

2020 Junior Docents • Exhibit Development Session

Please read the article on the exhibition development, the two Conejos labels (Change and Community) and view the images of the exhibit. Please come prepared with at least three questions to ask during the session.

The Exhibition Planning Process

Exhibition planning is an engaging process. Exhibitions are experiences; they provide communication of ideas, information, feelings, and values. Although there are many approaches to planning an exhibit, professionals follow a general set of guidelines.

Whether you are planning a small or large scale installation for a community organization or institution, designing a virtual exhibit, or learning the exhibition planning process, the information provided in this document will layout those foundational guidelines to assist you in doing so.

Before you begin:

Consider your target audience: who will visit and interact with it? Step into your visitor's shoes and consider their perspective:

- Think about what subjects or themes your target audience would enjoy learning about.
- Think about why are they coming to visit your exhibition in person or online.
- People visit exhibitions for several reasons: for information, for personal identity and reinforcement of personal values, for social interaction, and for entertainment and relaxation.

*An excellent resource on exhibition development is by Kathleen McLean, *Planning for People in Museum Exhibitions*.

Exhibition Development Process:

Remember that these phases of exhibition development are only guidelines that professionals use. Based on your institution or community group's resources, alter the process as required for your own exhibition project.

Idea: Brainstorm all your exhibit ideas.

Feasibility: Determine the feasibility of your exhibit for your organization (cost, resources, etc.).

Purpose/Vision Statement: Write a purpose/vision statement to outline the exhibition's function, goals, intended audience, general scope and emphasis (what the exhibit is supposed to do and for whom).

Assembling the Players: Invite all individuals working on the exhibition together to discuss the preliminary design.

Communication Goals: Identify the unifying ideas that the exhibit will share with visitors, they are known as "take-home messages".

Rough Schedule and Budget: Create a schedule (or timeline) working back from the exhibition launch date to current day. Establish phases to be completed by certain dates.

Outline the exhibition's budget and keep track of costs as design continues.

Research/Front-end Evaluation: Begin researching. This will define the exhibit's topic and the narratives that will be shared. Identify the available objects (artifacts or specimens, and archival materials) in addition to other media needed to develop the exhibit. Review the museum and/or archive collection and make a list of available objects. Front end evaluation is a process that professionals use to determine the public's existing knowledge, questions and concerns regarding the topic.

Storyline/Conceptual Design/Formative Evaluation: Begin writing the storyline, or script. This incorporates the basic concepts and take-home messages and develops themes for exhibit areas. It will eventually include objects, images, and components that relate to the themes and subthemes.

- Design the conceptual design or layout of the exhibit area, or how the exhibit will appear online. Describe the look and feel of the exhibit.
- Formative evaluation is a process that professionals use to analyze what visitors think of the exhibit as it takes form.

Script/Final Design/Formative Evaluation: Combine everything into the final exhibit script. This will incorporate the exhibit text, artifacts and objects, images and interactive components. The final design goes hand in hand with the script. Many institutions use storyboards to visualize the exhibit experience and layout, or create visual walkthroughs from a visitor's point of view.

- This stage also offers a second opportunity for professionals to conduct a second formative evaluation.

Cost Estimating and Design Revisions: Finalize the exhibit costs for materials and labour, as the final script and design is complete. Re-evaluate if the exhibit is over budget, and remove certain elements or types of materials.

Final Production Schedule and Budget: Establish the timeline and budget for construction and installation. Or if a virtual exhibit, the timeline and budget to launch the exhibit online following completion of script and design.

Construction and Specification Documents: Once the exhibit design is approved, create the design documentation (measurements, specifications, etc) for the exhibit construction (includes displays and exhibit labels). This will be used by museum staff or commercial exhibit fabricators when building the exhibit. Or if a virtual exhibit, this is known as the web architecture (how content is linked together and how to do execute the technical aspects online).

Fabrication and Installation: This phase can be costly if the budget isn't kept in check. Last minute changes may arise. A smooth and efficient installation is possible if the exhibit planning and design is carefully thought out.

Opening: Plan a reception or open house to promote the new exhibition. This will draw visitors to the institution or community group, provide an opportunity to fundraise and promote future events, and celebrate the completion of the project.

Maintenance: Conduct ongoing maintenance to keep the exhibition looking fresh over time.

Summative Evaluation: Professionals use this evaluation to examine visitor’s experiences and thoughts about the exhibit. This determines if the original exhibition goals have been met. It also identifies if certain designs are effective to be used again or altered.

Exhibit Redesign/Adjustments: Based on the summative evaluation, the exhibition may need adjustments in script or design.

Process Redesign/Adjustments: Known as the “post-mortem” of the exhibition development process, identifies what worked, what difficulties arose, and how future exhibitions can be improved.

