Breaking the Mold: The Science of Retooling a Membership Program

The Continuum of Museum Membership: What Research Tells Us

Passport to Science: Member Benefits That Travel

Value Added: Membership Strategies That Work

It Feels Like Home: The Value of Community
Is membership the key to moving “beyond the gate”? Should we be building deeper relationships with our most loyal customers? In recent years, ASTC Dimensions has examined such audience segments as early learners, female visitors, teachers, and adults aged 50+. In this issue, we focus on a group often taken for granted: the individuals and families who join our science centers as members and renew their memberships year after year. Articles highlight member audience research and approaches to membership fulfillment across a spectrum of ASTC science centers. Together, contributors examine what turns a casual visitor into someone who speaks with pride of “my museum.”

Features
Breaking the Mold: The Science of Retooling a Membership Program 3
Passport to Science: Member Benefits That Travel 5
The Continuum of Museum Membership: What Research Tells Us 7
Value Added: Membership Strategies That Work 9
A Member-Shaped Museum: The New Science Center of Iowa 13
It Feels Like Home: The Value of Community 14
Membership Resources 15

Departments
ASTC Notes 16
Calendar 16
Spotlights 18
Grants & Awards 19
People 20

Cover: Favorite exhibits and galleries, special member events, unusual volunteering opportunities, and the chance to go behind the scenes with museum educators and scientists all contribute to the sense of belonging that museum members prize. Photos, clockwise from top left: Members in the Rainforest at the Ontario Science Centre, courtesy Ontario Science Centre; family time at the Detroit Science Center, courtesy Detrott Science Center; the Ice Cream Lab at a members’ Back to School Bash, courtesy Louisville Science Center; a member/volunteer (in apron) at the Museum of Science, Boston, photo by Tom Kates Photography.
Breaking the Mold: The Science of Retooling a Membership Program

By Heather Calvin and Deborah Kulich

In 2003, the Museum of Science, Boston, had nearly 40,000 members—not bad for an institution with annual attendance of 1.6 million, in a metro area of 4.4 million. Our membership program consisted of four levels based on familiar household types: Individual, Dual, Family, and Family Plus. Each level offered a variety of perks, most notably free admission to the exhibit halls and free passes to the IMAX and planetarium shows. Prices ranged from $55 to $150 (see Figure 1, page 6). It was a solid program.

In 2004, we turned it on its ear. Never would we have predicted, when we initiated a research study to evaluate membership benefits, that the results would lead to a complete redesign of the membership program. This was not a decision we made lightly. By grounding our approach in the discipline—science—that is our bread and butter, we were able to make major changes to a well-established program with confidence.

How it started

Historically, the museum’s approach to membership pricing had been guided by the instincts of a small, interdepartmental group overseen by the finance department. Review of dues usually occurred during budget season, with an eye to finding increased revenues. Pricing was often determined by a comparison of our costs to those of other local institutions for similar programs.

Benefits were questioned as often as cost. For example, should we offer discounts instead of free passes? Proponents pointed to the lower cost to the museum, reduced operational hassles, and the potential to make membership dues fully tax deductible. But some feared that eliminating a benefit members seemed to value highly could be detrimental. In short, we found ourselves with more questions than answers and more hunches, personal preferences, and organizational politics than evidence.

So in 2004, we agreed that we needed definitive data: we needed research. And rather than focusing on one or two narrow questions, we would seize the opportunity to review the whole picture—benefits, levels, and prices. With input from staff and board stakeholders, we requested proposals from recommended consultants. We sought expertise in research methods and statistical analysis, an ability to quantify the likely impact of proposed program changes, and willingness to use museum resources to help manage costs. We also looked for an understanding of organizational change.

As it turned out, our final choice, BBC Research, offered a savvy approach that not only led to valid research conclusions but also bolstered institutional buy-in throughout the study, leaving us with actionable recommendations and an institution prepared to implement them.

Gathering the data

To begin, membership staff invited selected internal colleagues to review a
3. A significant portion of members showed interest in enhanced benefits apart from number of admissions—and they were willing to pay for them.

4. Members preferred some benefits over others. For example, passes edged out a regular discount on IMAX and planetarium admission.

5. Most reasons for membership attrition, such as "limited leisure time," were beyond our immediate control. However, 15 percent of members at risk for attrition cited the expense of parking—something our benefits could address.

Implementing change

Armed with this information, we realized we needed to break the membership mold. In our Individual/Dual/Family/Family Plus model, the only way to increase benefits was to purchase a membership with more admissions. For many members, the prospect of paying for benefits they did not need was a disincentive to upgrade.

This finding prompted us to move to an admission/benefits matrix (see Figure 2, page 6) that treats the number of admissions independently from other benefits. Our new structure starts with the question: "How many people do you bring?" and then asks: "What level of benefits do you want?"

We also took the opportunity to simplify. We standardized the number of passes across levels and moved to a numerical, rather than relationship-based, admission policy for membership. The new categories admit up to 2, 5, or 8 people, allowing greater flexibility to bring unrelated guests. The awkward, open-ended, and largely unenforceable definition of "family" would be history.

Finally, although the research suggested there was room to be more aggressive, we decided to price the new categories conservatively. Building initial pricing around our most popular membership level, the $89 Family category, would hold price constant for a large portion of our members while we made other significant program changes and retained flexibility to increase dues in the future.

Moving members to the new structure was a six-month rolling process built around clear, positive messaging. To ensure that each member received at least three communications regarding the changes, we used every method at our disposal—specialized mailings, E-news, our web site, and newsletters. We promoted the new structure in our renewal process and offered early renewal opportunities to move members to the program quickly. In April 2005, we finally "ripped the Band-Aid"—mailing conversion membership cards to those who remained in the old categories.

Assessing outcomes

In addition to expected outcomes, two pleasant surprises bear mentioning.

- First was the effect the new matrix had on annual giving. Frequent visitors are often attracted to membership by the opportunity to save money. This can be a challenging foundation for annual giving: How do you find the philanthropically inclined needles in the haystack of discount-motivated members?

- Not only did the enhanced benefits (Premier) option not erode annual giving; it actually seemed to be an indicator of likelihood to donate. A year later, the members most likely to make additional contributions were those who had paid the most for their memberships.

- Second was the extent to which revenue exceeded expectations. BBC's research had predicted that 25 to 33 percent of members would select Premier benefits. A year later, 31 percent of members had selected Premier memberships—a $400,000 revenue gain. Popularity of the enhanced benefits option has continued to grow. Today, 40 percent of members select Premier benefits—nearly $600,000 in incremental revenue.

To be sure, shifting 40,000 member households to a completely restructured program in a relatively unfamiliar format was a massive undertaking. But overall, the (Continued on page 6)
Passport to Science: Member Benefits That Travel

By Diane Frendak

Since 1983, ASTC has managed a reciprocal museum-admission program, the ASTC Travel Passport Program, on behalf of member science centers and museums. Institutions that are open to the public at least 250 days per year may participate, and no additional program fees are assessed by ASTC.

Participating science centers and museums—currently 308 institutions in 15 countries—agree to waive general admission fees for each other's members. A museum that does not charge general admission may offer an alternate benefit, such as free admission to a planetarium show or a discount on museum store purchases.

The Passport Program not only offers an additional incentive for people to join their local science center, but also encourages visits to the museum by out-of-towners and raises the museum’s visibility as part of a larger, international community of science centers. Evaluation reveals that the Passport Program is popular both with participating member museums and with the people who purchase museum memberships.

