

Chapter 6:

EFFECTS ON INDIVIDUAL CHILDREN'S MUSEUMS

Introduction

The Freeman Foundation Asian Exhibit Initiative (the *Initiative*) developed seven traveling exhibitions for children, each focusing on a single Asian culture. The exhibitions opened in early 2004 and each then traveled to at least ten children's museums around the United States.^{1,2} As part of the *Initiative*, the Association of Children's Museums (ACM) commissioned a research study to assess the contributions of the *Initiative* to American children's understandings of Asian culture.³ This chapter examines the effects of the *Initiative* on the participating children's museums. Chapter 7, "Effects on the Children's Museum Field" discusses effects on the children's museum field as a whole.

Defining Terms

The children's museum field is composed of many related parts, including the hundreds of children's museums across the United State and the thousands of people who work in them. It also includes the many people and organizations who serve those museums in either the public or private sector, including the Association of Children's Museums. Beyond those people and organizations, the field includes the relationships that bind the museums and their staff to each other and to the ACM, plus the knowledge, philosophies, and goals that children's museum people and organizations hold in common.

The research indicated that the *Asian Exhibit Initiative* had a broad range of effects across the children's museum field. These effects will be described using a three-part classification for outcome evaluations and program logic models (W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 2001). *Outputs* are the direct products of project activities, which in the case of the *Initiative* included the exhibitions themselves, marketing materials, cultural and artistic programs developed to support their *Initiative* exhibition, and more. *Outcomes* include changes in participants' behavior, knowledge, and skills. Earlier chapters looked at the *Initiative's* outcomes for visitors; this chapter looks at outcomes for children's museum staff. Finally, *impacts* are fundamental changes occurring in organizations, communities, or systems as a result of project activities. Note that impacts develop on a broader level, affecting organizations rather than individuals. Also, there is a difference in time span implied by these terms; although outputs and some outcomes develop fairly quickly after initiation of the project, impacts often taking years to develop (Kellogg Foundation, 2001).

This chapter looks at the outputs, short-term outcomes, and potential impacts of the *Initiative* at the level of individual children's museums and for the people who work there. Chapter 7 examines the broader and longer-term effects of the *Initiative* on the children's museum field.

¹ For a detailed overview of the *Initiative*, see the Introduction to this report.

² For a detailed description of each of the seven exhibitions, see Appendix A.

³ For a description and overview of the research study, see Appendix B.

The Host Museums

A wide range of museums hosted *Asian Exhibit Initiative* exhibitions. For instance, the 70-plus hosting museums varied greatly in size. Based on data from the host survey, the museums varied in terms of annual operating budget (Table C-3), staff size (Table C-4), and annual attendance (Table C-5).⁴ Although most hosting museums were located in mid-sized or larger urban areas, some were located in suburban settings (Table C-6).

The host museums also had a range of previous experience with cultural exhibitions and programming. Although most had conducted programming related to other cultures, fewer had exhibits with cultural or multicultural themes, and a minority had their own exhibits related to Asian cultures (Table C-7). The host museums also had a broad range of experience with traveling exhibitions. At the inception of the *Initiative*, 41% of the host museums reported hosting two or more traveling exhibitions a year. However, 17% of the host museums said they had never hosted a traveling exhibition before, and another 20% said they hosted traveling exhibitions at most every two or three years (Association of Children’s Museums, 2003). In particular, most museums reported that they had hosted cultural or multicultural exhibitions infrequently (Table C-8). Some host staff explained that this was, in part, due to the limited range of attractive cultural exhibitions available for rent. As one host staff member stated,

We are always looking for traveling exhibitions with multicultural themes, but very few of quality come across our desks.

Outputs for Individual Museums

Obviously, the major outputs for producing museums included the seven exhibitions and the range of supporting materials that accompanied them. These supporting materials included exhibition installation and maintenance manuals, public relations materials, and educational materials developed by the producing museums to help guide and inspire programming at the host museums.⁵ The producing museums also provided staff support to host museums, which sometimes included sending a staff member to assist with exhibition setup.

The host museums appreciated many aspects of the *Initiative’s* exhibitions, not the least of which was the low cost to them, made possible by The Freeman Foundation.⁶

First and foremost, it enable[d] more children’s museums to host such quality exhibits, which otherwise would not have been possible!

[The] ACM relationship with a major donor provide[d] money for large museums to create exhibits and travel them to smaller museums that cannot work on this scale and level of sophistication – i.e. brings extremely high quality to smaller cities and more rural areas of the USA.

