

Setting up a Research Space in a Museum Environment

Introduction

Research spaces within museums are very different from a traditional university lab as they are setup within an already existing, dynamic exhibit environment. This can create many opportunities and challenges. Here are some questions that scientists and museum collaborators might want to consider together when setting up a research space within a museum:

General questions when choosing/arranging a research space:

- How many tables/chairs do you need for researchers and kids?
- How do you want to orient the children in the space? What kinds of distractions might children face in your space and how can you minimize those distractions?
- How might you lay out your equipment so that the child is in an optimal place? Where are the outlets located? If you are filming, will you capture mainly the participant and not other passers-by?
- Gauge the general noise level of the space. Test out your camera to see whether you can hear yourself and children on the video and alter your placement of the camera as needed.
- Is the space suitable for testing a wide range of ages? For example, if you do not currently test infants now, would you be able to in the foreseeable future given your setup?
- How many studies might you want to conduct at a time, and how will that work with the space?
- Will your research space be shared with other colleagues or museum exhibits? Will everyone use a similar setup, or should the space be adaptable for different groups/studies?
- Consider designing signage, in collaboration with the museum, to advertize the space and to let museum patrons know when researchers will be in the space (e.g. "Researchers will be back Thursday from 12-4 and Sunday from 1-5") and what the research question is for the day.

Crowd control issues:

- Where will the parent sit while the study is being conducted to ensure they have the opportunity to observe and learn about the research? Do you need a chair for the parent, and does it need to be moveable depending on what kind of a study you are running/where the child is sitting?
- Do you need to set up an area for siblings to play while a participant is running? Where will that area be? Can the child running in the study see their siblings playing in the play area? Can siblings see what the participant is doing?
- Do you need a barrier to keep children from interrupting the study?

Record-keeping and storage:

- How will you assign subject numbers? How will you keep track of participant IDs on video? (whiteboards, iPads, etc.)
- How will you keep track of how many participants you've run and how many educational opportunities you've had throughout each visit?
- Will you have a storage area close by in the space, or will you store your equipment elsewhere? If you store it in the space, will you be able to secure and lock it while you are not there?
- How do you want to file consent forms and other information? Will you file as you run, or file at the end? How will you store extra copies of your forms?
- You may consider keeping a bin of things you may need but may not have anticipated (tape, stapler, pens, extra clipboards and whiteboards, Velcro, three-hole punch, batteries as needed, scrap paper, extra folders, extra toys).
- Do you have cleaning supplies on-hand to sanitize toys, stimuli, etc.?

Other logistics:

- Will you need to transport equipment to/from the space? If so, how will you do it?
- How many personnel might you need during a testing session? If the space is very busy and open, you may want one or two personnel in addition to the researcher to entertain siblings, consent parents, keep children from running in and out of the space, etc. However, if the traffic in the space is reserved mostly for people who are participating in the study, you may not need as many people.