo	Jeronimo Lozano, Peruvian-American, Salt Lake City, Utah Wood and Potato Flour, Dimensions: H 10.5”, W 12” closed (23.5” opened), L 3”			
9		2008.10.1	Washi Paper Doll	Japan (artist unknown) paper, confirm dimensions			

	Photo	Collection ID #	Object Name	Object Summary (Maker, Culture, Location, Dates, Materials, Dimensions, Credit Line, etc.)	Must Acquire	Exhibit Section	Requirements for Safe Display
10		2010.4.7b (set is a-f)	Sioux Drum	Souix (artist unknown), provenance? Wood and buckskin, confirm dimensions			
11		2010.5.4	Tiki Carving	Tonga Uaisele, Tongan-American, Magna, Utah wood, Dimensions: H 9", W 2.75", L 2.15"			
12		2010.5.7	Horsehair Vase with Cow Skull	Dave John, Navajo or Pueblo? (is he in Utah?) Horsehair and clay, confirm dimensions			
13		confirm?	Four Corners Papercutting	Ada Rigby, Blanding, Utah paper, Dimensions: H 4.75", W 6.15"			
14			Production Tools, Raw Materials	Used to make objects, or required clothing. Any in collection already? May need to loan or buy?	X		
16			Photos	Of artists at work, of other lauded eggs of their work, of historic or earlier traditional forms of same type of work or workplaces, murals of workers here.	X		
17			Archival Materials	Drawings or sketches of ideas prior to realization or related objects; letters, diaries, receipts documenting sales or relationships – impact of work	X		
18			Maps or Timeline	Showing what exactly?	X		
19			Recordings or other Multimedia	Of artists talking about their work, process, reasons for choosing this work, identity as artist.	X		
20			Hands-on education	What items might these be?	X		

EXHIBIT PROJECT TEAM & TIMELINE MANAGEMENT – First draft completed worksheet 1/31/2017

Keep track of tasks involved in developing and fabricating your exhibit and assign SPECIFIC roles, responsibilities, and timelines.

ROLES – many of these roles will be filled by the same person, but spread responsibility to team members as possible.

Overall Project Manager:		Megan		
CONTENT	Theme Development:	Lisa	Content Review:	Matt and Kathleen
	Research Objects:	Megan	Research Theme:	Megan
	Label Writing:	Virginia	Label Editing:	Lisa
FABRICATION	Overall Exhibit Design:	Lisa	Graphic Design:	Megan
	Label Fabrication:	Megan	Construction:	Kimberleigh
	Conservation Planning:	Kimberleigh	Object Mounts:	Kimberleigh
	Installation:	Megan and Virginia	Other:	
EDUC	Education Materials:	Virginia	Education Programming:	Virginia
	Evaluation:	Lisa	Other:	

RESPONSIBILITIES – these are existing workshop due dates, but fill in interim activities as needed.

#	Task	Owner	Helper(s)	Start	Due	Status	Notes
1	First draft of Exhibit Planning Worksheet (EPWS) outlining big idea, supporting concepts, initial object list (use form)	Megan	Lisa, Virginia	2/6/17	3/6/17	done	
2	First draft of Project timeline & team roles (this document)	Megan	Lisa, Virginia	2/6/17	3/6/17	done	
3	Object research (use form)	Megan	Virginia	2/6/17	4/3/17		
4	Topic research (use form)	Megan	Matt, Kathleen	2/6/17	4/3/17		
5	Update EPWS based on research	Megan	Lisa, Virginia	3/6/17	4/3/17		
6	Sketch exhibit layout plan	Lisa	Virginia	4/3/17	5/1/17		
7	Plan for safe object display	Kimberleigh		4/3/17	5/1/17		
8	Update EPWS based on space and object considerations	Megan	Kimberleigh, Lisa	4/3/17	5/1/17		
9	Compile research into rough outline (use form)	Megan	Matt, Kathleen	5/1/17	6/5/17		
10	Draft labels (use form)	Virginia		5/1/17	6/5/17		
11	Update EPWS based on rough outline and label decisions	Megan	Lisa, Virginia	5/1/17	6/5/17		
12	Draft Education Self-Guide	Virginia		6/5/17	7/7/17		
13	Draft Education Plan	Virginia		6/5/17	7/7/17		
14	Finalize EPWS	Megan	Lisa, Virginia	6/5/17	7/7/17		
15	Build mounts & prepare case	Kimberleigh		6/5/17	8/28/17		
17	Design & create labels	Megan	Lisa, Virginia	6/5/17	8/28/17		
18	Install prototype exhibit	Megan	Virginia	8/28/17	8/28/17		
19	Create visitor survey (use form)	Lisa		7/7/17	8/28/17		
20	Revise & finalize from feedback	Megan	Whole Team	8/28/17	9/15/17		
21	Final report due to UH	Megan	Lisa, Virginia	10/1/17	10/31		