The 2007 ASTC Member Opinion Survey asked science centers to rate the Passport Program’s value; respondents gave it an average score of 4.16 out of 5. On ASTC’s web site, the Passport Program page (www.astc.org/passport) regularly comes up on reports as one of the “most visited” by Internet users.

Initially known as the Reciprocal Free Admission Program (RFAP), the program was revised and renamed in 1999 after members raised concerns about loss of revenue in their local markets. The guidelines were changed to restrict the free admission benefit to only those science centers and museums that lie beyond a 90-mile radius of the member's home institution. The name “ASTC Travel Passport Program” reflects ASTC’s intention to reward families that support their local science center or museum by giving them a benefit they can use when traveling or visiting out-of-town friends and relations.

Museum members—and families in particular—have been delighted with the benefit. An e-mail received in 2004 by San Diego’s Reuben H. Fleet Science Center is typical: “We want to thank you for your participation in the Passport Program. Our family of five just returned from 365 days of travel throughout the United States and Canada. We visited 12 ASTC centers, all for the price of one family membership at the Fleet Science Center. We visited some centers more than once, so we saved several hundred dollars. What is more, other staffs always treated us like members of the center we visited, and sometimes like VIPs.”

As Internet access became more common, the program required one more adjustment to reach its current format. Some people discovered that they could search online for the ASTC science center that offered the cheapest membership with Passport Program benefits, then join that museum and visit their local institutions for free. They need never set foot in the original museum. News of this dodge spread by word-of-mouth through homeschooling networks and blogs, and even appeared in print in regional newsletters and the business section of a Canadian newspaper.

To close the loophole, restrictions based on local residency were added in 2006. Despite this new limitation, more than 200,000 science center members took advantage of the Passport Program in 2007, including science centers and museums among the “must visits” of their vacation.

Every other year, ASTC surveys program participants to gauge satisfaction levels, measure reactions to policy changes, and seek advice on program improvements. The next Passport Program survey will be launched soon.

Diane Frendak is ASTC’s membership director. To enroll in the ASTC Travel Passport Program, contact her at dfrendak@astc.org.

Membership by the Numbers

On the ASTC General Member Survey sent to science center and museum members, one of the categories covered is membership programs. Here are some statistics from the 2007 ASTC Sourcebook of Statistics & Analysis.

- More than 80% of the 179 institutions that responded to the survey in 2007 have membership programs. Among U.S. members, 85.5% offer memberships; outside the United States, the figure is 65.9%.
- Together, the number of individual, family, and senior memberships reported by the 139 institutions that responded in this category came to 737,139.
- The median membership renewal rate for all responding ASTC science centers and museums is 53%; among very small science centers (<12,000 square feet), it is 60.5%.
- The median number of members for large science centers (50,000 square feet and up) is 6,604; the greatest number of memberships reported by a single institution was just under 50,000.

—Compiled by Christine Ruffo. For details on the 2007 Sourcebook or to order a copy, visit www.astc.org/pubs.
(Continued from page 4) museum could comfortably label it a success. The research process worked—so much so, that when it came time to reevaluate and fine-tune a year later, we agreed to do so using research.

We brought BBC back to conduct a quick, focused research update. From this we learned that
- we could streamline benefits by substituting one valued perk for another
- pricing our levels $1 under a round number—e.g., $89 instead of $90—made no difference in sales
- we could increase prices without decreasing demand.

These findings helped us further refine our pricing and benefits structure. A comparison of Figures 1 and 2 below shows just how much has changed from where we were in 2003 to where we are today.

With such significant changes behind us, are we done? Far from it. The experience and outcomes of our member benefits research studies convinced us of the value of this approach. Recently we commissioned an illuminating evaluation of membership communications. And the next time we have major questions about our program? We'll be taking the scientific approach to answering them, too.

Heather Calvin is associate vice president for visitor services and membership and Deborah Kulich is membership manager at the Museum of Science, Boston, Massachusetts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 1. Museum of Science Membership Categories in 2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual</strong> – $55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admission for member named on card</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Receive:
  - 2 IMAX passes
  - 2 Planetarium passes
  - 2 Guest passes |

| **Dual** – $65 |
| Admission for 2 members named on card OR 1 member + 1 guest |
| Receive:
  - 2 IMAX passes
  - 2 Planetarium passes
  - 2 Guest passes |

| **Family** – $89 |
| Admission for 1 or 2 members named on card + children or grandchildren age 18 or under OR 1 member + 3 guests |
| Receive:
  - 2 IMAX passes
  - 2 Planetarium passes
  - 2 Guest passes |

| **Family Plus** – $150 |
| Admission for 1 member named on card + up to 7 guests (max: 8 people) |
| Receive:
  - 4 IMAX passes
  - 4 Planetarium passes
  - 4 Guest passes |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 2. Museum of Science Membership Categories Today</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Basic 2</strong> – $70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admits 1 member + 1 guest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Receive:
  - 2 IMAX passes
  - 2 Planetarium passes
  - 2 Guest passes
  - Discounted Butterfly Garden and 3D Digital Cinema tickets |

| **Basic 5** – $100 |
| Admits 1 member + up to 4 guests |
| Receive:
  - 2 IMAX passes
  - 2 Planetarium passes
  - 2 Guest passes
  - Discounted Butterfly Garden and 3D Digital Cinema tickets |

| **Basic 8** – $130 |
| Admits 1 member + up to 7 guests |
| Receive:
  - 2 IMAX passes
  - 2 Planetarium passes
  - 2 Guest passes
  - Discounted Butterfly Garden and 3D Digital Cinema tickets |

| **Premier 2** – $105 |
| Admits 1 member + 1 guest |
| Receive all Basic 2 benefits PLUS:
  - 2 extra IMAX passes
  - 2 extra Planetarium passes
  - 2 extra Guest passes
  - 2 hours free parking every visit
  - Priority treatment for select member events |

| **Premier 5** – $135 |
| Admits 1 member + up to 4 guests |
| Receive all Basic 5 benefits PLUS:
  - 2 extra IMAX passes
  - 2 extra Planetarium passes
  - 2 extra Guest passes
  - 2 hours free parking every visit
  - Priority treatment for select member events |

| **Premier 8** – $165 |
| Admits 1 member + up to 7 guests |
| Receive all Basic 8 benefits PLUS:
  - 2 extra IMAX passes
  - 2 extra Planetarium passes
  - 2 extra Guest passes
  - 2 hours free parking every visit
  - Priority treatment for select member events |
Last October I paid my first visit to the Museum of Science and Industry (MSI). My husband, who had often told me about childhood visits to this Chicago landmark with his grandfather, eagerly took me to his favorite haunts: the chemistry exhibit, the chick hatchery, the sanitary plumbing exhibit. Still, the exhibit that impressed me the most was Earth Revealed.

I sat in the domed space, mesmerized, as a skilled museum educator interpreted the patterns of weather, light pollution, and chemical pollution swirling across the suspended globe. Families came and went in the space, but the majority of people who lingered were, like me, adult visitors—reinforcing to me that people come to science centers with different needs. For my husband, our day at MSI was a chance to reminisce about his grandfather. For the many families visiting, it was an opportunity to be together in a fun, yet educational environment. For me, it came down to one exhibit that sparked my curiosity and intellect. I walked away wishing for more.

Learning from ACM visitors

I had no way of knowing that day how many of my fellow visitors were members of the museum or former frequent visitors, like my husband. But it was clear to me that understanding and responding to the motivations, needs, and concerns of multiple audiences would go a long way toward fostering the kind of relationship my husband has with MSI—a lifelong sense of “my museum” that combines happy social memories with an enthusiasm for particular exhibits and experiences.

