

Tips for Research Institutions - Initiating On-site Research Collaborations

Establish goals for your collaboration effort, and know your needs and constraints, before you contact potential museums to collaborate with your lab.

Learn what you and your research team want to gain from collaboration with the museum; possibilities include:

- Access to deep and diverse, and affordable, participant pool
 - You can recruit more participants from the museum floor per hour than in the traditional lab setting (e.g., at the Museum of Science, researchers can get 7 times the number of participants per hour than in a traditional lab)
 - Participants are compensated with an educational experience rather than with money/prizes given in the traditional lab
- Practice communicating research topics and methods to public audiences
 - Graduate and undergraduate students can gain comfort talking with a lay audience about their work, through orientation to and practice in interpretive practices with museum educators
 - Collaborating scientists improve their ability to answer questions and describe the real-world implications of their research, which can benefit their teaching, grant-writing, and manuscript-writing skills
- Access to unique museum resources (some museums may be experts in producing novel stimuli for future experiments, or providing novel settings for participant recruitment)
- Access to wide audience for dissemination (scientists' grants often require outreach to public)

Identify your research and staffing needs.

- Do your studies require particular settings, materials, lighting conditions, equipment? Do you need privacy or quiet? Do you require lengthy experimental sessions? Are you willing/able to compromise on any constraints?
- How many postdocs, graduate students, or undergraduates would contribute to studies taking place at the museum? Would they have sufficient supervision?

Consider the mission, needs, and goals of potential museum collaborators. Be specific in outcomes expected for museum visitors and staff you hope to impact with the collaboration; think about:

Mission

- Will your on-site research activities complement the educational mission of the museum, as well as aid you in the pursuit of your research?
- What types of research will support institutional goals of the museum?
 - Are any topics especially relevant to the mission of the museum?

- Are any topics not appropriate for a museum setting (e.g., distressing or polarizing topics could work against educational goals by focusing visitor discussions on controversial moral issues rather than on child development as a science)?
 - Are any research methods not appropriate for the mission of the museum (e.g. surveys are not very conducive to visitor education goals; infant research often requires specialized equipment and/or spaces)?
- How will you evaluate the success of the collaboration in meeting the needs of both your lab and the museum?

Museum audience interest/needs:

- What do you hope the museum audiences will gain from the collaboration?
- What learning outcomes do you have for participants (children, and/or caregivers)? What will they gain from participating in your research as part of their visit?
 - What learning outcomes do you have for museum staff through the collaboration? What can museum staff gain by interacting with members of your lab?
- How do you think visitors will respond to the opportunity to participate in real research, talk with cognitive scientists, and learn about child development?

Contact collaborators who can support your goals, and whose goals you can support; try to:

Make contacts with museum professionals in the education department

- Why? Museum professionals in the education department have direct experience educating the public and are therefore best situated to help you think through the rewards and challenges of conducting studies in a museum. In addition, if your attempt to start a collaboration with the museum is successful, you will be working closely with the education department. It is therefore helpful to start partnering with this department early.
- How? Visit the museum and talk to the floor educators. Although some of them may be volunteers or part time workers who will not be able to set up collaborations, they will be happy to give you the name of someone in the education department who would be a good contact. If your first attempt at establishing a connection doesn't work, you may have better luck with someone else.

Consider Staffing, Spaces & Finances

- Who at the museum will train you and your research assistants before you run your experiment in the exhibits? Who will support you as you work at the museum?
- Do you have specific needs (e.g., space, equipment, staff support) for your study? Will the museum be able to support these needs, and if they can, how will they do so?
- In your lab, who will be the primary contact person for the museum?
- Where can live research take place in the institution?
- Can studies take place on the exhibit floor? Should visitors be asked to leave the exhibit floor to participate?
- Where can researchers store materials?
- How will you secure support for the needs above?
- Can on-site research be supported with existing resources? What additional resources must be identified?

Remember, effective collaboration takes time and work on both sides; think about:

Communication between collaborators

- How, and how often, will you communicate with the museum staff?

- Who will be responsible for maintaining this communication between museum staff and your research group (including principal investigators, research assistants, and lab managers)?
- What role will the various members of your research group have in this communication?

Museum Training for Collaborating Researchers

- How will collaborating scientists be oriented to the museum environment?
 - What should you know about museum customer service policies/expectations (e.g. common visitor questions about bathrooms/other amenities; educating the public about one's research area and common research-related questions)?
 - What other institutional policies/procedures should you know about and abide by (e.g. dress code, food & drink, emergency procedures)?
- What kind of interpretive/educational training will the museum provide to collaborating scientists?
 - How will museum staff train you to share their work with the public using lay-language and real-world applications?
 - What museum staff members have the expertise to train researchers as interpreters?
- How will you receive information about the museum (e.g. a handbook, an orientation session, other mechanisms)?
- How will the museum provide feedback to collaborating scientists? Who will provide this feedback?
- How will the museum expectations for the researchers be communicated?

Educational expectations

- How often will you be at the museum, and how long should you stay each time?
 - Will research activities happen on a regular schedule, or as "special events"?
 - How will the museum let visitors know when researchers are available?
- What kinds of information does the museum want you to share with participants?
 - What expectations does the museum have for educating non-parental care-givers/other non-participants about the research?
 - How and when will you share your results with previous participants, and/or with museum staff?
- What kinds of materials do you need to develop to convey all of information about your study to participants and others (e.g., legal guardians, other family members, nannies)?
- What kind of connections (if any) do you wish to make between the on-site research topics/methods and other educational materials or programs at your institution?

Policies for conducting research with museum visitors

- How should visitors be approached/identified for participation?
 - Where and how will you recruit subjects?
 - Who can sign consent forms? (e.g. generally, only parents and legal guardians, not other care-givers can consent to participation)
 - How will you interact with non-parental caregivers/ other non-participant visitors?
 - How will you interact with children who are not eligible to be participants in a particular study? (e.g., if they are outside of the required age range for a study)
- How long should visitors' interactions with you take?
 - How much time should paying visitors be asked to take out of their visit to participate?
 - How much time should collaborating scientists spend de-briefing visitors about their experience?