



GKHS Exhibit Planning Guide

Part 1: Interpretive Planning Document

The first step toward planning an exhibit is filling out the Greater Kent Historical Society and Kent Museum Interpretive Planning document (Blank version attached, see Appendix).

Below is an example of a filled out Interpretive Planning Template for *Collective Action in Kent: an Extraordinary Response to COVID-19*.

Project/Exhibit Title: Collective Action in Kent: an Extraordinary Response to COVID-19

Location/Gallery/Space: Small room behind office, first floor

Date(s): Summer/Fall 2024

Curator/Program Organizer: Ray Cagnetta, Dylan High, and the Greater Kent Historical Society

Museum Goals: (What will the museum achieve with this project/exhibit. 1 – 3 goals maximum.)

1. GKHS will create an exhibit about COVID-19 and the initial response, a topic that is under-explored since it has only been 4 years since the outbreak.
2. GKHS will make an exhibit that faithfully represents the diverse assortment of organizations that came together for the first time and their contribution to the Kent community.
3. GKHS will have a framework for future exhibits about modern topics.

Partners/Partner Organizations: N/A

Big Idea: This exhibit explores the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the grassroots response by Kent community members.

Brief Exhibit/Project Description: A group of local Kent nonprofits saw the rising need in their community and decided that something could be done to help. Over a dozen local nonprofits and faith-based organizations who had never worked together before joined forces to form a coalition called "Kent Community Partners". In June 2020, Kent Community Partners was able to begin a safe, no-contact pick up system to distribute USDA food boxes weekly. Typically, 7,500 families per week were able to receive emergency aid thanks to the grassroots system. The exhibit will share this story to inspire visitors to get involved in community mutual aid.

Primary Audience: Kent community members

Marketing Strategies: Posters, social media posts, events connected with the exhibit

Signature Cultural Materials: Cultural events tied with the exhibit such as a food drive requesting foods that are not usually donated but are required for certain cultural dishes such as spices, specific types of rice, specific types of produce

Design Elements: Free standing top-down poster stands, GKHS color scheme

Essential Question: What unique skills do you have and how can you contribute them to mutual community goals?

Visitor Learning Outcomes + Interpretive Strategies: (What is the change in visitor thinking, behavior, skills, attitudes + how will we foster those changes. 1- 3 visitor outcomes maximum. 2-4 strategies per outcome.)

1. Visitors will feel inspired to get involved with local organizations for community aid work.
2. Make it easy: Provide the business cards/contact info for local orgs and what they need from community members. (i.e. Kent Food Bank needs volunteers on Sundays, email here).
3. Show that the people who made a huge impact on feeding local families were everyday community members just like the visitor. You don't have to be extraordinary/a superhero to do heroic things.

Evaluation/Measure of Impact: Attendance of exhibit, interaction with pinboard, feedback/comment box, positive feedback from local orgs

While planning the exhibit, make sure to refer to the interpretation checklist (attached in Appendix). Not all exhibits can follow every point, but try to adhere to as many criteria as possible. Refer to the interpretation checklist at every step of the exhibit designing process.

For example, *Collective Action in Kent: an Extraordinary Response to COVID-19* does not have any audio capabilities, so criteria referring to audio can be skipped. We paid attention to accessibility criteria. We avoided putting objects in the center of the room because of the small room dimensions. We tried to keep the fonts simple, on solid backgrounds, and in easily differentiated colors. We tried to keep the labels <75 words.

For further reading on writing exhibit labels:

Serrell, B., & Whitney, K. (2024). *Exhibit labels: An interpretive approach*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Serrell and Whitney (2024) do a wonderful job of breaking down types of labels and guidelines on best writing practices.

For further reading on overall exhibit design:

Piacente, M. (2022). *Manual of Museum Exhibitions*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Piacente (2022) is an extremely thorough source about exhibit design, including different kinds of lighting, cases, interpretation, graphic design and more.

