



# Recommendations for Producing Small Traveling Exhibits for Children's Museums

Developed by  
Kohl Children's Museum of Greater Chicago

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## Introduction

In 2009, Kohl Children's Museum of Greater Chicago (KCMGC) received a National Leadership Grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to create Recommendations for Producing Small Traveling Exhibits for Children's Museums. These recommendations provide the children's museum industry with a set of guidelines, specifications and design strategies that will inform the development of new, high-quality, flexible traveling exhibits for museums of all sizes – especially small and emerging children's museums.

The majority of children's museum exhibits currently available for rent are designed for gallery spaces over 1,000 square feet in size, which presents a significant barrier for small and emerging museums that have limited space in their facilities. In addition to size being a challenge, small and emerging museums may have limited resources for developing their own changing exhibits, making access to traveling exhibits that meet their administrative, space and financial constraints all the more important.

At the beginning of 2010, KCMGC, in collaboration with the Association of Children's Museums (ACM) and an advisory committee made up of children's museum professionals, museum consultants and exhibit designers, worked together to develop and disseminate a survey to gather quantitative and qualitative information on traveling exhibit needs in the field. 163 ACM members responded, providing key insights about the traveling exhibit needs at each of their facilities.

In addition, KCMGC conducted a series of focus groups at ACM's InterActivity 2010 conference to discuss traveling exhibit topics that would be of interest to small and emerging museums. Twenty museum education, exhibits and senior level staff participated in the focus groups. As a result of these sessions, two exhibit topics were identified to be of high interest: "Insects" and "Impressions," which are described in Attachments A and B.

The results of this survey and feedback from the focus groups were used to develop the Recommendations for Producing Small Traveling Exhibits for Children's Museums. The recommendations, presented by KCMGC and ACM, are intended to inform the design and production of innovative traveling exhibits with universal appeal. A summary of survey results can be found in Attachment C.

### **How to use this document:**

Use this document to brainstorm ideas for exhibits under 1,250 square feet. Pay attention to the parameters described in general recommendations.

## General Recommendations for Producing Small Traveling Exhibits for Children's Museums:

- Target age range: 3-8 years old
- For the small museum market, produce exhibits between 500 and 1,250 square feet
- Rental rates should range from \$10,000 to \$30,000, depending on square footage
- Always provide a marketing kit including logos, photographs, sample press releases and ads
- Always provide education materials including field trip activities, program plans, teacher resources, book lists, etc.

## Content Recommendations for Producing Small Traveling Exhibits for Children's Museums:

Several content areas were identified in the survey and through the focus groups as being of high interest to children's museums. These include:

1. **Science** – overall, survey respondents are most interested in traveling exhibits based on Science, with the most desirable topics being the following:
  - a. How living things interact, function, adapt and change
  - b. Properties of the earth (land, water, atmosphere)
  - c. Principles of force and motion
2. **Physical Development/Health** – secondly, survey respondents are most interested in traveling exhibits based on Physical Development/Health, with the most desirable topics being the following:
  - a. Healthy living
  - b. Physical Fitness/Movement
  - c. Nutrition
3. **Fine Arts** – thirdly, survey respondents are most interested in traveling exhibits based on Fine Arts, with the most desirable topics being the following:
  - a. Music
  - b. Drama/Theater
  - c. Literature

Specifically, within the science category, focus group participants developed frameworks for two topics: Insects and Impressions. See Attachments A and B for these topic frameworks.

## **Attachment A: Exhibit Content Framework for Traveling Exhibit for Small Children's Museums**

### ***Topic: Insects***

#### ***Overview:***

This exhibit will build visitors' knowledge of insects. Visitors will learn how insects live, grow and develop and learn the importance of insects in our environment through exploration and concrete experiences.

#### ***Learning Outcomes:***

- Understand and apply the concepts, principals and processes of scientific inquiry.
- Understand and apply concepts that explain how insects function, adapt and change.
- Understand and apply concepts that describe how insects interact with each other and their environment.
- Use communication and social skills to interact effectively with others.
- Describe numerical relationships using variables and patterns.
- Apply word analysis and vocabulary skills to comprehend written text.

#### ***Exhibit Components:***

- 1. Crawl through scent and color maze**  
Explore how insects navigate using their senses.
- 2. Insect transportation**  
Explore how insects gather and transport food and other objects focusing on communication and insect characteristics.
- 3. Spider vibration station**  
Discover how spiders use their sense of touch to find food.
- 4. Insect Sorting**  
Identify characteristics of insects through comparing and contrasting.
- 5. Camouflage**  
Discover tactics that insects use to hide from predators.

*If you are interested in developing this exhibit, please contact Mary Trieschmann, Vice President of Programs for Kohl Children's Museum at [mtrieschmann@kohlchildrensmuseum.org](mailto:mtrieschmann@kohlchildrensmuseum.org).*

## **Attachment B: Exhibit Content Framework for Traveling Exhibit for Small Children's Museums**

### ***Topic: Impressions***

#### ***Overview***

This exhibit will allow visitors to explore the world and its infinite impressions left behind by those who inhabit it. Children will learn to identify unique patterns made by living creatures and objects and see how artists use clever tools to make their trademark pieces. Visitors will leave their own mark behind in this exhibit.