Because both the development and distribution of the exhibitions were funded through ACM, the host museums portrayed the *Initiative* as “giving museums and their audiences an experience that they may not be able to provide on their own.”

⁴ All tables are included in Appendix C.

⁵ These materials are cited for each exhibition in Appendix A.

⁶ The quotations in this chapter were selected from host surveys as examples of the *range* of ways in which respondents discussed the topic in question. However, the number of quotations does not represent the relative frequency or strength of a particular response.

Many outputs produced by the host museums were developed in direct response to the producing museum's work. For instance, the host museums each developed a plan for marketing their exhibition in their area based on publicity materials provided by the producing museums and the Association of Children's Museums. These efforts were partially funded by the \$15,000 grant from ACM. The marketing plans included a balance of free publicity and paid advertising (Table C-9), usually based on models provided by the producing museums (Table C-10). The host museums developed creative marketing ideas to attract diverse audiences (Table C-11).

In addition, the host museums developed a wide variety of programming that took place during their *Initiative* exhibition. Most museums said they did more programming for their *Initiative* exhibition than for other traveling exhibitions they had hosted (Table C-12), usually building on model educational materials provided by the producing museum (Table C-13). Most museums conducted at least four or five of the many types of programs listed in Table C-14. Some sample program descriptions demonstrate the range of programming conducted by the host museums:

[We presented] Asian Culture Fest activities and programs, including "The Magic of the Monkey King" theatrical performances; Children's Museum floor programs ("Asian Adventures," "SuperSprouts: Monkey Stories," "Origami Game Show").

The Magic of the Monkey King theatrical performances were presented solely because we had The Freeman [Foundation] traveling exhibit. It was a wonderful program and very successful.

We held several extensive program day events: Tet; MidAutumn Festival; a Viet Nameese Feast; a number of Arts and Craft days.

Every Saturday we had a person from our Korean community volunteer to do Korean craft/activity at the exhibit.

The following is a listing of the special programming activities that went on during the run of the exhibition at our museum:

- Viet Nameese paper folding demonstrations
- Dragon Dance performances
- Sampling of Viet Nameese food
- Viet Nameese fashion shows
- Origami demonstrations
- Fan Dance performances.

Anne Fadiman spoke (The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down).

Our annual fund-raising event theme was Chinese Lunar New Year.

[We] showed anime films. In addition, we had an adult night (PG) anime film festival.

Also, some educational programming was developed specifically for schools.

[We] held a middle school and high school students' Japanese tea with games and some Japanese food.

[Our] education coordinator offered a Discovery Workshop the month of April for school groups & community groups.

We developed a teaching curriculum which required six teachers to move large groups through the exhibit.

[We] developed a 1/2 hour "Time Travel to China" field trip program for 1st-3rd grade, embracing state learning standards.

[We developed] an art project (batiking) to accompany field trip class visits.

The *Initiative* inspired many host museums to develop in-house exhibits to supplement or extend their Initiative exhibition, as shown by the following examples. Note that many involved contributions from the community and/or Asian American organizations.

We had several members of our community who donated their tea sets, dolls, fans, etc., that were offered for us to display. Another person offered a kimono, hats, and sandals for a mannequin window display.

[We displayed a] photo exhibit from the Japanese Gardens, large framed photographs in the foyer and hallway leading to exhibit.

[The museum] re-curated its Origami as Architecture exhibition to showcase traditional and new forms of origami and paper art.

[A] kite exhibit was provided by the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center.... It consisted of 48 handmade kites from Japan.

[We] also created a reading area in exhibit. [The] exhibition came with books. We purchased an area rug and floor pillows and added a donated rocking chair for adults and children to sit and read.

We leveraged the exhibit to actually convert our entire museum to reinforce cultural studies around China....Our reading areas' books were switched out with books about China. The puzzles in the game areas were switched for puzzles from China as well... Our kitchen/café exhibit was given an Asian theme.

The *Initiative* exhibitions, aided by the host museums' marketing and programming efforts, served about 3.5 million visitors at host museums during the four-year tour (Table C-15). Most hosting museums reported at least a slight increase in attendance over the same time period for the previous two years (Table C-15). This increase may be due in part to the *Initiative* exhibitions attracting a broader audience to the hosting museums, including more visitors of Asian descent and older children and adults (as noted in Chapter 1). However, the total attendance figures reveal that the *Initiative* had, at most, a negligible impact on overall attendance at children's museums (Table C-15), and a few host museums expressed disappointment that their *Initiative* exhibition did not increase attendance as much as they had hoped. Perhaps the children's museum field should expect that cultural exhibitions will increase the diversity of their audiences and achieve goals critical to their missions, but may not greatly increase the *numbers* of visitors they serve.