Part 2: Community Outreach

Some exhibits require input from community members or local organizations. It is important to reach out prior to the majority of the exhibit planning process, in case the community has unexpected issues or seems uninterested. If community outreach is low priority, email is an appropriate way to reach out. If community input is high priority, there might be more responses if you reach out via phone.

Example questions used for *Collective Action in Kent: an Extraordinary Response to COVID-19*:

- What would you like to see included in an exhibit about 2020 Kent community cooperation for food distribution?
- Is there anything you would like the Greater Kent Historical Society to know about your organization or your contribution during 2020 that you would like included in the exhibit? Is there anything we should avoid including in the exhibit?
- Are there lessons from 2020 that your organization learned that contribute to your current work?
- Do you have advice for visitors who might want to get involved in community service?

From the field/additional reading:

Bruine de Bruin, W. B., & Bostrom, (2013) A. Assessing what to address in science communication. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 110 (Supplement 3), 14062-14068, 2013.

Bruine de Bruin & Bostrom (2013) is a great source for thinking about how to display scientific information. They lay out the “mental models approach” to developing science communication:

- “1. Identify what people need to know to make more informed decisions (expert decision model), Conduct literature review, Convene expert panel
2. Identify what people already know and how they make their decisions (lay decision model), Conduct semi-structured interviews to identify beliefs and relevant wording, Conduct follow-up surveys with larger samples to examine prevalence of interviewees’ beliefs
3. Design communication content, Compare lay decision model with expert decision model, Address common gaps and misconceptions in understandable wording, Iteratively test communications for adequacy and understanding (with members of intended audience) as well as for accuracy (with domain experts)
4. Test effectiveness of communication content, Conduct randomized controlled trial to test effect of communication (vs. control) on recipients’ understanding, decision making, and behavior” (Bruine de Bruin & Bostrom 2013).

This method is a good strategy for how to include the community in planning your exhibit and making sure that the information is being communicated effectively.

Canfield, K. N. et al. (2020). Science communication demands a critical approach that centers inclusion, equity, and intersectionality. *Frontiers in Communication*, 5.

Canfield et al. (2020) is another source that focuses on science communication and the intersection of inclusion and equity. “In both research and practice, we advocate for more experimentation to help make inclusive science communication the future of science communication writ large, in order to engage diverse publics in their multiple ways of knowing and expand a sense of belonging in STEMM.” (Canfield et al. 2020).

I would also highly suggest looking into the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) model by the Wing Luke Museum. This is from their CAC information website:

“Top 10 principles for community-based work:

1. Community-based work must be rooted in relationships of trust and respect.
2. Community-based work requires a safe, comfortable environment to express ideas and share experiences.
3. Community-based work requires listening, flexibility, agility and patience.
4. It is democratic in nature – not top-down, and not a funnel for input.

5. Community ownership of their stories enables communities to hold and use them towards their own self-determined purposes.
6. Opportunities to learn about in community-based work.
7. Community empowerment results from bringing together diverse people within communities who might not otherwise connect and collaborate together, increased community pride through increased visibility, development of professional skills and resources within the community from grant writing to educating to publishing and more.
8. Community-based work draws together communities and creates deep engagement and connections within as well as to the broader public.
9. Community-based work creates a safe place to speak your story and your truth.
10. People get involved in heart-felt work, doing something that they believe in.”

(Wing Luke Museum, 2021)

For an example of the CAC being utilized, see Chapter 8: Co-Creating with Visitors in Nina Simon’s book, *The Participatory Museum* :

Simon, N. (2010). The Participatory Museum. Published by Museum 2.0.

Part 3: Presentation

A powerpoint presentation can help you organize your thoughts about the main points of your exhibit. Some of the slides can be easily adapted into the labels and panels that will be used in the exhibit itself. This step is optional, but I have found it helpful.