So what do differing audiences need and expect from a visit to a science center? Can museums effectively reach curious adults while also educating family groups? And what are visitors’ expectations regarding the presentation of new science and technology?

Such questions came naturally to mind because the consulting company I work for, Reach Advisors, had recently investigated the relevance of U.S. children’s museums to their chief audiences: parents and grandparents. In this 2007 study, conducted on behalf of the Association of Children’s Museums (ACM), we contacted some 5,500 “core visitors” (defined as e-newsletter subscribers, but 80 percent were members, too) of 33 U.S. children’s museums.

Among the questions we asked were (1) How relevant are children’s museums to children and parents? (2) Do children’s museums serve all their community? and (3) When do families start to visit other types of museums? That last question, in particular, produced responses that have a bearing on an upcoming ASTC project.

Over the next few months, ASTC and Reach will partner in a large-scale survey of science centers’ members and core visitors. This work will build on what we learned about visitors’ perceptions of science museums from the participants in the ACM study.

Children’s museums 2.0

One clear finding of the ACM study was that visiting families consider science centers “Children’s Museums 2.0.” That is, parents perceive science centers, because of their interactive nature, as the logical “next” museum for kids who have outgrown the children’s museum. Dozens of comments reflected this, with one mother stating, “Science museums are the best, where they get to do things hands-on and learn and play at the same time.”

So what did we learn about these museum-going families as they begin visiting science museums?

• First, visitors to children’s museums love science centers. Some 65 percent indicated they also visit science centers with their families, while 42 percent visit natural history museums, and 51 percent visit nature centers. This visitation was highly linked to the age of the children in the family, growing significantly as the oldest child enters elementary school (see Figure 1).

• Correlating directly with this trend, visitation goes up as parents grow older, with visitation rates of
parents in their 40s far outnumbering those of parents in their 20s and 30s, who tend to have younger children. This has important ramifications for science centers. Parents in their 40s are more likely to donate money to aid organizations that help children. Parents in their 30s are more budget-minded, joining to save money on services received. Given the affluent base of core museum visitors (90 percent of respondents earned more than the average American household), this tells us that science centers are in an excellent position to ask for financial gifts from engaged older parents. The families that visit children’s museums and science museums are also very well educated. Some 80 percent of respondents have college or advanced degrees, and the statistic held true for those respondents who visit science museums. This high rate of college attainment helps explain the affluence of the core visitor base, but it may also indicate that visitors to science museums do not reflect their communities. Further research for ASTC should shed more light on this visitation trend and suggest action that could lower perceived barriers to entry.

**Demographic factors**

While level of education was a clear indicator of museum visitation, race or ethnicity was not as big a factor. Science museum visitation held steady among museum-going families, with all races and ethnicities showing similar attendance patterns (see Figure 2).

Education was also a key predictor of responses to questions about diversity. Respondents with more education were more likely to want to expose their children to different cultures, races, and ethnicities, in and out of the museum; to want their local children’s museum to do more to help in this effort; and to value diverse communities (see Figure 3). The race or ethnicity of the respondent was a critical factor in diversity responses as well. African Americans were the most likely to want to expose their children to diversity, the most likely to seek diverse and integrated communities, and the most critical of how the museum deals with diversity. Caucasians felt significantly less strongly on all of these issues, and Asian Americans and Hispanics fell in between (see Figure 4). But these responses, and the overall attendance patterns of minorities, tell us that while museums are working to attract diverse audiences, more needs to be done to reach and engage these groups on a personal basis.

**Questions to pursue**

The ACM survey raises significant questions that we hope to tackle this year for ASTC. We have seen that visitation grows as children enter elementary school, but what happens as they grow older, and enter their ‘tween and teen years? How do empty-nester or childless adults perceive science centers? Do adults feel, as families do, that science museums are an extension of children’s museums, or do they see them as places of exploration for older visitors as well? What current science topics are of interest to these audiences? How does that interest differ across generations?

All of these lead to the questions of what role core visitors want science museums to play in their communities, and how science museums can best serve those communities. We do not have the answers yet, but we will share what we have learned in October at ASTC 2008. Stay tuned!

Susie Wilkening is a senior consultant with Reach Advisors, an audience research firm focusing on emerging ways that Americans live, play, and buy. For details on the ACM visitor survey results, go to http://reachadvisors.typepad.com/. To learn more about the 2008 ASTC–Reach Advisors research project, contact Wendy Pollock, wpollock@astc.org.
Value Added: Membership Strategies That Work

Three ASTC science centers share membership management practices that have increased member satisfaction and improved the bottom line.

The Personal Touch

By Kelly Brault

Museum membership professionals have many quantitative ways to track success: retention rates, front-desk capture rates, year-over-year numbers, revenue, and more. While these statistics can be pretty exciting, especially when you see upwardly mobile bar charts, I have found that the key driving force to make the numbers go in the right direction is just this: Listen to your members.

Prepare to be surprised

It's amazing how much you can learn from a modest effort. In a previous museum position, I conducted a market research study that included both an online survey of members and a set of focus groups. Our institution, with around 24,000 square feet of interior exhibit space, had on-site annual attendance of 150,000 and approximately 5,500 members.

A professional research firm donated its time, so our only costs were for mailings and incidentals. Members were notified of the survey via postcard, and a phone version was offered to those without computer access. The focus groups were a follow-up, used to dig deeper into issues that the survey helped us identify.

The chief lesson I took away from this experience was that even a small museum means different things to different people. Among the surprises revealed in the survey were the following:

- Members viewed the museum as a hidden gem, their own special place where they could take their families for an hour or a full day. Management hadn't been promoting it that way.

- Members were open to paying a modest fee for more elaborate traveling exhibitions. Because our pricing model didn't allow for extra fees, we had been keeping costs down by bringing in smaller exhibitions.

- Members said they often didn't attend events because they didn't know if it was appropriate for the age range of their children. We had wondered why attendance was not higher. Who knew that something so simple (and correctable) would be the answer?

- Members wanted more adult lectures. Although our core audience was families with children aged 2–13, there were many loyal adults who wished to connect with each other and the museum in a more meaningful way. A new lecture series was launched, and most talks sold out in advance.

Although not all of these items were membership-related, they all enhanced the overall experience of members and led to renewals.

Answer their calls

In my current position, I am in charge of membership at the Detroit Science Center, an institution with 58,000 square feet of interior exhibit space. In 2007, our on-site attendance was 425,000 (partly due to the blockbuster exhibition Our Body: The Universe Within), and we had 7,000 members in the database.

In a big museum, it can be more difficult for members to make a personal connection with the institution. And it can be equally difficult for staff to connect with members. For that reason, I make it a point to answer phone calls on our member hotline as often as I can. This puts me directly in touch with members' needs and questions.

As part of our conversation, I often ask what motivated this person to become a member. I get a different story each time. One recent member, a retired engineer, told me he believes mathematics is of primary importance. He would like to help make math accessible to young people. As it
happens, that fits perfectly with an exhibition that the Detroit Science Center plans to build. We may be able to recruit this member as a docent and/or donor, serving both our interests.

At one point, the hotline was receiving many calls from homeschooling families wanting to join. I learned in talking with them that homeschoolers have an incredible online network. We set up a special homeschool membership at our teacher rate, and the education department expanded the programming we could offer them. Those families went on to sell hundreds of memberships for us.

**Find a way to do it**

Whether it’s a short survey conducted at an event, a questionnaire sent via e-mail, a small focus group, or a full-fledged study, there is no excuse for not conducting some sort of member research at your museum.