Outcomes for Children’s Museum Staff

As noted earlier, the outcomes of a project include changes in participants’ behavior, knowledge, and skills. Earlier chapters discussed outcomes for visitors; this section discusses outcomes for children’s museum staff and volunteers.

Staff learning was a major outcome for most of the participating museums. For instance, in the process of preparing for the exhibition and associated programs, staff and volunteers learned about the culture portrayed in their *Initiative* exhibition.

We, as a staff, learned much about the Japanese culture. We worked for a long period of time, researching and testing ideas, connecting to community contacts, and made it a real priority.

Staff got to learn about Japanese culture as programs, volunteers & exhibit staffing were developed.

We all learned so much about the Hmong people.

In addition, ACM funding allowed several museums to add temporary staff to extend their educational efforts.

[The grant from ACM] afforded us the opportunity to hire a knowledgeable Southeast Asian staff exhibit coordinator.

[Asian] staff member in residence for 12 weeks brought new energy and expertise.

Increased staff understanding and skills related to traveling exhibitions was also a major outcome of the *Initiative*.

The most significant impact that this exhibition had on our institution was that it was our first incoming traveling exhibit. This exhibit provided our staff, and volunteers [with] a variety of new experiences, from the intricacies of installing an exhibit such as this, to the staff and volunteer training... The museum staff learned a great deal about the considerations involved with installing a temporary exhibit, and we appreciated the opportunity to gain this new expertise.

It gave us a better understanding of the measures of quality within the traveling exhibit world and also the complications that can arise from the use of technology.

Many host museums – especially the smaller ones – paid a price for their increased knowledge of traveling exhibitions. Host museums experienced difficulties with preparing the exhibit space, unloading the trucks, setting up the exhibitions, storing the crates, maintaining the interactive and multimedia components, and packing up the exhibition for shipment to the next venue.

Logistics were difficult with a very small staff.

The most challenging thing about hosting this exhibit was the installation. Although in the end we had a successful installation, the experience revealed our limitations to host this type of traveling exhibition.

[The biggest challenge was] SET UP & TEAR DOWN & LOADING SEMI!!! The size and quantity of crates with no loading dock or inside staging area depended on weather since crates didn’t fit in our building. It was too hard to load the semi.

There were also challenging aspects around exhibit components that never worked. Some of the technology kiosks were difficult to hear and were not effective.

The exhibit was larger and more technically complex than originally thought. This led to added expense and frustrations.

These experiences highlight the need for clear and accurate communication between producing and host museums about exhibition requirements and the limitations of host museum buildings. In addition, some smaller and first-time host museums did not accurately describe on their applications how their facility met the physical requirements of the exhibits. Nonetheless, some host staff said they saw the benefits of learning-by-doing traveling exhibitions.

We are a small organization and so making sure all the components were out and useable took a little effort...but it was worth it.

The size and scope of this project tested our abilities to the max. We rose to the challenges and were able to accomplish the goals and objectives we set for ourselves as a staff. The institution gained credibility in the community—we impressed many!

These increases in staff knowledge were, in turn, responsible for some of the larger impacts of the *Initiative* on the participating museums, as detailed in the following section.

Impacts on Children’s Museums as Organizations

As noted earlier, impacts are fundamental and long-term changes occurring in organizations, communities, or systems as a result of project activities. Based on the available data, several major impacts may be developing at museums that produced or hosted the *Asian Exhibit Initiative* exhibitions. However, because impacts develop over long time frames, we cannot be certain that they will continue to develop or last unless further study is done.

Building Relationships with the Asian American Community

For many museums, the most important impact of the *Initiative* was the development of new or stronger relationships between the hosting museums and their local Asian American communities. The museums expected to develop such relationships, and most were not disappointed.

We hoped to develop a relationship with the local Hmong community. Their enthusiastic participation exceeded our expectations.

The opportunity to build connections to the Chinese community exceeded expectations. The community was extremely thrilled with this opportunity and took full advantage.

These partnerships resulted in programming, additional exhibits, and funding opportunities for the host museums. However, not all host museums were able to develop these sorts of relationships.