Example of slides: Title slide, Storyline Summary, Take Home Messages, Organizing Concepts, Look and Feel of Exhibit, a few slides to show off the different exhibit ideas, Floor plan, Public Programming Ideas, Proposed Budget, Bibliography. Details of what you can add to these slides is included in the Appendix.

Part 4: Object List

An object list is the spreadsheet that contains all the information related to the objects being used in the exhibit. It includes an ID number to keep track of objects, a picture, object dimensions, visual description details, who is loaning it, how it will be acquired, etc. A blank object list and an example object list are included in the Appendix.

Part 5: Floor plan

Once you have all the objects narrowed down, it is time to arrange them in the space. Get measurements of the overall room from above. The object list should include the dimensions of each piece. Consider display cases and ease of movement. Then, draw a sketch of possible room layouts. It's ok if this changes during installation.

It is important at all stages of exhibit planning and implementation to consider visitors with disabilities and how they will navigate the exhibit. Floor plan is especially important because there needs to be room for wheelchairs and other mobility aids while keeping all of the objects visible. Planning to accommodate for disabilities is difficult because sometimes accommodations for one visitor may hinder another. A great source for thinking about disabilities while planning museum exhibits is the Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Exhibition Design by Janice Majewski:

Majewski, Janice (2010) *Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Exhibition Design*, Smithsonian Accessibility Program

Part 6: Public Programming Ideas

This step is optional. Consider a program that could pair with your exhibit. For example, *Collective Action in Kent: an Extraordinary Response to COVID-19* could pair with a culturally specific food drive, since the exhibit is about food aid distribution and food banks lament the lack of culturally specific donations.

Part 7: Proposed Budget

First, finalize a budget with GKHS. Divide the overall budget into general categories, such as installation, programming, misc. Then, create an itemized list in each category of what you plan to purchase for your exhibit. An example budget is attached in the Appendix.

Part 8: Installation and Deinstallation

Depending on the size of the exhibit and the complexity of objects involved, installation can take anywhere from a few hours to several days. Plan a day or two with GKHS where the Kent Museum is closed to the public or a convenient time for all involved. Gather all your materials beforehand, and have your floor plan ready to follow. It is ok if small changes are made to the plan once you start installing in the space. Once the exhibit has run for its scheduled time frame, plan another session to de-install.

Congratulations, your exhibit is complete!

Appendix:

Blank Interpretive Planning template:

Interpretive Planning Template

Project/Exhibit Title:

Location/Gallery/Space:

Date(s):

Curator/Program Organizer:

Museum Goals: (What will the museum achieve with this project/exhibit. 1 – 3 goals maximum.)

GKHS will

Partners/Partner Organizations:

Big Idea: (one concise sentence)

Brief Exhibit/Project Description: (3-5 sentences)

Primary Audience:

Marketing Strategies:

Signature Cultural Materials:

Design Elements:

Essential Question: (What we want visitors to think about)

Visitor Learning Outcomes + Interpretive Strategies:(What is the change in visitor thinking, behavior, skills, attitudes + how will we foster those changes. 1- 3 visitor outcomes maximum. 2-4 strategies per outcome.)

Visitors will

Strategy #1

Strategy #2

Evaluation/Measure of Impact: (How we will measure project success)

GKHS Interpretation Checklist:

Interpretation Checklist

(This checklist identifies some of the important elements of an inclusive, relevant, and impactful interpretive project. Note: not every project has the space, resources, and capacity to include all elements.)

- Consider diverse visitor motivations, expectations, learning styles.
- Provide multiple voices and perspectives, including opposing views.
- Share authority with others in the community.
- Make space for visitor ideas and perspectives.
- Provide plentiful and varied seating.
- Design for multi-sensory learning (touch, smell, sound experiences).
- Design for social learning (conversation and collaboration).
- Design for family learning (shared memories, traditions, values)
- Include a variety of active, hands-on learning opportunities.
- Provoke imagination and critical thinking (questioning, reflecting, comparing, interpreting, etc.)
- Imbed moments of awe and wonder.
- Plan for wheelchair/walker/stroller access.
- Identify voice and institutional biases.
- Craft brief labels < 75 words in active voice using multiple paragraph breaks and bullet points.
Use large, accessible fonts
- Replace lengthy text panels with brief signs to orient visitors to the theme or subject of a space.
- Allow visitors to control audio and video experiences.

