UBIQUITOUS MUSEOLOGY

TACTIC CARDS

&

NEIGHBORHOOD

ACTIVATION GUIDE

REVISED

THE OMNIMUSEUM PROJECT

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INTRODUCTION

People who work for museums, zoos and aquariums, science centers, nature centers and heritage sites and other informal learning institutions put a lot of effort into creating experiences that engage and inspire their visitors, deepening the public's understanding and appreciation of the world around them. So imagine what might happen if we applied that effort to the world at large. This is the concept behind the Omnimuseum Project.

With its Tactic Cards and Neighborhood Activation Guide, the Omnimuseum Project applies the intentions and practices of the museum profession to the everyday world. It stresses embracing pre-existing conditions and processes as foundations for the "museum experience". Look around. You constantly inhabit an environment that holds a magnificent collection! But your environment is very different from those we find in controlled exhibition halls.

In 2020 the Omnimuseum Project updated and streamlined the Activation Guide, but the goals are the same. This Neighborhood Activation Guide is here to spark your imagination and offer tips for launching your own neighborhood activation.

TACTIC CARDS

The Tactic Cards represent a variety of bare-bones tactical approaches for engaging people in museum content in public environments, using the world as the object being interpreted. Tactic cards are meant to kick-start your thinking. By design, the cards are not content specific. How these tactics are applied to the unique circumstances of your site and project goals is up to you and the imagination of your team. Mix and match the cards to spark lots of ideas during brainstorming.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR TACTIC CARDS

First things first. Set your project goals: decide on your audience, content, and location. Keep returning to your Who, What, and Where to evaluate your project, but hold those goals lightly. Be ready to adapt your goals as obstacles or opportunities present themselves. As with most place-based projects, your site may drive the majority of your content choices, but so could an unanticipated audience need or interest.

Next, refresh yourself and your team on brainstorming techniques. There are plenty of great examples, but we like these seven rules for brainstorming from IDEO:

> Defer judgment
> Encourage wild ideas
> Build on the ideas of others
> Stay focused on the topic
> One conversation at a time
> Be visual
> Go for quantity

Now, pull out the tactic cards and start brainstorming! To get the most out of your cards, don't necessarily take them literally. For example, the "PROJECTION" card can imply numerous uses of cast light, whether projecting onto a wall, the ground, or an

object. Projection can suggest the use of anything from a state-of-the-art digital projector to a flash-light for making shadow puppets. A projection can be of an image or text, moving or still. What's more, projection could be cultural, psychological, or social. Interpret each card broadly and in as many ways as possible.

Try mixing and matching cards. What they could mean if woven into one approach, or strung to-gether in series?

GUIDELINES

The following pages are intended to provide some guidelines for organizing your team, and analyzing key conditions that will help inform your neighborhood activations. These conditions include your site, the participants, the content and goals of your project, as well as operational resources. Your resource needs may become clearer once you start planning your approach.

CONTENT

What is the main topic, or theme of the experience(s) you are creating? How will you frame the way people think about, and interact with the site? This might be a topic you already have in mind, or one inspired by the opportunities your site presents. It could also be a combination of the two.

Determine your...

CONTENT LENS
The content lens is your overall topic, or theme. It establishes the mind-set of the participants.

CONTENT FOCUS
The content focus is a subset of the content lens. For example, if the content lens was botany, a content focus might be edible weeds. The content focus is largely driven by components of the site's natural and human made features, and histories.

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SITE

Being familiar with your site will help you find opportunities for activation. Once you've selected a site, record what you can about its attributes. Below are some of the primary aspects of your site to consider:

THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT
What objects, features, and phenomena in the built environment are available and relevant to your Content Lens?

GEOGRAPHIC FEATURES
What environmental, climatic, biological and topographic features are available and relevant to your Content Lens?

ZONING AND LAND USE
How is the site zoned (commercial, residential, industrial, agricultural, mixed use) and, more specifically, how is it being used?

HISTORICAL ATTRIBUTES
What historical events, or processes does your site represent that are relevant to your Content Lens?

PEOPLE
Who is living near, passing through or using site? What are their needs and expectations?

SITE SPECIFIC -VS- CONDITION SPECIFIC
When designing place-based experiences, a site can be addressed in terms of its unique aspects (site specific), or in terms of the conditions that exist at the site, but are not unique to it (condition-specific). Let's use Ocean City, MD as an example. Addressing Ocean City in a site specific way might be to focus on its history, or on the specific places we can visit when we are there.

