

Tips for IPOP Exhibition Development

Step 8: Testing 4E displays

Background

“4E displays” are objects/exhibits/graphics that either alone or in combination strongly engage all four experience dimensions. In other words, this display includes:

- **A strong idea** - A strong idea is “an idea worth having” – one that makes you feel excited to tell someone else about it. It might be a compelling factoid or a grand comprehensive idea. It needs to be something striking, surprising, or revealing.
- **An emotional connection** – An emotional connection is a story, or piece of a story, or fact about someone’s life that evokes an emotional response. It offers a window into someone else’s world, so that you have some sense of what it is like to be them.
- **A striking object** – A striking object is usually beautiful, but it could also be intricate, puzzling, or unusual. It could look ordinary, but have a special, unlikely purpose.
- **A physical experience** – We usually think of interactives as physical experiences in museums, but not all interactives (and in particular most computer interactives) are not really physical experiences. An immersive space, bright lights, smells, sounds, music, etc. are all physical experiences.

In order for these qualities to cohere into a 4E display, there needs to be a strong connection among them, so that no matter which one first engages the visitor (a contact usually driven by experience preference), that initial engagement is so compelling that the individual naturally turns to the other dimensions of the display in a desire to extend that positive experience. This greatly increases the likelihood of a “flip,” i.e., a strong experience outside of one’s experience preference. IPOP theory contends that “flips” are one key to Superior overall experience. They will be especially memorable.

Preparing Materials

The challenge here is to put together an idea, a hint of a story, an image of a compelling object, and a description of a physical experience that have the qualities described above. In order to see if these individual parts and the combination have the power that the team anticipates, they are presented on a single sheet of paper (usually legal or oversize) in the most concise form possible. The sheet has the heart of the idea in a clear, simple statement, a key to the story (and a picture of the person, if possible), a good color photo of the object(s), and a description of the physical experience (perhaps with a drawing or photo that does not show faces of people). These materials are rather difficult to make, but the activity forces the team to focus on what is really important with this display. It’s worth spending time with, because these 4E displays will be particularly powerful in the exhibition.

Interviewing

Interviewing follows the same process that was outlined in Step 4: Concept Development. As with that activity, interviewing and note-taking by pairs of team members occupies the first half of the creative meeting with the second half devoted to discussion and ideas for change. Because the material is different, however, there are some additional points to watch for.

- Observe carefully what the visitors first look at when they take the sheet. Do they read? Do they go to the people photo? The object? The physical experience? Do they ever read the text? Do they just glance at it and hand it back? Do they linger over something? Do they say anything spontaneously? Do they make any sounds or expressions?
- After following the usual method (“What about it?” “You said, ‘tk tk’, can you tell me more about that?”), this may call for some additional probing, e.g.,
 - “What part of this captures your attention most strongly” “Can you say more about that?”
 - “Does any of this remind you of something you’ve experienced?” “Tell me more about that.”

Typically interviewers will have a number of these 4E pages to show to visitors. If you are interviewing couples or groups, you can distribute the pages among them, ask each person about them, and then shift them around so that everyone has seen all of them. Sometimes differences that arise among the visitors in these cases can be revealing. Remember that the point of all of this is to see how other people think, to uncover perspectives different from your own that open up possibilities for you and for the team as you do this work.

Note-taking

This is exactly the same as in Step 4. Because the interviewer is totally focused on listening, s/he might not recall everything that is said. It’s the job of the note-taker to record points that the interviewer followed up on, as well as any other points that the note-taker feels are not what s/he expected. Under no conditions should the note-taker say anything during the interview. Having a second person asking questions makes the work of the interviewer much more difficult. Interviewers should interview. Note-takers should take notes.

Creative discussion

This, too, is exactly the process described in concept development, but with a slightly different conclusion. The second half of the concept-development meeting is taken up with discussion. Note-takers report on the key points that were different (in small or large ways) from what they and the interviewers noted. Interviewers can add or clarify what they heard, since the note-taker’s report will help them recall the interview. If some of these points strike the team as especially interesting, they will be a starting point for considering how the statement/plan might be revised or enriched.

At the conclusion of the discussion the team suggests ways that the display elements should be changed. In some cases the change might be minor – rephrasing the idea, revising the graphic layout, choosing a different photo, etc. In other cases they might be substantive – visitor comments might make it clear to the team that these four items don’t work together as conceived and either need to be changed or dropped altogether in favor of a different set.

It will usually take a number of rounds to get this right. You'll know that it has reached its natural end when:

- You are not getting any new or unexpected responses from visitors.
- Nearly every person you show it to finds a natural entry point and is pleased with it.

Over time the team will develop skill at making and expressing these combinations. Initially it might take many rounds of trial and error, but with practice everyone involved will get better and better at it, until the team gets to the point where only one or two rounds is needed to achieve the desired result. This skill has ramifications far beyond this test – the team will be able to more easily and effectively see all their choices through an IPOP lens. While only some objects or displays will be 4E, others will be 3E, others 2E and some only 1E. Appreciating these differences will enable the team to be more agile and sophisticated in the overall design of the exhibition.

Andrew Pekarik
Office of Policy and Analysis
Smithsonian Institution
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