Our expectation to create new connections within the community was not met as we expected. There are not any formal Japanese organizations in [our] area. Due to this, we collaborated with individuals in the community.

[Although we expected] strong sponsorship from the Asian community, we made great effort with no success.

It was not always clear why some museums were less successful, although it is possible these museums might have benefited from support and advice from some of the more successful museums.

In addition to developing relationships with the organized cultural community, some host museums also looked to their local Asian community for audience development.

Our museum has a strategic focus on increasing attendance from the Viet Nameese community.

Asians are among the fastest growing ethnic groups [in our area]. The subject/topic offered the possibility of bringing in more Asian visitors than we usually get.

We viewed hosting the exhibit as an opportunity to reach out to local Viet Nameese audiences.

Although most museums reported an increase in Asian visitors during the run of their *Initiative* exhibition, no post-exhibition data is available. Therefore, we cannot fully evaluate this potential impact on the hosting museums.

Building Capacity to Host Traveling Exhibitions

Respondents sometimes used the term *capacity building* when discussing host museum's experiences with the *Initiative* exhibitions. In the case of traveling exhibitions, building capacity means increasing staff abilities and expertise, and it affects a number of other factors including funding, developing appropriate spaces within the museum buildings, and more. Building traveling-exhibition capacity was particularly important to museums that had never hosted a traveling exhibition before, or had not hosted one for a long time. The *Initiative* gave them a low risk opportunity to see if this approach to exhibitry worked for their museum.

Our institution has not received a traveling exhibit for many years. It was an opportunity to test community interest and internal needs.

Opportunity to host a traveling exhibit was new to us...and was made affordable to us through Asian Exhibit Initiative.

Host museums developed many capacities through their *Initiative* experiences, including identifying new sources of funding.

It was important to identify new opportunities to partner with funders. It turned out to be an important new opportunity to work with a shopping center that is just opening, laying the foundation for a lasting relationship.

We expected that hosting a nationally traveling exhibit would raise our profile within the funding community, and we are pleased to report positive results. We added two new corporate funders and realized increased individual donations during [the exhibition's] run.

[The Initiative] helped develop our traveling exhibit hall while creating a partnership with [a sponsoring company].

Another important aspect of capacity cited by the host museums was the relationships developed between museum staff members as they shared the experience of hosting a traveling exhibition.

This was the largest project we ever mounted, and we met, as a staff, on a weekly basis for almost two years.

The whole process of installing and promoting the exhibition had a positive impact on team-working aspects [for] all departments in our museum.

It seems that team-building and staff relationships should be included as another aspect of the capacity building process. However, we need to caution once again that these data on capacity building were collected over a short timeframe. Enhanced capacity seems, at this point, to be an important impact for the participating museums, but only time will tell what the museums are able to do with their new capacities.

Building Capacity to Develop Cultural Exhibitions

Producing museums also gained a wealth of knowledge about developing cultural exhibitions for children. Here is a sample of what some had to say about this topic.

The Asian Exhibit Initiative helped [us] to refine techniques—using individual experiences and stories, genuine objects, and face to face encounters—that help visitors understand diverse cultures.

[Our museum] has developed a new model and approach for presenting cultural exhibits, which staff is applying to another traveling exhibit now under development.

For [our museum] one of the greatest outcomes of the Initiative has been the creation of a new model and developmental framework for planning cultural exhibits. [We have] built lasting connections to the [Asian] community, increased its capacity for developing traveling exhibits and have become a leader for outreach to the [target] community.

Some host museums also talked about impacts the *Initiative* had on their plans for future exhibitions. For instance, some museums had never hosted cultural exhibitions before. They said they were using the *Initiative* as a way to expand into new subject areas.

[The Initiative] presented an excellent opportunity for us to expand beyond the usual natural history and science exhibitions

[We] wanted to “experiment” with other types of exhibits than the ones we usually do.

Others talked of their plans for building their own cultural exhibitions, listing ways in which their *Initiative* experience helped build their capacity to achieve that goal.

[This] fit with our mission and strategic plan. [It was a] chance to host a sophisticated cultural exhibit before building our own.

Our expectation [was] that our staff would benefit from fresh exhibit techniques. We used [the exhibition] as a common reference in planning a new exhibit and reviewing interpretation techniques.

[Our museum] has strong and extensive family programming, but no exhibition that is primarily oriented to families. We are planning to develop one, and [the exhibition] taught us useful lessons and demonstrated the success of such exhibits.