Alternatively, addressing Ocean City in a condition specific way might be to focus on the sandy beach, or the boardwalk in more general terms, both of which can be found in other places that share these conditions.

This distinction means that your ideas for activating the site will be either specific to one location, or applicable to other locations (expandable). The neighborhood (or site) you choose to activate is composed of both site specific and condition specific features.

PARTICIPANTS

Audiences in public places can differ from those in controlled museum settings. There may be people who come for the sole purpose of participating in your activation, while others happen upon it unexpectedly. Some participants may be local residents or commuters moving through the site on a regular basis. Others may pass by completely unaware there is any activation to engage in.

What do you know about the people you want to engage? Doing an analysis of the potential participants can help you develop forms of engagement that are relevant, accessible, and compelling. Some factors to consider are listed on the following page.

What are the participant's circumstances?

SITUATIONAL
What is the participant's situation, objectives, or activities? What brings them to this site?

INTERESTS and ASPIRATIONS
How do participants define themselves? What are their needs, interests, aspirations, and attitudes and how do these relate to the site?

RESOURCES

A neighborhood activation can be as ephemeral as chalk commentary on a sidewalk or as permanent as a sculpture. So the resources your project needs are just as variable.

The more permanent, expensive, or time-consuming your project, the more we recommend starting with prototypes to test your activation.

Your primary resources are your site, the stories it holds, and the people who use it. Embrace a spirit of upcycling and repurposing for as many of your other resources as you can.

MINDSET

The kind of grass-roots approach described in this guide calls for more informal and experimental ways of thinking. Here are a couple of things to consider as you begin planning your site activation:

PERMISSION IS OPTIONAL
It's best to have the community (neighbors, local businesses, local government) on-board with whatever you are planning, but getting permission can be complicated and time consuming. Unless the concept involves a significant physical, or operational alteration to public space, there is usually nothing wrong with running a test without first going through a lot of red tape. Try it! It may be just what you need to generate a persuasive example to rally support for your site activation.

DESIGN TO COEXIST
It's still important to respect public and private property and ensure that the functions of public facilities remain unimpeded. Rather than thinking in terms of "an intervention," design your activation to coexist with what is already there.

It's even more important to respect the people who pass through your site. Take a step back periodically to review your planned activation from an equity, justice, and environmental lens. Is your activation dismantling or reinforcing past wrongs? From whose perspective?

REFLECTION

Once your activation is installed, take some time to evaluate your project. Does it achieve your goals? What would you do differently next time?

Measuring the impact of your project doesn't have to be elaborate. Consider one of these methods:

OBSERVATION:
Take a few hours to observe people's behavior on your site before and after your activation is installed. What differences do you notice?

INTERVIEWS:
Keep it short - try asking one question, or even asking for a one-word reaction.

EMBEDDED EVALUATION:
Add a "call to action" to your activation - ask people to add something to your activation, call a hotline, or tag and tweet a photo.
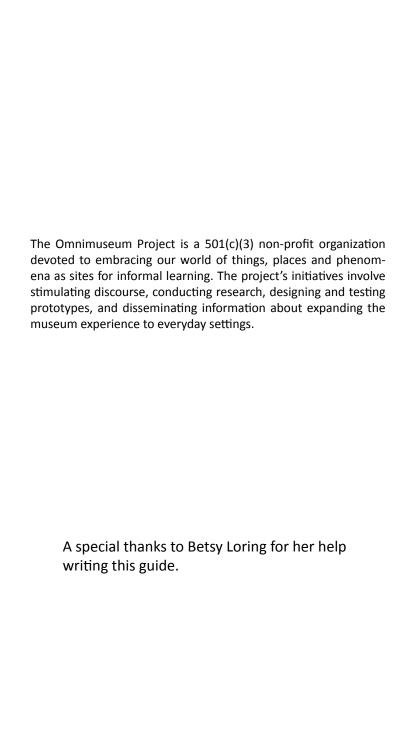
CONCLUSION

We hope this guide and tactic card deck will help in-spire some interesting ideas for activating informal learning experiences in your neighborhood. Have fun, and good luck.

WANT TO SHARE YOUR IDEAS?
We are very interested in how people use this material and would like to hear from you. Please use the email address below to share your ideas for neighborhood activations. With your permission, we will post them on our website.

www.omnimuseum.org