Examples of details for powerpoint slides:

The **title slide** is the title of the exhibit and the curators names.

The **storyline summary** is >150 words describing the story that your exhibit will follow.

Take home messages are 1-3 statements about what you want visitors to walk away from the exhibit thinking or knowing or feeling. For example, the take home message is that “everyone in Kent has something to offer each other”.

Organizing Concepts is how you are going to divide up your exhibit. For example, *Collective Action in Kent: an Extraordinary Response to COVID-19* is divided by the problem section (COVID hitting Kent), the solution section (Kent organizes aid), and the future (How to get involved).

Look and Feel of the Exhibit is a visual slide, showing pictures that inspire the “feel” of your exhibit, and perhaps a color scheme or fonts that will be used.

At this point in your powerpoint, you can show off objects/visualizations/anything to explain your exhibit.

Next would be a **floor plan**. This can be a sketch of the dimensions of the space you will be using and how the objects you plan to display will fit into that area. Or some other visualization of the 3D space.

Adding **public programming** ideas is optional, but if you have something that goes along with your exhibit, explain it on this slide.

Next, is the **proposed budget** slide which just has an itemized list of what you plan to purchase for your exhibit. This can include objects, supplies, printing, lights, and more. Try to think of everything that will cost money.

Finally, a **bibliography** slide with all of the sources for your information and background research.

Example object list from *Collective Action in Kent: an Extraordinary Response to COVID-19*:

#	Image	Title	Maker	Medium	Year	Length (cm)	Width (cm)	Height (cm)	Lender	Notes
C1		USDA Box	USDA	Cardboard	2024	91	61	61	USDA/ CovingtonSt oreHouse/ KentFood Bank	Ask orga for extra boxes
C2		Toilet paper	Charmin/ Off brand	Paper	2024	10	10	15	Recycling/ Anyone/Ray	
C3		6ft apart floor sticker	OnlineLa bles.com	Vinyl Sticker	2024	30.5	30.5	0	Purchase	Link to product
C4		Wood fake fruit	JOCES	Wood, velcro	2024	22.8	17.8	6.8	Purchase	For play area Link to product
C5		Plastic fake vegetables	WJboard	Plastic	2024	22.8	16	13	Purchase	For display with USDA box Link to product
C6		Egg carton	Safeway/ Brand	Cardboard	2024	29	10	5	Recycling/ Anyone/Ray	For display with USDA box

Budget Example for *Collective Action in Kent: an Extraordinary Response to COVID-19*:

Overall Budget		Amount
Acquisitions		\$172
Installation		\$365
Special Events		\$200
Misc		\$123
Total		\$860
Itemized Budget		
Acquisitions		
Object Purchases	6ft apart sticker	\$4
	Fake plastic fish	\$20
	Plastic vegetables	\$22
	Plastic fruit	\$16
	Fake wood fish	\$22
	Fake wooden fruit	\$28
	Road Carpet	\$20
Misc.		\$40
Installation		
Printing costs	Cardstock paper bulk (250 pages)	\$30
	Color ink (2 packages)	\$100
Hanging	Command strips	\$120
	Poster boards x 5	\$15
Misc. Craft Supply		\$100
Special Events		
Community Meetup and Recipe Exchange	Refreshments	\$100
Free Food Pantry Creation Workshop-Virtual	Compensation for org that does demonstration	\$100
Ongoing food drive	Box	\$0
Contingency		
Misc	Extra	\$123
Total		\$860