[We have no permanent exhibitions devoted to Asian cultures] but you can be sure that this will change in our future thinking [and] strategic planning! It has already influenced programming.

Again, this impact will be playing out over the next several years, and it will be interesting to see if the momentum that these museums developed during the *Initiative* will be maintained.

Some Remaining Opportunities

Looking over the outputs, outcomes, and impacts of the *Asian Exhibit Initiative*, it is clear that some aspects of the traveling exhibition process were more difficult than expected, such as some host museum's frustrations with the logistics of their *Initiative* exhibitions. Some host staff saw this as part of their own learning experience about traveling exhibitions. However, the researchers believe that ACM and the children's museum field now have enough accumulated knowledge to make traveling exhibitions a much less difficult experience for smaller and first-time host museums. Now seems like a good time to collect, organize, and distribute that knowledge.

Although most host museums successfully built relationships with their local or regional Asian American communities, others were less successful. Again, now is a good time to collect, organize, and disperse the field's growing knowledge about what works and what factors may hinder building these relationships.

Learning-by-doing was a successful strategy at many of the host museums, contributing to a range of positive outcomes for their staff. However, as ACM staff have pointed out, the *Asian Exhibit Initiative* was conceived and developed before the Internet's current wave of social networking technologies. The potential for these technologies to support staff learning-by-sharing should be exploited, including sharing ideas for marketing, programming, exhibit development, and evaluation.

Finally, some participating museums reported that they continue to, or plan to, develop their own cultural exhibitions. Therefore there is an opportunity for ACM and the producing museums to share their knowledge about the development and design of cultural exhibitions.

Recommendations for ACM

Develop a list of design and support criteria that make traveling exhibitions easier for small and first-time hosts. It is important that new host museums continue to learn-by-doing traveling exhibitions, but it should be possible to make improve the logistics of the process.

Future initiatives should focus more effort on opportunities for staff learning. In particular, use a variety of electronic means to provide training and support for staff at smaller and less-experienced museums.

Find ways to tap producing and host museums' knowledge about building relationships with their Asian American communities. Each host has a story to tell, and these should be gathered and organized in a way useful for other museums.

Provide support for children's museums that produce new exhibitions about other cultures, either for in-house or for travel. This includes developing mechanisms to share accumulated knowledge about the process of designing cultural exhibitions. The sessions at *InterActivity 2007* were a good starting point, but the field should establish more permanent resources available to museums when they need it most.

Continue to collect data from the participating museums. To better understand the long-term outcomes and impacts of the *Asian Exhibit Initiative*, the researchers suggest conducting follow-up staff interviews, and perhaps written surveys, at several points over the next two to five years.

See the Executive Summary for a synthesis of all the recommendations from this report.

References

The following references were cited in this chapter.

Association of Children's Museums. (2002). *Interest survey report*. Unpublished manuscript, Association of Children's Museums, Washington, DC.

W. K. Kellogg Foundation. (2001). *Using logic models to bring together planning, evaluation, & action: Logic model development guide*. Battle Creek, MI. Retrieved July 29, 2007: <http://www.wkkf.org/Pubs/Tools/Evaluation/Pub3669.pdf>

A complete list of references consulted during this study is included as Appendix D: Classified Bibliography.

Citation: Selinda Research Associates, Inc. (2008). *The Freeman Foundation Asian Exhibit Initiative Research Report*. Washington, DC: Association of Children's Museums.

Chapter 7: EFFECTS ON THE CHILDREN’S MUSEUM FIELD

Introduction

The Freeman Foundation Asian Exhibit Initiative (the *Initiative*) developed seven traveling exhibitions for children, each focusing on a single Asian culture. The seven exhibitions opened in early 2004 and then traveled to at least ten children’s museums around the United States.^{1,2} As part of the *Initiative*, the Association of Children’s Museums (ACM) commissioned a research study to assess the contributions of the *Initiative* to American children’s understandings of Asian culture.³ Chapter 6, “Effects on Individual Children’s Museums” focused on effects on individual children’s museums and their staffs. This chapter focuses on focuses on the effects of the *Initiative* on ACM and the children’s museum field as a whole.

Defining Terms

As noted in Chapter 6, the research indicated that the *Asian Exhibit Initiative* had a broad range of effects across the children’s museum field. This chapter looks at effects that go beyond the individual museums who participated in the *Initiative*, discussing ways in which the *Initiative* has affected, and may continue to affect, (a) children’s museums and museum staff who did not directly participate in the *Initiative*, (b) the relationships among children’s museums, (c) and the Association of Children’s Museums.

