

ACM LEADERSHIP CALL NOTES

Unique Partnerships in Children's Museums
Tuesday, October 26, 2010, 2:00 p.m. ET

**Moderator: Richard Winefield, Executive Director, Bay Area Discovery Museum
(Sausalito, CA)**

I. Bay Area Discovery Museum's Connections Program

Connections, the centerpiece of Bay Area Discovery Museum's (BADM) community efforts, is a comprehensive educational outreach program designed to create sustainable, multi-year relationships between the Bay Area Discovery Museum and its community partners. The museum currently partners with 35 local preschools, including 1,250 participating children through Marin Head Start, Marin Community Child Development Program, San Francisco Unified School District Child Development Program, Wu Yee Children's Services and Contra Costa Head Start.

Participating partners receive classroom support, enhanced museum visits each quarter, and an annual family visit. These visits include curriculum-based educational experiences and the opportunity for open-ended creative play throughout the museum. Children, teachers and families spend up to two and a half hours at the museum per visit. All transportation and museum admission is provided.

The museum offers on-site programming for participating schools (On the Bay is a program series highlighting local geography) and an enriched curriculum packet to help preschool teachers integrate the museum experience into classroom teaching. In order to create meaningful relationships between the children, teachers and families, each participating school commits to working with the museum for three years.

Connections Goals

- Establish the museum as a critical resource in the Bay Area for creative play and the extension of child development in under-served areas.
- Extend access to museum resources to children in communities who would not normally be able to experience the museum.
- Give children a feeling of ownership of the museum through consistent and repeated site visits.
- Cultivate relationships which result in families feeling welcome at the museum and returning on their own.
- Support early childhood educators in integrating the museum into the classroom without adding undue work or stress.
- Demonstrate to caregivers the importance of open-ended, creative play. This type of play can take place in any setting without special materials.
- Increase the diversity of communities involved in Bay Area Discovery Museum programs to enrich experiences for both new and existing visitors.

The partnership has successfully created long-term relationships with teachers, children and families from underserved communities, developed ongoing, creative experiences through the initiatives three-year commitment policy and succeeded in reflecting the diversity of the Bay Area through the significant number of children involved in the program.

Question: How were you able to get potential partners to make the multi-year commitment?

Answer: The project is attractive to partners because it is very fundable and our emphasis on the specific criteria for partnering has assisted us in finding compatible partners.

Question: Does the museum have an evaluation plan in place to measure outcomes?

Answer: We are working with a local organization, Research Evaluation and Assessment to measure the direct impact that the On the Bay curriculum has had on the children involved in the initiative. We also will survey with the teachers about how the initiative has changed the way they teach.

Question: What is your general attendance for the year?

Answer: Approximately 260,000 visits during the year.

III. Partnerships

A. Nonprofit

Providence Children's Museum (RI) shared information about its successful, 13-year, AmeriCorps program. The Museum AmeriCorps team is group of dynamic and diverse individuals who, in conjunction with Museum staff, design and implement programs with Greater Providence Head Start; create and conduct educational programs for Learning Clubs at community centers in Providence and Pawtucket; and recruit and coordinate Museum volunteers. Members have a strong commitment to hands-on learning and experience and/or training in child development. In return for their year of service, members receive benefits including living allowance, health insurance, childcare allowances, an educational grant and more. The AmeriCorps team members work out of thirty sites that reach a total of 1,500 children each year. At the end of each school term, the museum hosts a celebration that includes a family night for all participants. This event, coupled with the success of the AmeriCorps program has instituted a deep partnership with the community and local families.

Question: How are the AmeriCorps volunteers at your museum supported and what does the commitment entail?

Answer: AmeriCorps members serve full time for 11 months and are supported by a federal grant through the state commission. Providence Children's Museum currently hosts 13 AmeriCorps volunteers.

Question: Do you track metrics?

Answer: Yes. Because we have an outreach program and we receive support from the AmeriCorps grant, there is a required measurement process in place. It assists the museum with planning long-term goals and outcomes and provides measurable objectives that we present annually in our AmeriCorps renewal applications. Metrics can be a slippery slope. Funding agencies want to see results. Sometimes results are a challenge. For us, the challenge is to be real and honest and not make promises we can't keep.