Cost need not be an obstacle. There are several free web tools, such as SurveyMonkey, that can be added to an e-newsletter. Your survey should be both useful and actionable. There is no point in asking people if they like your exhibits when you have no funding to address a negative response.

Don’t forget to look beyond active members. I find it helpful (and inexpensive) to contact people who are about to let their membership lapse. With the third renewal notice, I enclose a short survey asking why they’re not rejoining. Frequent responses are “lack of time to use membership” and “kids too old.”

While these may seem as factors beyond our control, people do make time for things they want to do. Reminding members to visit and giving them an urgent reason to do so— a one-day astronomy event, the last week of a traveling exhibition— can help with the “lack of time” response. A more comprehensive plan to appeal to older children and adults may be needed to address the second response.

Another easy way for membership staff to connect is to reach out to those people you constantly see in the museum or at events. If you don’t know who they are, ask your educators, visitor service reps, or docents to introduce you. Talk with these members at length and build relationships with them. Again, expect to be surprised.

In short, while statistics look good on annual reports, nothing can replace getting out there and learning about your members in person. Whether this takes the form of just talking to people now and then, or of more elaborate surveys, focus groups, and market research projects, every single museum can do something to mold its offerings to what members are truly looking for. Then watch those bar charts grow!

**Improving Membership at the Fleet**

By Michael Conley

Can I bring my grandchildren if I’m a Family member? What other science centers can I visit? Are my IMAX passes good for all your films? If you’re a museum membership manager, you’ve heard variations on all of these questions and probably many more. What these members are really asking is, How can I get the most value out of my membership?

At the Reuben H. Fleet Science Center (the Fleet), a San Diego, California museum with 25,000+ square feet of interior exhibit space, we believe in giving new members as much information as possible about their membership benefits right from the start. When we mail membership cards, we enclose a Membership Benefits Brochure with tips on how to get the most out of the membership year.

The more often members visit and use their benefits, we have found, the more likely they are to renew. In 2007, with on-site attendance of nearly 550,000 visitors, the Fleet had 11,310 members. Our renewal rate is well over 50 percent. Since every science center is looking for ways to keep members coming back, this article will cover two programs developed here at the Fleet that have worked well for us.

**Surveying for satisfaction**

Three months after a member joins the Fleet or renews, we e-mail a “Satisfaction Survey,” asking the new member to grade us (on a scale of 1 to 5) on a broad range of service issues through questions like these:

- Was our membership application easy to understand?
- Was our staff knowledgeable about the membership program?
- Did you receive all the materials we promised to send?
- Have you encountered any problems we should know about?
- To encourage feedback, we offer a free IMAX pass to those who respond. Respondents can remain anonymous, although we prefer that they tell us who they are, so we can address any particular problems.

When Fleet staff pose such questions, what are we really asking is, Why did you join the Fleet? Is the science center meeting your expectations? If you joined for IMAX films, have you been able to see one yet? If it was because you love astronomy, what did you think about our planetarium show, “The Sky Tonight”? Have you taken advantage of discounts on education programs and at the store and café?

Most importantly, we want to know these things now—not next year, when the member is considering whether to renew. The questions are worded in a positive way (and we do get many top scores), but we are especially interested in any “less-than-satisfactory” responses. These tell us where improvement is needed.

The survey also allows members to provide more information or tell us how we can help them. Perhaps they have moved or changed a phone number or e-mail address. If someone isn’t receiving the newsletter, we follow up before it becomes a problem. If members want to upgrade, we help them do it now—no need to wait till renewal time.

The results? We hear about problems earlier, and the survey tells members
from the very start that we want to know what we can do to make their year with us the best it can be.

Exchanging benefits
San Diego is fortunate to have many top-quality museums within driving distance. While that could mean competition for the Fleet, we prefer to see it as a way to build bridges. One of the most creative—and successful—programs we have launched is our Membership Benefits Exchange.

Whenever we think an upcoming exhibition or film at the Fleet will be of particular interest to another museum's members, or when an exhibition scheduled for that museum would be especially appropriate for our members, we propose an exchange. For one month, members of the partner museum can present their membership cards at the Fleet and receive free exhibit gallery admission, discounts in our store and café, and reduced admission for IMAX and planetarium show tickets. Fleet members receive comparable benefits at the other institution.

This system allows us to extend the value of our membership at very little cost. Since members of the partner museum probably would not have visited the Fleet otherwise, there is no loss of revenue to us (or to them). The opportunity is publicized through our membership newsletter, so we have no advertising expenses. We pick months when visitor attendance is traditionally low—in San Diego, that often means September—to do the exchanges. The increased foot traffic brings sales that our store and café would not otherwise have enjoyed. And there is always the possibility that our new visitors might have such a great experience that they will join the Fleet on their own.

Part of the fun (and challenge) of this approach is matching a science exhibition or film to a museum you might never have thought to partner with. For example, when San Diego's Museum of Photographic Arts presented an exhibition on the science of photography, we proposed a Membership Benefits Exchange. They were thrilled with the increased attendance our members brought to their facility. When we hosted a traveling exhibition from the Berkshire Museum, Enchanted Museum: Exploring the Science of Art, we got to do a first-ever exchange with a local art museum. And because we often present IMAX films on the oceans, the Birch Aquarium at Scripps in La Jolla is one of our favorite exchange partners.

Final thoughts
Over the past 25 years, membership has gone from being something museums grudgingly think they “have to have” to something recognized—and respected—as an untapped resource for an institution’s long-term growth and stability. At the Fleet, we’ve learned that members, the visitors who care most about our facility, can provide a valuable source of feedback. And we’ve learned that we can use membership to build bridges with other museums in the community and strengthen existing relationships. It’s a “win/win” situation all around.

Michael Conley is manager of membership services at the Reuben H. Fleet Science Center, San Diego, California.

Membership Cards Go “Live”

By Tara Keblish and Steve Jacobson

At the New York Hall of Science (the Hall), a Queens, New York museum with more than 100,000 square feet of interior exhibit space, we believe in maximizing the visitor experience by responding promptly to visitors’ needs. First impressions are critical. Yet, prior to 2006, we were having difficulty meeting this goal with one very important group of visitors—new members.

Like many science centers, the Hall recruits the bulk of its new members from on-site guests. In 2006, with on-site attendance of 412,000, we ended the year with 7,719 members in our database. But the methods we were using to manage new memberships presented several challenges.

Under the existing system, people received a temporary, hand-written membership card when they joined. A permanent membership card would arrive in the mail 3 to 4 weeks later. This meant not only that full member benefits, such as reciprocal admission through the ASTC Travel Passport Program, were unavailable right away, but also that new members wound up with two cards, despite our official policy of “one card per membership.” A second challenge was database
management. Our membership roster had doubled in 2005, when a major expansion added 55,000 square feet of exhibit space to the museum, but there had been no corresponding change in staffing levels. We still had only one full-time staff member for member database entry.

Finally, the process for checking membership at entry was cumbersome. The Hall uses Ticketmaster's VISTA for admission but Blackbaud's Raiser's Edge for membership. Since only VISTA was available at the front desk, members who had joined since the last import from Raiser's Edge wouldn't appear in the system. Even worse, the member database was unavailable on weekends, when families were most likely to visit.

**Streamlining the process**

A staff task force selected to address these challenges came up with two key recommendations: that members should receive their permanent membership cards upon joining and that barcodes be added to the cards so front-desk staff could use scanners to speed up member entry.