As in Chapter 6, these effects will be described using a three-part classification: (a) *outputs*, the direct products of project activities, (b) *outcomes*, the changes in peoples’ behavior, knowledge, and skills, and (c) *impacts*, broader and longer term changes occurring in organizations, communities, or systems (Kellogg Foundation, 2001).

Outputs for the Children’s Museum Field

The most obvious outputs of the *Asian Exhibit Initiative* have been the seven exhibitions, which were seen by about 3.4 million visitors at host museums during the four-year tour (Table C-15). The *Initiative* has changed the number of traveling exhibitions about culture, as well as ideas about what makes a good children’s museum exhibition about culture. As host museum staff stated,⁴

It is amazing to have seven high quality exhibits about Asian culture on the market. We plan to rent some.

¹ For a detailed overview of the *Initiative*, see the Introduction to this report.

² For a detailed description of each of the seven exhibitions, see Appendix A.

³ For a description and overview of the research study, see Appendix B.

⁴ The quotations in this chapter were selected from host surveys as examples of the *range* of ways in which respondents discussed the topic in question. However, the number of quotations does not represent the relative frequency or strength of a particular response.

[The] quality of traveling exhibits has a new standard. Authenticity through use of real materials and credible advisors gave the exhibit a more professional quality than many have enjoyed earlier.

It raises the bar and sets a cultural benchmark for traveling cultural exhibits, while inspiring smaller institutions with the possibilities.

In addition, the *Initiative* exhibitions will continue to be displayed at children's museums and other venues at the conclusion of the current tour. In a phone survey conducted during October 2006, several of the producing museums said they had preliminary plans to travel their *Initiative* exhibitions to children's museums around the country (Association of Children's Museums, 2006). As of winter 2008, several *Initiative* exhibitions were soliciting additional bookings using the ACM *Exhibits Marketplace* website. All the exhibitions may be available for a national tour pending additional funding. Both the ACM and producing museums reported that dozens of museums had expressed interest in hosting *Initiative* exhibitions in 2008 and beyond. Also, two producing museums said they planned to circulate their exhibitions to libraries and community centers in their communities, and two others said they would include elements from their *Initiative* exhibitions in their own galleries. Producing museums also expressed interest in publishing the culture guides, educational kits, and other printed material developed to support their exhibitions (Association of Children's Museums, 2006).

The major outputs of the *Asian Exhibit Initiative* are destined to outlive the project that produced them.

Outcomes for the Children's Museum Field

As defined earlier, outcomes include changes in peoples' behavior, knowledge, and skills. Through the *Initiative* and its research and evaluation efforts, the children's museum field has gained expertise in the development of cultural exhibitions for children. One of the most profound and presumably lasting contributions of the *Initiative* has been the increased, shared knowledge about presenting Asian cultures – and culture in general – to American children in meaningful ways. The research study made clear that many children's museums had been struggling with how best to create successful cultural exhibitions. By developing, evaluating, and hosting exhibitions about Asian cultures, many institutions across America gained important experience with exhibitions about other cultures.

This knowledge continues to be shared in print and online, through reports like this one, available to both participating and non-participating museums. Of course, it remains to be seen whether future developers and designers of cultural exhibitions will be able to locate this knowledge when they need it, and if they will find it useful in their work. That in itself should become a target of future research.

⁴ All tables are included in Appendix C.

⁵ These materials are cited for each exhibition in Appendix A.

⁶ The quotations in this chapter were selected from host surveys as examples of the range of ways in which respondents discussed the topic in question. However, the number of quotations does not represent the relative frequency or strength of a particular response.

Impacts on the Children’s Museum Field

This section examines the long-term impacts of the *Asian Exhibit Initiative* on the children’s museum field.

Developing Broader Audiences for Children’s Museums

As noted in Chapter 6, individual children’s museums found that when they hosted an *Initiative* exhibition, the diversity of their audiences often increased. Most exhibitions attracted increased numbers of Asian American families as well as older children and adults who had an interest in the focus culture. The *Initiative* is part of a larger trend of children’s museums attempting to diversify both their audiences and their staff. As evidence of this trend, the diversity-focused *Interactivity 2007* in Chicago set a record for attendance at these ACM-sponsored conferences. Although it is not clear to what extent the *Initiative* has inspired this trend, the experiences of hosting museums clearly indicate that culturally focused exhibitions and programs are a successful approach to diversifying children’s museums audiences in the short term.