Question: It is easy to measure quantitative and qualitative items but more challenging to analyze, evaluate and report back on long-term results. Does anyone have a good way to measure the effectiveness of a program over a period of five-to-six years?

Answer: Few studies are able to prove long-term effects. It is important to look at smaller impacts that are the building blocks to long term growth. Charlie Trautmann, executive director of the Sciencenter in Ithaca, NY, wrote an article in the March-April 2009 edition of *Informal Learning Review* and in the *ASTC Dimensions* newsletter (July/Aug 2010), about the metrics of educational programs in museums.

B. For-Profit

- Madison Children's Museum (WI) described its lucrative, 24-year partnership with American Girl®, the successful, Wisconsin-based company that promotes and sells a line of dolls, books and accessories based on pre-teen girl characters. The American Girl Benefit Sale is an annual, two-day fundraising event hosted by Madison Children's Museum. The event attracts up to 6,000 customers from around the country. Museum volunteers are responsible for preparing the sale of overstock merchandise donated by American Girl. The museum and American Girl supported charities split the proceeds equally. The successful venture has generated approximately \$14 million for the museum, provides a significant contribution to the annual operating budget and supports the museum's efforts to provide outstanding exhibits and programs for children and families.

Question: What percentage of revenue comes from the partnership?

Answer: At present, approximately 10 percent of the museum's revenue is generated from this event. At its peak three and a half years ago, the museum generated 35 percent of revenue through the partnership.

Question: Can you disclose dollar amounts generated through the partnership?

Answer: There has been a drop in sales due to the recession. This year, sales generated \$600,000. In past years the figure has been as high as \$1.5 million.

Question: Do you devote a staff person full time?

Answer: Yes, the museum employs a full time employee with warehouse management experience. This person is responsible for serving as a liaison to American Girl®, supervising the museum volunteers assigned to this event and managing the year-long development process.

C. Government (Local/Federal)

- Children's Discovery Museum of San Jose (CA) highlighted its Zero Waste Practices initiative, a partnership around supporting green practices at the museum. The Environment Service Department of The City of San Jose approached the museum to, "go green," in 2008, in an effort to support a city-wide initiative to divert 100 percent of its municipal solid waste from landfills within 15 years. The city provided the funding to start the initiative, which included specially designed trash and recycling receptacles for the museum. Since starting the initiative, the museum has added a composting program to its Café, which is managed by an outside contractor and performed waste audits to monitor outcomes. Trash costs have gone down proving that it is significantly cheaper to recycle, and the museum has added more bins (for diapers and paper towels) as well as guest signage, in an effort to continue the success of the initiative and increase the amount of waste that they recycle.

Question: Does the museum compost waste onsite?

Answer: No, the museum works with a compostable friendly company that removes the waste and provides recycling bins and compost dumpsters at a discounted rate.

- Wow! Children's Museum (Lafayette, CO) reported on its tri-partnership to purchase solar panels for their building. With the assistance of a \$20,000 grant from Namasté Solar electric company, matching support from both local and federal entities and donated labor for installation, the museum added solar panels to its building, decreased its energy costs and is eligible for a rebate paid by the local utility company for the balance.

Question: How did the museum capture funding for this effort?

Answer: The museum is always looking for potential funding opportunities for grant proposals. Namasté Solar offers a solar grant program for organizations in the Denver/Boulder area that are interested in committing to energy conservation.

D. Schools/Libraries/Universities

- Kohl Children Museum of Greater Chicago (IL) shared information about its partnership with National-Louis University (Chicago, IL). Through stimulus funding, the museum partners with the university as a resource for students working toward receiving a teaching certificate in early childhood education. The museum offers part-time work to students as floor staff, providing a professional development resource opportunity where they can observe children in play environments. Recruitment for the program has been challenging. The museum and the university are working together to enroll students into the program. The museum currently has 17 students enrolled and the support from the stimulus funds assists the museum in maintaining adequate numbers of floor staff

Question: How did you tap into the funding?

Answer: National Lewis University approached us about the program. We also researched state funding opportunities through the stimulus program.

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