To help streamline membership and admissions, the Hall hired Jacobson Consulting Applications Inc. (JCA), a firm that specializes in helping nonprofits solve workflow and systems issues. JCA integrated the membership data in VISTA with that in Raiser's Edge, automating the transfer of data and giving staff access to all current members, regardless of which system they used. Careful consideration was given to the security of donor information from the development department, and quality control in reporting was ensured by reconciling sales figures between the two software packages daily.

Cost-effectiveness was an important factor. JCA utilized as much of our existing hardware and software as possible. Instead of mailing new cards to 7,000+ member families, staff were to replace old cards as memberships were renewed, eliminating redundancy. But most critical to the project's success would be training the six cashiers who staff the admissions area. If they could handle all of the data entry, it would eliminate the need for another full-time employee.

JCA developed two training sessions to ensure a more streamlined membership process. First, the cashiers learned how to use Raiser's Edge and print out membership cards. After a guest completes a brief application form, the cashier processes the transaction in VISTA and issues a receipt. If there is no line, the staffer will then toggle over to Raiser's Edge, enter the member's data, and print out the bar-coded member card, using a standard laser printer. (During busy times, the cashier holds all application forms until there's a lull and then enters them in a batch.) Each staffer handles the entire process for his or her own sales, inserting the cards into pre-stuffed welcome packets and, if need be, placing them at the member desk for members to retrieve as they leave. At the end of the day, the cashier runs a query in Raiser's Edge and compares his or her sales for the day to a similar report from VISTA.

The second training was in sales techniques, such as how best to up-sell visitors from a one-day visit to a yearly membership and how to pre-sell renewals to members nearing their renewal dates. Prior to the training, only a few cashiers would proactively pitch membership to visitors, even though a commission structure was in place to reward them. Now all cashiers feel comfortable approaching visitors with sales offers.

**Benefits for all**

By integrating the databases, involving everyone in the trainings, and making commissions dependent on accurate data entry and card printing, the Hall ensured that membership sales would become part of daily front desk operations. Members are thrilled to receive their cards right away, and cashiers can now provide guest services that formerly were available only on weekdays.

Additional advantages of the new system include the improved accuracy of visitation reporting afforded by bar-code scans, the postage saved by printing a permanent card on the day members join, and better security of the free passes we give out for certain categories of membership. A final, unforeseen benefit is that working together on sales goals has forged new collegial bonds between membership and visitor services.

Tara Keblish is membership manager at the New York Hall of Science, Queens, and Steve Jacobson is president and CEO of Jacobson Consulting Applications Inc., New York, New York.
A Member-Shaped Museum: The New Science Center of Iowa

By Sara Scallon

First opened in 1970, the Science Center of Iowa (SCI) quickly became a cultural fixture in the state. So when, after 35 years, the museum made plans to construct a new 110,000-square-foot facility in downtown Des Moines, key constituents and stakeholders were invited to participate from the start.

At each step, SCI engaged the community while serving in the role of facilitator. Members, as a core constituency group, played an integral part in the planning process—participating in charrettes, focus groups, and market research and offering valuable feedback and insight into what they envisioned for the future of SCI. Through this organic and responsive process, the creation of the science center came to reflect community needs.

Members provide feedback

Early in the planning process, SCI conducted a survey to determine the level of support for a new facility. We administered the survey to 300 visitors in the science center, many of them SCI members, and to 300 shoppers at malls in the greater Des Moines area. Questions varied from ways in which participants spent their leisure hours to science topics that interested them the most. The survey affirmed the community’s desire for a new science center and demonstrated a high level of interest in each proposed exhibit area. From the responses to topics tested, SCI was able to develop programming and exhibits reflective of participants’ interests.

A qualitative study was also part of the process. In late 2004, SCI conducted seven moderated focus groups, each drawn from a different potential target audience, asking them about their needs and desires for the new Science Center of Iowa. The focus group drawn from SCI museum members knew the science center well and had high expectations of what they wanted from the new center. Members wanted to be assured that all aspects of the new SCI were designed for interactive learning, so that each of their visits throughout the year would guarantee a new experience. Members also confirmed that the new downtown location was feasible and would be conducive to multiple visits.

As construction and exhibit installation neared completion in April 2005, we once again asked members to participate by helping to evaluate our new “experience platforms,” themed galleries with hands-on exhibits and live demonstrations. On two separate days, a total of 1,500 members took part in these shakedowns, providing valuable feedback on their new science center. Making their way through the construction zone to assigned experience platforms, members interacted with exhibits and offered comments to staff standing by with clipboards and surveys. Even the labels were temporary, as our guests evaluated the instructions for exhibit use. Members who participated in this process demonstrated a strong desire to help in the completion of the new state-of-the-art learning center. We discovered that those who attended these preview events were creating a great deal of excitement in Des Moines and the state of Iowa as they told others about the new facility and its unique experiences.

Better benefits through partnership

In anticipation of the new facility’s opening in May 2005, we once again surveyed members, this time to assess the membership program itself—its current benefits and a possible expansion of the program. The results further defined and confirmed our direction.

At the time, we were offering a combination membership to the Science Center of Iowa and Des Moines’ Blank Park Zoo. To better meet community demand, we decided to add another local cultural attraction, Living History Farms, to the mix. An agreement was reached to offer Combo and Tri memberships among all three locations. Similar targeted audiences, close proximity of the three venues, and the key shared trait of having fee-based membership programs made this partnership a logical fit.

The first step was for the three locations to coordinate membership levels. Four different levels were created: Family, Family Plus, Grand, and One Plus One. These categories reflected the diverse needs of target audiences, as well as the existing programs at each location.

Each organization agreed to discount $10 off its regular membership price to promote the partnership and provide an incentive for purchasing Combo or Tri memberships. Member benefits were aligned among the organizations so purchasers could easily compare and recognize the value of the new offerings. The process we created for transferring memberships sold at each location and for marketing the program is still in use today.

Announced in March 2005, the Combo and Tri membership program immediately met with great success. An additional incentive to become a charter member was offered for any new or renewed membership purchased before the May 2005 opening.

Prior to 2005, SCI’s membership base had held steady at about 2,500 households. One year after the opening, in March 2006, our memberships had more than tripled, to 7,800 households. Even more telling of the program’s success has been the unprecedented renewal rate among charter members at SCI. After year one, charter member renewal rates were 98 percent, and after year two, 74 percent. Members continue to endorse SCI with a very high level of satisfaction and provide us with valuable feedback for our future offerings. The key to sustaining this success has been and continues to be an open line of communication between partners and a commitment to keeping the program fluid and responsive to the needs of the community it serves.

Sara Scallon is membership coordinator at the Science Center of Iowa, Des Moines.
It Feels Like Home: The Value of Community

By Paul Tatter and Kristin Leigh

“...This is a wonderful atmosphere. Can I live here?” (Visitor comment card)

At Explora we think of membership as a sense of belonging. “Belonging” comes from an old English word meaning a close and secure relationship. Relationships of belonging are personal. They are about you, me, and the stuff of the world that is the medium of our activity.

Being a member has deep roots in belonging, trust, comfort, genuine-ness, safety, acceptance, and sharing resources. Developing personally meaningful relationships takes time, as reflected in these notes from visitors: “My husband and I have come here before and couldn’t wait for our daughter to be born so that we could share with her what fun we had! She’s now two years old, and we all had a blast. We’ll be back!” “Siempre estamos encantados” (“We’re always charmed.”)

Perceiving membership as relationships that develop over time is different from viewing it as a commodity. We see membership as a layering of mutual commitments with other community organizations. Our local adoption exchange uses Explora as a place where children can comfortably meet prospective parents. In this example, membership also involves commitments with informal social groups, families, and individuals. Collectively, all of these relationships define the membership.