#### ***Learning Outcomes***

- Understand processes, traditional tools and modern technologies used in fine arts.
- Understand and apply the concepts, principles and processes of scientific inquiry.
- Observe, categorize and describe characteristics of people, animals, plants and objects.
- Explore the effects of forces in nature.
- Recognize the feelings and perspectives of others.
- Recognize individual and group similarities and differences.
- Apply word analysis and vocabulary skills to comprehend written text.
- Use communication and social skills to interact effectively with others.

#### ***Exhibit Components***

##### **1. First Impression Interactive Video Kiosk**

Understand how physical appearance can impact first impressions/assumptions about other people that may or may not be correct.

##### **2. Impressive Art Explorations**

Understand and explore how artists use impression techniques to create.

##### **3. Natural Impressions**

Identify how people, animals and plants create intended and unintended impressions in their natural environments.

##### **4. Material Test Station**

Explore the impact that pressure has on various materials.

##### **5. Guess to Impress**

Identify the source of impressions and marks left behind.

##### **6. Create your Own Impressions**

Use a variety of tools to create impressive works of art.

*If you are interested in developing this exhibit, please contact Mary Trieschmann, Vice President of Programs for Kohl Children's Museum at [mtrieschmann@kohlchildrensmuseum.org](mailto:mtrieschmann@kohlchildrensmuseum.org).*

## Attachment C: Summary of Survey Results

### ***Demographics***

The 51 item survey included both qualitative and quantitative questions and was distributed to all 340 ACM members within the United States. 163 responses were received with the following demographic summaries:

- Majority of survey respondents have target age range: 3-8 years old
- Majority of survey respondents have the ability and/or willingness to pay for traveling exhibit rental: 10 – 15K (for 600 sq ft) version or 20-30K (for 1,200 sq ft) version
- Traveling exhibit gallery sizes:
 

19%	0 sq ft
7%	100-500 sq ft
<b>6.3%</b>	<b>500-750</b>
<b>9.5%</b>	<b>750-1,000</b>
<b>6.3%</b>	<b>1,000-1,250</b>
19%	1,250-1,500
32.9%	1,500 +

### ***Exhibit Content Interests***

1. **Science** – overall, survey respondents are most interested in traveling exhibits based on Science, with the most desirable topics being:
  - a. How living things interact, function, adapt and change.
  - b. Properties of the earth (land, water, atmosphere).
  - c. Principles of force and motion.
2. **Physical Development/Health** – secondly, survey respondents are most interested in traveling exhibits based on Physical Development/Health, with the most desirable topics being:
  - a. Healthy living
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3. **Fine Arts** – thirdly, survey respondents are most interested in traveling exhibits based on Fine Arts, with the most desirable topics being:
  - a. Music
  - b. Drama/Theater
  - c. Literature

NOTE: 50% of survey respondents generally did NOT desire exhibits based upon recognizable characters/books/show/etc. and 50% did desire these types of exhibits.

NOTE: 57% of survey respondents want bilingual exhibits (English/Spanish)

### ***Exhibit Activity Interest***

Respondents were asked to rate which exhibit activities were most desired in a traveling exhibit. Results showed the following:

**Create, Construct and Build** – overall, survey respondents are most interested in traveling exhibits with Create, Construct and Build activities, with the most desirables being:

1. Assembling
2. Using tools
3. Collaborating

**Multi-Sensory** – secondly, survey respondents are most interested in traveling exhibits with Multi-Sensory activities, with the most desirable being:

1. Touching
2. Seeing/Viewing
3. Hearing

**Problem Solving** – thirdly, survey respondents are most interested in traveling exhibits with Problem Solving activities, with the most desirable being:

1. Experimenting
2. Cause & Effect
3. Predicting

### ***Marketing***

100% of survey respondents felt Marketing Materials were very important to include with the traveling exhibit (i.e. logos, photographs, sample press releases and ads, etc.)

### ***Education & Programs***

100% of survey respondents felt Education and Program Materials were very important to include with the traveling exhibit (i.e. field trip activities, programming, teacher resources, book lists, etc.)

### ***Logistics***

#### **Staff Support**

Majority of survey respondents would benefit by the option to hire a staff member from the producing museum to oversee the install/de-install of the exhibit – and are willing to pay a nominal fee for such service.

#### **Transportation**

Majority of survey respondents can accommodate a 53-foot semi-tractor trailers; and stated that delivery trucks with lift-beds are preferred.

**Facility Conditions**

Majority of survey respondents identified the following facility conditions:

- Dollies, hand trucks or rolling carts are on hand.
- 500 lbs. is maximum a component (with its crate) can weigh
- Un-assembled components should fit through a 3 foot wide x 6 foot high opening.
- Exhibits should accommodate an 8 foot ceiling height gallery space.
- Exhibits should require a maximum of 8 electrical outlets.
- Crate storage is very challenging.

**Materials**

Majority of survey respondent's desire traveling exhibits constructed from sustainable materials using sustainable practices.

Majority of survey respondents can confidently handle tracking, maintaining and resetting loose parts within the exhibit.

Majority of survey respondents desire a 50/50 balance of high and low-tech interactive components.