* This document was produced by *Capital Heritage Connexion Canada*

EXHIBIT: *Una Familia Grande: The Conejos Neighborhood Project*

Artifacts, photographs & stories will put this once vibrant neighborhood back on the map. Through a community-based history project, former residents tell their own stories and visitors will gain insight into the Conejos Neighborhood’s unique community identity, history and culture.

EXHIBIT LABELS

Community

Born in Colorado Springs in 1932, Victor Ornelas Sr. and his eleven siblings grew up in the Conejos neighborhood. Their parents were Manuel and Beatrice Sanchez Ornelas. Victor married Mary Josephine (Josie) Sandoval in 1955 and the couple had four children. In 1976, Victor and Josie opened the Aztlan Restaurant and Lounge at 504 East Pikes Peak. They were generous business owners who fostered a “sense of family” in the community by hosting holiday parties with toy giveaways, sponsoring baseball, softball, golf and billiard teams, and offering local dance groups rehearsal space at Aztlan. They were also members of La Fiesta Bonita, a renowned cultural festival founded by Jose and Corina Pacomia Alvarado.

Organized in 1956, La Fiesta Bonita was the first formal celebration of Mexican Culture in Colorado. And it was a phenomenal success – drawing thousands of residents and tourists to Acacia Park to see authentic dancing, hear Mariachi music, visit booths and games, and enjoy delicious food. The three-day festival was held in late summer to capitalize on the tourist season. It began with a colorful parade and was capped off by the La Fiesta Bonita Queen’s Coronation Ball at the City Auditorium.

Jose Alvarado was born in San Luis Potosi, Mexico and was five years old when his family moved to Colorado Springs for his father's job with the railroad. As an adult, Alvarado was determined to share the culture, language and religion of Mexico with young people in Conejos. As he stated, "If you have respect for your own heritage, you're going to respect someone else's heritage." To do so, Alvarado organized an extensive array of dancers, musicians and volunteers from a variety of backgrounds and recruited sponsors for the event. Monies raised benefited the National G.I. Forum, providing college scholarships to talented students. Multiple generations of the original La Fiesta Bonita participants including the Alvarado, Ornelas, Archuleta and Avila families have kept the rich traditions of Mexican music, dance and culture alive in our community.

Change

Conejos was both remarkably stable and yet subject to constant change. Platted on the outskirts of downtown in the early 1880s, for generations the neighborhood was home to working class families employed in a number of trades including construction, mines, mills, railroads, and junk yards. Residents built houses and businesses, raised families and socialized in a neighborhood crisscrossed by railroad tracks and increasingly industrial.

In 1925 the new Martin Drake Power Plant opened south of Cimarron Street, essentially blocking the neighborhood off. It also raised health concerns for Conejos residents constantly exposed to coal ash. Ironically, despite proximity to downtown, Conejos was largely forgotten. Residents went without running water, connection to sewage systems and sometimes electricity. They also lacked infrastructure such as sidewalks, curb and gutter, street lights, and paved roads. And so they organized.

In the 1950s, the Conejos Community Club met at Chadbourn to discuss needs. In April 1953, Club President Sam Melena briefed forty members in attendance about potential projects and asked them, "...not to be discouraged." For several years, any upgrades were put off until a route for the new interstate (now I-25) was determined. Conejos neighbors did not give up. They spoke at public meetings, volunteered to tax themselves to pay for improvements, and gave City Council Members tours of the neighborhood. One local official acknowledged the, "wonderful community spirit possessed by so many individuals."

Dramatic change came in the 1990s when plans took shape for a new park on the western edge of downtown and landowners were bought out. In June 1998, *Gazette* reporter Rachel Rutledge interviewed the Melenas, who were among only sixteen residents and businesses that remained. Rutledge described, "Empty cardboard boxes line the living room wall of Rudy and Ruth Melena's house. The couple has been collecting them for months, waiting to hear when they'll have to pack 48 years' worth of memories...Though the city says the property owners are getting a good deal, the Melenas would rather stay where they are. 'Our kids grew up here,' Rudy said. 'We've been through so much here.'"

In 2005 the 16.9 acre America the Beautiful Park opened. It contains a playground, pavilion, walking paths, a popular water feature, and provides access to the Midland and Pikes Peak Greenway Trails. Former Conejos residents have mixed feelings. As one stated, "It was so sad to see it (the neighborhood) just go down...All of a sudden it was gone...I loved it. It was stable, everybody had their home, and everybody knew everybody. I miss that because it was really a family." Others describe satisfaction

knowing the area still draws families together to play, share picnics and have fun. However, in the end, all agree that Conejos should never be forgotten.

IMAGES OF THE EXHIBIT