Members of Explora feel they belong to something larger, like the neighborhood, and to something smaller, like their family or friends. A staff member observed, “One family set up dim sum in our picnic area, with a tablecloth, and a centerpiece they made in our workshop exhibit.”

Explora is a member of the community and, reciprocally, the community belongs in Explora. It’s not irrelevant that every staff person becomes a member when he or she is hired, and everyone in the community can be a member (because they don’t pay if they can’t*). For all of us to be members, we really do need regular visitors to develop relationships with each other, with the staff, and with exhibit and program materials. One visit isn’t enough to develop these relationships.

Membership requires durable, mutual commitments. In this broad context of community life, four widely shared commitments are participation, trust, acceptance, and respect.

Perhaps the most important commitment is to participate in the life of Explora as part of the life of each person, family, and the community, and, over time, to develop new relationships with the physical world, self, and others. These relationships develop in unpredictable ways, uniquely to each person, with no expectation of ending. For our visitors, this means contributing to Explora through their presence, being willing to engage in inquiry with us, honestly revealing their thinking, and making themselves at home. To ask for this participation, we must be committed to access for all the diverse members of the community; a comfortable, safe, bilingual environment; and a friendly, diverse staff genuinely interested in learning. We design programs and exhibits for repeat visitors and their recurring participation.

A staff member describes how relationships change with regular participation: “Rickie’ is 11 now. He and his family have been coming to Explora regularly since I started working here. As I have gotten to know the family better, our relationship has become more informal, and I enjoy seeing them—like one might enjoy having friends come over. Rickie brought a plant he’d started from a seed to contribute to the Experiment Bar. Every time he comes, he wants to check on his plant.”

Similarly, a grandmother describes her grandson: “Diego is 8 years old. He first came to Explora four years ago. He spent all of his time at the ball run. Later it was one or two hours in the water area, then Shapes of Sound, then Systems in Motion. Today, Diego talks about Explora as his second home. He knows the staff and every exhibit. Everywhere he goes is his favorite. Now he brings his friends to show them around.”

Another commitment members must make is trust. We ask visitors to trust us enough to take intellectual risks, to believe that we won’t embarrass them, and to embark on explorations for which the outcomes are unknown. At the same time, we trust visitors to use our many loose materials in creating their own learning experiences. A staff member describes such an experience:

“In November families from two Title I schools spent a night...
especial at Explora. They brought all the kids from 20s to babies. There were about 350 people. Most of Explora’s bilingual staff came. Parents spontaneously helped serve food and assisted the staff. I sat down with a teenager at the Magna-Cam. We magnified money. He was so interested that I gave him a dollar to examine. In half an hour, he found me to return the dollar. Later, he saw me across the room and brought me to meet his older brother.”

A child attending the same event wrote, “Querido Explora, a mi me gusta ir a Explora mucho, mucho, y mucho. Después yo voy a ir otra vez.” (“Dear Explora, I like coming to Explora a lot, a lot, and a lot. I will come again later.”)

Members also make a commitment to accept each other. Explora often serves as a meeting place. “I began coming to Explora as a mother with two children. I have many friends with children that have come to Explora for as many years as me. Now I work here. Increasingly, conversations have led to child development, what parents have observed their children doing and learning at Explora, and conversations about their families. Parents are increasingly trusting, and I have observed parents who had been ‘hands off’ begin to interact with their children and the activities.”

Many members meet the same people here each week, and this notion of Explora as a meeting place rubs off, even on people who didn’t intend to attend the meeting. Explora’s staff and environment support an inclination to see others around you, even strangers, as belonging to your community. Homeschool parents find each other and share ideas. Adoptive parents meet regularly to create peer groups for their children and support networks for themselves.

With acceptance of other community members comes respect. “I think that being here makes me feel like I can make anything.” (Visitor comment card.) Whether it’s the grandmother who, over the years, taught all of her grandchildren to walk in Explora’s Knee Hi-Sci area, teens from different parts of town working together in our Youth Program, or hundreds of families from underserved neighborhoods at a family night, all of these community members respect each other’s presence and the commitment manifested through that presence.

A school principal sent this note: “WOW—that was truly a wonderful, powerful, exciting, and so engaging evening. There were so many moments I observed last night—two students talking about vibrations, delighted laughter about air pressure, a little ADHD girl focusing on water flow for 20 minutes, parents and students building marble tracks together. My heart was full with the vision of what learning and exploring the world together can be.”

Membership comes back to one of Explora’s six core values, the value of community: ”...We value the diverse community in which we live, to which we strive to make a positive contribution and to create an environment where all members of this community feel a sense of comfort and belonging.” Or, as one visitor wrote on a comment card, “I love this place...it makes me feel right at home.”

Paul Tatter is associate director and Kristin Leigh is educational services director at Explora, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

**Readings**


**Web sites**

- AAM Development and Membership
  www.aam-us.org/getinvolved/comm/dam.cfm
- This American Association of Museums’ Standing Professional Committee advances best practices in development and membership, including high-quality sessions organized and sponsored at the AAM Annual Meeting, for museums, gardens, historic homes, zoos, and aquariums.
- Idealware
  www.idealware.org
  This site devoted to candid reviews and information about nonprofit software features a March 2006 article, “A Few Good Databases for Membership Organizations.”
- Membership Management Forum
  www.membershipmanagementforum.org
  A professional networking group for membership staff at U.K. museums, galleries, heritage attractions, and performing arts venues.
Fostering Leadership for the Public Good

How will the 21st century be different in positive ways because science centers exist? How can science centers and museums continue to make a significant impact within their communities and in society at large? How can our institutions leverage their rich history and contributions and sustain innovation in the coming years?

Addressing these questions and advancing the informal science education field in general requires an intentional focus on leadership and the future. To that end, the Noyce Foundation, in collaboration with ASTC, is launching the Noyce Leadership Institute, a forum designed to immerse both existing and aspiring executives in cutting-edge knowledge and tools, promoting practices, and professional networks, with an eye to increasing their capacity to lead effectively and have a greater impact in their communities.

The first Institute program, the Noyce Leadership Fellowship, will begin this June. Eighteen chief executives from science centers worldwide have been selected to participate (see People, page 20). These inaugural Fellows, all relatively new in their CEO positions, were selected by a nominating group and selection committee drawn from senior professionals in the science museum field and executive education, together representing a wide range of backgrounds and institutions.

The program will be nine months in duration, with a mix of face-to-face sessions, coaching, peer learning, videoconferencing, and other learning strategies, followed by ongoing Fellows alumni activities.

Over the long-term, through programs for both current CEOs and aspiring leaders, the Noyce Leadership Institute aims to strengthen the impact of science centers as innovative educational hubs—places that engage their audiences in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics at every age, encouraging children and youth to choose STEM careers and adults to acquire sufficient knowledge to understand the science issues in their lives.

The Institute bears the name of Robert Noyce, cofounder of Intel, inventor of the integrated circuit, and a man known for integrity, authenticity, character, inclusiveness, and continuous innovation. Noyce’s work in leading science, engineering, and technology to a whole new level of innovation—as well as in the creation of new industries and fields—is legendary. His legacy continues to serve as a standard for leaders today.

Primary funding for the Institute comes from the Noyce Foundation, with additional support to date from the David & Lucile Packard Foundation, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation.

For more information, contact Sheila Grinell at sheilagrinell@cox.net.