Many *Initiative* exhibitions increased both the ethnic and age diversity of host museums’ visitors. As one museum stated on its host survey, the *Initiative* provided the host museums with the “opportunity for children’s museums to educate adults as well as children.” Other host museums stated similar points.

The AEI will prove that children’s museums can provide quality experiences and learning opportunities for multi-age groups. Children’s museums can successfully educate others, including adults, about different cultures through hands-on exhibits.

The [AEI] exhibit was well received by all ages, not just 5-12 years, showing museums can be enjoyed by all ages, 2 years to 59! Children play to learn and adults learn to play.

Adults typically make up about half of children’s museums audiences (e.g., Ringel, 2005). Within the field, there has been much interest and research on ways to help adults become more effective at facilitating family learning. To date, there has been less interest among children’s museums in adult visitors learning for their own sakes. It remains to be seen how children’s museums will follow up on the issues of age diversity and adult learning.

Creating More Cultural Exhibitions

There were indications that the *Initiative* helped make cultural exhibitions a higher priority across the field, beginning to “move institutions into more cultural content.” As noted in Chapter 6, several host museums stated that their *Initiative* exhibition was the first cultural exhibition they had ever displayed. As one host museum stated,

I think [AEI] shows that the field is dedicated to teaching about diverse cultures as a core value.

Other host museums also discussed this trend.

[AEI] will encourage the creation of other high quality cultural exhibits aimed at younger children.

Museums will be looking for more cultural opportunities when developing new exhibits.

It will encourage institutions to do more programs that promote cultural understanding.

Some hosts said they were already working on plans to build their own cultural exhibitions.

We used [our AEI exhibition] as a common reference in planning a new exhibit and reviewing interpretation techniques.

We hope to host more like it, or even produce some exhibits of the quality ourselves.

Although the Initiative has begun to move the field in this direction, the incipient movement may need nurturing if it is going to continue.

Relationships with the Larger Asian American Community

Many children's museums are relatively recent additions to their communities' cultural landscapes, and their leaders often are looking for ways to increase the breadth and depth of their relationships to other community organizations. As discussed in Chapter 6, one of the most significant aspects of the *Initiative* for many host museums was the opportunity to build relationships with local Asian American organizations. Some hosts looked beyond their own backyard and depicted this as a widespread phenomenon.

The Initiative has erected stronger ties between the Asian community and children's museums in large numbers of communities across the country.

The [Initiative] exhibits, if they were the same in other [host museums'] communities, created an opportunity to connect and work with new resources, new audiences, and new partners.

The *Initiative* provides an effective model for children's museums seeking to build these sorts of ties within their own communities, and should be part of ACM's continued efforts to disseminate ideas and advice to its member organizations.

Relationships between Museums

Many smaller children's museums look to larger and more established museums as sources of ideas and inspiration. For some host museums, the relationship they built with their producing museums was an important part of the *Initiative*.

[One of the best things about AEI was] getting to know the staff at the [producing museum] better. They are a great group of people to work with!

We were looking to learn from a cultural pro [the producing museum we worked with], and we feel that happened.

Collaborations between museums, especially small and large museums, are a success story that should be repeated.

The host training sessions held at *InterActivity 2004* and *2006* served as a starting point for host museums to build relationships with both their producing museums and other host museums.

The required pre-conference (ACM annual conference) meeting day was an extremely good idea. It helped immensely in being able to establish communication with peer institutions AND with the [producing museum] crew!

Although there were limited *formal* opportunities for host museums to collaborate with one another, many host museums built informal relationships with the museums that hosted "their" exhibition immediately before and after their time slot. Some host museums found this to be an important aspect of the *Initiative*.

[AEI was] a great way for us to share what we do and what we've learned with colleagues.

Some host museums were looking forward to future relationship-building with other children's museums.

This Initiative will create a more open dialogue between the participating museums.

It will undoubtedly lead to more collaboration among children's museums in the future.

[AEI provides] a new and outstanding model for future collaborations.

It will be interesting to see how well the children's museum field can build on the collaborative aspects of the *Initiative*.

Perceptions and Roles for the Association of Children's Museums

Host museums were impressed that the *Asian Exhibit Initiative* demonstrated the capabilities of the Association of Children's Museums and the children's museums field as a whole.

[AEI demonstrated that] that something of this scale and scope [can] be achieved!

