

EXHIBIT DESIGN FOR INTERGENERATIONAL VISITORS

at the Northwest Railway Museum

University of Washington iSchool
Museology Masters Thesis

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Driving Question

How can NRM better use our rolling stock exhibits to engage everyday visitors, especially intergenerational groups?

Evaluation Response Samples



Context and Purpose

In preparation for the construction of a new gallery at NRM, the Roundhouse Gallery, the museum wanted to inform their exhibit design process to be better catered to non-experts and intergenerational visitor groups. This project will be used as a reference guide for future exhibit development at the Northwest Railway Museum, primarily within the new gallery space.

Methodology and Timeline

01 >>

Train Shed Exhibit Hall Evaluation: Surveys

Adult and youth visitors were surveyed with differentiated questions to determine visitor exhibit design preferences, with 153 total participants.

02 >>

Evaluation: Data Analysis

Identified overlaps in adult and youth responses, strengths in existing exhibit design at NRM, and gaps in existing interpretive design.

03 >>

Recommendations for Intergenerational Design

Synthesized findings from existing literature with results from the Train Shed Exhibit Hall evaluation to come up with 7 core principles for engaging visitors of different ages in the same group.

04 >>

Roundhouse Gallery Exhibit Design Plan

Applied recommendations for intergenerational design to the specific context of the new Roundhouse Gallery at NRM, to open in 2033.

05 >>

Messenger of Peace Pilot Exhibit

Designed new interpretive panels for the Messenger of Peace chapel car exhibit utilizing recommendations from the design plan.

Project Deliverables

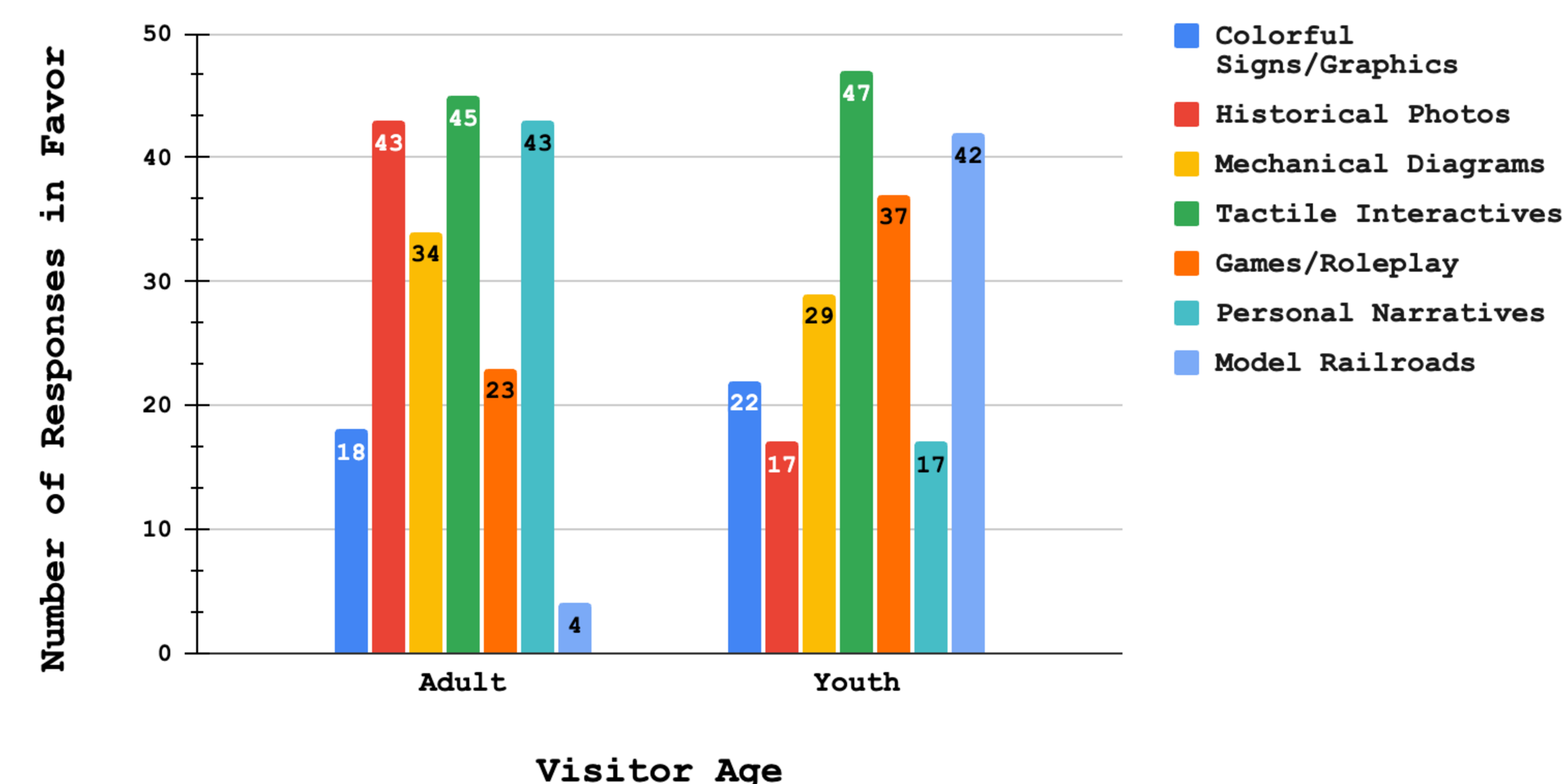
One of the final deliverables is a comprehensive **Roundhouse Gallery Exhibit Design Plan**, which defines 7 core recommendations for designing engaging exhibits for intergenerational audiences. The other is a more specific **Exhibit Construction Plan**, with copy text and design mockups for an exhibit about the Messenger of Peace chapel car.

7 Core Recommendations

- Universal Design/Accessibility
- Ambiguous Age Coding
- Socially-Oriented Design
- Simple Exhibit Interactives
- Diverse Personal Narratives
- Immersive Historical Spaces
- Historic Preservation Education

Different ages don't require different exhibits. There is more in common between children and adults than we think! If families arrive together, exhibits should be designed so that they can explore them together.

What do visitors want to see more of at the museum?



Key Sources

Harper's Ferry Center Accessibility Committee, "Programmatic Accessibility Guidelines for National Park Service Interpretive Media." National Park Service, 2017. <https://www.nps.gov/features/hfc/guidelines/>.

Rand, Anne Grimes, Robert Kiihne, and Sarah Watkins. "Families First! Rethinking Exhibits to Engage All Ages." History News 64, no. 1 (2009): 1-8. JSTOR.

Shreckengast, Rebecca. "Exhibit Design that Sparks Social Connection." Ideum, December 17, 2025.

Simon, Nina. "Chapter 4: Social Objects," in The Participatory Museum. Santa Cruz: Museum 2.0, 2010. <https://participatorymuseum.org/chapter4/>.