New Governing Member Approved

At its October 2007 meeting, the ASTC Board of Directors...
approved the promotion of Lisbon’s Pavilhão do Conhecimento–Ciência Viva (Pavilion of Knowledge) to Governing Member status, bringing the total of ASTC Governing Members to 68. Opened in 1999, the science center is not only the core of Portugal’s Ciência Viva network of 11 science centers, but also the largest in the nation, with 29,000 square feet of exhibit space. In 2007, the Pavilion hosted the 18th Ecsite Annual Conference.

A Growing Resource

As ExhibitFiles.org nears its one-year anniversary, new features are being added to make this community web site even more useful and easier to use. The site, designed by Ideum and developed with support from the National Science Foundation, now has more than 550 members. Collectively, this group has contributed nearly 100 case studies and reviews. Topics range from case studies of traveling exhibitions like Psychology: Understanding Ourselves, Understanding Each Other (by Gretchen Jennings) to a review of the Toaster exhibit at St. Louis’s City Museum (by Paul Orselli). Contributions have come from around the world—including reviews of the ethnographic museum in Neuchatel, Switzerland; the Tropical Mauan Zoo in Brazil; and museums in Zaragoza, Spain. Some members have drawn on old exhibition planning documents to prepare their case studies. Others have written in from family vacations, business trips—and even, in one case, from a research base in Antarctica. Topics have ranged widely, but the core of the site is focused on science exhibitions.

A new set of features added in January allows registered users to tag any case study or review. Tags are added to the list of available keywords for each entry, which helps with search functionality and provides users with a new way to browse. Another addition to the “browse” page is a thumbnail viewer that lets users sort by title, date of post, or popularity (how often users mark an entry as a “favorite”).

Ahead are easier ways to post and link to media files and to contribute short observations—the kind of tip that’s frequently described on the ISEN-ASTC listserv but could benefit from an illustration. For more information on ExhibitFiles, contact Wendy Pollock, wpollock@astc.org.

Dimensions Forum Set

Readers are invited to join ASTC Dimensions contributors and other museum colleagues for an online discussion of membership based on the articles in this issue. The forum will be held in ASTC Connect in the week of April 7. To register, visit www.astc.org/astc_connect, or contact forum manager Margaret Glass, mglass@astc.org.

Welcome to ASTC

The following new members were approved by ASTC’s Membership Committee in October 2007. Contact information is available in the About ASTC section of the ASTC web site, www.astc.org.

SCIENCE CENTER AND MUSEUM MEMBERS

- Chatham Marconi Maritime Center (CMMC), North Chatham, Massachusetts. This former wireless radio and transmitting station, founded by Guglielmo Marconi in 1914 and operational until the Town of Chatham bought it in 1993, is now the object of a $300,000 capital campaign. The nonprofit CMMC hopes to reconfigure the historic buildings into a communications technology museum and learning center by June 2009.
- Glasgow Science Centre, Glasgow, Scotland, U.K. Featured educational facilities of this 90,000-square-foot center, (which is rejoining ASTC after a hiatus), include the hands-on Science Mall, an IMAX theater, and the rotating Glasgow Tower. The latter, at more than 400 feet high, is Scotland’s tallest freestanding building and the only one worldwide to rotate from the ground up.
- Gujarat Science City, Ahmedabad, India. This organization’s 264-acre campus, laid out in eight 96,000-square-foot hexagons, features an IMAX theater, an amphitheater for science shows, and the Energy Education Park. Future plans include a life science park, a space and communication pavilion, and a possible 700-acre addition to the site.
- Hurricane Warning! at the Disaster Survival House, Deerfield Beach, Florida. Built by State Farm Insurance in 1998 to highlight home safety features, the 3,300-square-foot, three-bedroom residential home has been transformed into an all-hazards learning and training center operated by the nonprofit organization Hurricane Warning!
- Terengganu Science & Creativity Centre, Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia. First opened to the public in 2005 in a 2,700-square-foot space, the science center, known locally as Pusat Sains & Kreativiti Terengganu, is currently building a new facility. Scheduled to open in 2009, it will house nine exhibit halls, three laboratories, a dome planetarium, an auditorium, and a “4-D” cinema.

SUSTAINING MEMBERS

- Brad Larson Media, Inc., Canton, Massachusetts
- Douglas Balder Design & Planning, Brooklyn, New York
- Folia Industries, Inc., Huntingdon, Quebec, Canada
- NEXT Exhibits + Creative Communication, Sudbury, Ontario, Canada
- SmithGroup, Washington, D.C.
- Tessitura Software, Dallas, Texas.
A THOUSAND LITTLE STORIES—
Nature or nurture? DNA or personality? A new traveling exhibition from Philadelphia's Franklin Institute explores the many elements that combine to shape the development of unique individuals.

Identity: An Exhibition of You opened at the Franklin in November 2007. Originally inspired by advances in identity recognition, the 5,000-square-foot exhibition reflects input from expert advisors in genetics, psychology, sociology, cognitive studies, bioethics, and anthropology. Personal vignettes, self-portraits, and drawings join with exhibits to illustrate the multidimensional nature of the self.

Developed for the Science Museum Exhibit Collaborative (SM EC), Identity: An Exhibition of You is designed primarily for 11- to 15-year-olds and their adult companions. It comprises three areas: Physical Identity, Psychological Identity, and Social Identity.

Visitors begin by exploring interactive exhibits based on such physical characteristics as fingerprints, genetic inheritance, family resemblances, and the effects of aging over time. The second area delves into more subjective realms, allowing visitors to compare their own responses to different stimuli (images, smells, musical sounds) with those of others and view films of fetal brain development and functional MRI scans that show how different brains respond to the same situation.

The final section addresses questions of gender, ethnic, and racial identity. Interactives featuring computerized ability tests and video clips of babies dressed in pink or blue help spark discussion of gender identity. Exhibits also invite visitors to match their skin tone with that of people around the world, to take an “implicit association” test to learn how quickly group identity develops, or to evaluate their own sense of ethnic identity.

Associated programming in Philadelphia has included a “brain perception” live show, a lecture series, DNA workshops for school groups, and an ongoing art project encompassing collages created by visiting children and works by Philadelphia artists. A major funding for the $2 million exhibition came from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. After closing at the Franklin on April 20, Identity: An Exhibition of You will travel to the six other SM EC members before touring in North America.

Details Jenny Zehmer, exhibit services, jzehmer@fi.edu; www.fi.edu/exhibitservices

CUI BONO?— Current and future U.K.-based research in human molecular genetics and genomics is the focus of Inside DNA: A Genomic Revolution, a traveling exhibition developed by At-Bristol, on behalf of Ecsite-U K. Inside DNA opened at Explore-At-Bristol in November 2007.

Designed to provoke questions and stimulate debate, the exhibition encourages visitors to explore issues like the role of genes and environment in human health, identity, and evolution. It also delves into ethical questions: Will genetic testing lead to discrimination? Who will benefit most from genetic medicines? What should be the role of DNA databases?

The exhibition is divided into five zones:

- Genetics examines current knowledge of the structure, function, and interactions of the human genome.
- Identity challenges visitors to think about the personal and forensic applications of genetics; interactive exhibits allow users to compare their genetic traits to those of other museum visitors or investigate a murder by profiling evidence at the crime scene.
- Health focuses on ways that genetics allows us to identify, understand, and treat disease. Here visitors can learn about genetic testing and discuss ethical questions raised by the testing of developing fetuses.
- Evolution explores the similarities between humans and other primates and traces the history of human evolution. Visitors can track the distribution of Britons who share their surname and compare fossil casts, brain volume, and other characteristics of chimpanzees, humans, and Neanderthals.
- The Dialogue Zone is the place where visitors can air their own views about the science they’ve encountered. In addition to presenter-led activities and “Meet the Researcher” sessions, its News and Views pods allow people to read the latest news of genomic research, vote on related questions, and leave their own thoughts behind.