The ACM organization can bring opportunities to children's museums of all sizes by working on their behalf in areas we may not be able to achieve individually.

[A long-lasting effect of AEI will be] strengthening the field's ability to host and manage these large-scale projects.

Some host museums speculated about the availability of funding for future large-scale initiatives.

[AEI] shows the field that there is funding available for large scale multicultural exhibitions and programming and that there is interest.

The host museums were looking to the Association of Children's Museums to take the lead on new initiatives.

High praise for ACM for this initiative and hope something similar can happen again.

[AEI] was a great first effort at building traveling exhibits for children on new subject matters. We strongly support ACM's involvement in this.

The hosts were looking at the *Asian Exhibit Initiative* as a model for future large-scale initiatives.

It will provide a model for development of cultural exhibits and similar collaborations/partnerships.

I hope the model will be used to create other national exhibit opportunities.

By organizing the *Initiative*, the Association of Children's Museums seems to have developed a reputation as an organization that can get things done for children's museums across the country. As one host museum wrote,

I believe we are all waiting to see what will be next!

Some Remaining Opportunities

Two important aspects of the *Asian Exhibit Initiative* have had relatively little impact on the field so far. The process of developing and designing cultural exhibitions for children is one. While some of *AEI* exhibit teams' accumulated wisdom has been shared through this report, there are many details about the process of exhibition development that have not been widely shared beyond several *InterActivity* sessions and a few papers by exhibit team members (e.g., Gyllenhaal, 2007; Gyllenhaal & Perry, 2006; Ringel, 2005). This will begin to be remedied at *InterActivity 2008*.

Also, the seven exhibitions' evaluations seem to have had little impact beyond the producers' exhibition teams. Only a few host museum surveys even mentioned the evaluations, and they tended to discuss what did *not* happen. Apparently the front-end, formative, and summative evaluations for the seven exhibitions have not been widely distributed, among either the producing museums or the host museums. Although the producing museums may have been understandably reluctant to share results that were not always positive, this seems like a missed opportunity for all concerned.

Recommendations

Publicize and support the continued circulation of *Initiative* exhibitions. When the *Asian Exhibit Initiative* tour ends in 2008, continued circulation of the individual exhibitions becomes the responsibility of the producing museums. However, ACM should continue to serve as a clearing house for contact and tour information.

Track long-term changes in children's museum audiences. ACM should work with at least a subset of children's museums to track both short-term and long-term changes in the cultural and age diversity of their audiences, especially in response to exhibits and programs designed to affect that diversity.

Support children's museums that want to produce new exhibitions about other cultures, either for in-house or for travel. The sessions at *InterActivity 2007* were good starting points, but there need to be more permanent resources available to museums when they need it most.

Expand and share knowledge about cultural exhibitions in general, and about children's understanding of Asian cultures in particular. Portraying individual Asian cultures presents specific challenges. *Initiative* participants (including exhibition teams and evaluators) should share their ideas about how to deal with both the prior knowledge and pre-existing stereotypes that parents and older children have about more familiar cultures, such as Japan and China, and ways to approach less familiar cultures, given that parents bring less background knowledge and may have a harder time supporting their children's learning about those cultures.

Develop mechanisms to share producing museums' accumulated knowledge about the *process* of developing and designing cultural exhibitions. This could include future *InterActivity* sessions (as planned for *InterActivity 2008*). These sessions should also be written up in a more widely available format.

Tap the host museums' knowledge about building relationships with their Asian American communities. Each host has a story to tell, and these should be gathered and processed into a form that can be used by other museums.

Post existing *AEI* evaluation reports on the ACM website. For

those producing museums willing to give permission, add PDF versions of the reports to the *AEI* section of the website.

Incorporate evaluation sharing into future exhibit initiatives. As part of future contracts with producing museums, obtain permission to post evaluation reports on the initiative website.

Track the use of *Initiative* reports and related presentations. Employ website usage statistics, formal interviews, and informal contacts to track who accesses this information and how they use it over the next five to ten years.

For future initiatives, develop creative ways to help participating children's museums build relationships with each other. Blogs or other electronic forums might provide useful formats for this sort of networking. Museums could share programming ideas, tips for publicizing and staffing the exhibitions, and other day-to-day concerns, as well as larger issues.

See the Executive Summary for a synthesis of all the recommendations from this report.

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A complete list of references consulted during this study is included as Appendix D: Classified Bibliography.

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