After closing in Bristol, Inside DNA will begin its U.K. tour in September 2008. Funding for the £5.1 million ($10 million) project was provided by the Wellcome Trust, with development support from the Sanger Institute.

Details Susie Jones, marketing and public relations, travelling@at-bristol.org.uk; www.insidedna.org.uk

INSPIRING CITIZEN ACTION—
As part of a three-year, $6.3 million refurbishment, the Montreal Science Centre, located in the Canadian city's Old Port section, has opened four new interactive exhibit areas aimed at visitors aged 9 to 14. Exhibitions are built around five key science and technology sectors: information, biotechnology, engineering, health, and the environment. Citizen action, central to the science center's mission, inspired the creation and production
Players choose their next move in Mission Gaia, a game built around the challenges of sustainable development. Photo by Marie-Josée Roy

of the new content.

Social responsibility and interaction are the themes of Mission Gaia, a multimedia game, played alone or in teams of two or four, in which players deal with a succession of sustainability challenges. After exploring solutions for some of the ecological and human disasters of the 20th century, they move on to try maintaining a balance among the environment, the economy, and human society while fostering sustainable development in a large North American city and, ultimately, the whole planet.

Everyone is a science reporter in idTV (ideas television), a huge newsroom with computer stations that guide visitors through the process of choosing a science issue to explore (e.g., Should cloning be allowed?) and developing a multimedia news report on the topic.

Imagine! is an image-filled immersive space in which visitors encounter six “dreamers”—young, visionary scientists who share their passion for extending the boundaries of knowledge and encourage passersby to do the same. Interactive devices here showcase 40 technological inventions of today and tomorrow, and six experimental stations let users experience what it might be like to move about inside the body, travel around the world, speak any language, and more.

Completing the new galleries is Science 26, where letters of the alphabet—A for animation, B for bubble, C for chemistry, and so on—form the basis for exploring the scientific principles hidden in people’s daily lives.

Also featured in the revamped science center are two exhibitions highlighting local industry and technology. Cargo examines the complexity of operations in a modern port, and Technology Showcases, presented by Alcan, focuses on Canadian innovation in fiber optics, fluorescence, thermal analysis, computer modeling, and more. Funding for the renovation project was provided by the Montréal Science Centre Foundation, a nonprofit that solicits contributions from private and public organizations.

Details: Catherine Giroux, media relations coordinator, cgiroux@oldportofmontreal.com

‘EXPEDITION’ EXPANDS—The Rochester Museum & Science Center (RMSC), Rochester, New York, completed renovation of its first floor this January with the installation of two new galleries in the museum’s Expedition Earth experience. Staff created more than 35 interactive elements—from learning to interpret frog sounds to judge the health of a bog to seeing the impact of population growth on the land—and combined them with specimens from RMSC’s natural science collections.

You & Your Earth explores the environment of western New York. Black bear, beaver, and bog dioramas have been updated with hands-on technology. Special creative play areas, including a puppet theater housed in the beavers’ lodge, encourage shared exploration and conversations.

An Ever-Changing Planet allows visitors to retrace the geological and paleontological history of the region. After entering alongside a volcano, visitors can step onto a vibe plate to experience a mini-earthquake—examples of the geological forces that shaped the region. A favorite touch-screen lets visitors navigate by moving a finger along a mapped screen, speeding up time to show how Rochester has changed since its underwater location in tropical seas of 350 million years ago to its present setting.

Principal underwriters of the

Visitors to Expedition Earth enjoy an enhanced and updated version of the museum’s famous Undersea Diorama. Photo courtesy Rochester Museum & Science Center

$3.1 million project include the Gleason Foundation and M rs. William H. Morris.

Details: Debra A. Jacobson, director of marketing and community affairs, debra_jacobson@rmsc.org

Grants & Awards

Two U.S. ASTC members recently received funding from the Motorola Foundation’s Innovation Generation Grants program. Pacific Science Center, Seattle, Washington, was awarded $10,000 for its youth-development program, Discovery Corps. Carnegie Science Center, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, received $100,000 for its Girls, Math & Science Partnership, which aims to encourage girls to participate more fully in science and enter the science and technology workforce (see Spotlights, November-December 2007). The $3.5 million Innovation Generation Grants program was established to fund education programs that “spark a love of science, technology, engineering, and math in today’s youth.”

Science North, in Sudbury, Ontario, Canada, has received two separate grants from regional government totaling $3.7 million (Canadian). The Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation (NOHFC) gave the science center $2.3 million for the development of two new traveling exhibitions and four object theaters, and NOHFC has also pledged $1.4 million toward expansion of the museum’s sister site, Dynamic Earth.

The Colorado Health Foundation has awarded $584,550 to the Denver Museum of Nature & Science for a new health exhibition and to develop health-education programs about human biology, disease, and wellness.

The Lilly Foundation gave $4 million to Indiana’s Children’s Museum of Indianapolis to support the museum’s exhibitions on Egypt, including Global Perspectives and Tutankhamen and the Pharaohs.
Brenton Honeyman, formerly manager of education and strategic communications at Australia’s Questacon, the National Science and Technology Centre, has been appointed executive director of ASPAC, the Asia-Pacific science center network. Honeyman is the first to hold this position, created to support the ASPAC Executive Council and facilitate ASPAC’s participation in global and inter-network initiatives.

Connie Martinez resigned as director of the Children’s Discovery Museum of San Jose (CDM) in September 2007 to become managing director of 1stACT Silicon Valley, a nonprofit group that is helping to spearhead revitalization of the Northern California city’s cultural and business landscape. CDM associate director Marilee Jennings is serving as interim head until a replacement can be found.

The new president and director of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, in Woods Hole, Massachusetts, is Susan Avery. She replaces Bob Gagosian, who left in June 2006. Previously professor of electrical and computer engineering and dean of the graduate school at the University of Colorado-Boulder, Avery also served for 10 years as director of the Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences.

Halsey Spruance is the new executive director of the Delaware Museum of Natural History, in Wilmington. Spruance came to DMNH from the Brandywine Conservancy, where he served as public relations director and handled marketing for the Brandywine River Museum. He replaces Geoffrey Halfpenny, now director of Wilmington’s Hagley Museum and Library.

The following chief executives from museums worldwide have been selected as the first Noyce Leadership Fellows (see ASTC Notes, page 16); their nine-month program of leadership development begins this June in Seattle.

- Linda Abraham-Silver, Great Lakes Science Center
- Dennis Bartels, Exploratorium
- Michiel Buchel, NEMO Science Center*
- Antonio Gomes da Costa, Pavilion of Knowledge-Ciência Viva
- John Durant, MIT Museum
- Phelan Fretz, ECHO at the Leahy Center for Lake Champlain
- Peter Friess, The Tech Museum of Innovation
- Lindy Hoyer, Omaha Children’s Museum
- Marilyn Hoyt, New York Hall of Science
- Paul Jennings, Dundee Science Centre*
- Patrick Lopez, Explora
- Georgina Ngozi, Children’s Museum of the Lowcountry*
- Kerry Orlyk, Schenectady Museum
- Neville Petrie, Science Alive! The New Zealand Science Centre
- Stephanie Ratcliffe, The Wild Center/Natural History Museum of the Adirondacks
- Kirk Ramsay, Glasgow Science Centre
- Chee-kuen Yip, Macao Science Centre
- Alex Zwissler, Chabot Space & Science Center

* = not an ASTC member