DEVELOPING A TOOLKIT FOR A SOCIAL AWARENESS

COMMUNITY EXHIBIT

by

Alexa Michelle Goldberg, B.A.

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Council of
Texas State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts
with a Major in Communication Design
May 2015

Committee Members:

Maia Wright, Chair

Erina Duganne

Jason Reed

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my parents, Mary and Irwin Goldberg, for their unconditional love, support, and encouragement. And to all my family and friends along the way who inspired me to persevere.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Introduction

It is becoming increasingly important for exhibitions to allow visitors to "discuss, share, and remix what they consume," in order to create an experience that resonates with them (Simon). When museums and other cultural institutions fail to create a meaningful experience for their audience, they are liable to be perceived as inaccessible, irrelevant, boring, and/or uncomfortable for an audience whose primary sources of entertainment and education (the Internet, television programs, and social media) have helped to create a culture of instant gratification, hyper-stimulation, and over-exposure. By engaging the community in the development of an exhibition, on the other hand, the exhibit can become "responsive to the needs and interests of local community members; a place for community engagement and dialogue," and aims to "help participants develop skills that will support their own individual and community goals" (Simon). Designing *with* communities, rather than just *for* them, in an effort to create meaningful exhibitions and experiences, continues to grow as an important issue in the design field (Shea, 8). This thesis project will propose a tool for designers, which will facilitate a collaborative community exhibition design process.

CHAPTER II

Preliminary Research

<u>The History of Exhibition Design and Emergence of Participatory Exhibitions</u>

An exhibition has been traditionally defined as a public display of a collection of items (Hughes, 10). Currently, exhibition design can be found in many aspects of our lives in the form of personal displays in the home, storefront displays, art galleries, and museum installations. The evolution of exhibition design over the centuries has been influenced by disciplines including graphic design, interior design, marketing, art, and architecture, to name a few. Exhibitions are a unique form of communication because they create an immersive experience for their audience, stimulating multiple senses.

The first exhibitions in the early 18th century were a way for affluent families to present their valuable and rare personal collections to other affluent families. These displays were a symbol of social status. In the late 18th century and throughout the 19th century, many of these personal collections were combined and placed on display publicly. This not only served as a way to store the valuable items, but also provided the opportunity to educate visitors about the historical and cultural background of the items. Many of the visitors had little to no travel experience and were eager to learn about the world through these collections of objects. These exhibitions offered the opportunity for visitors to "gain a broader and more complex understanding of the world" (Hughes, 11).

In the early 20th century, many designers emerged from the Bauhaus in Germany and brought their new design ideology to the field of exhibition design. The new design approach took into consideration the space where the exhibit was housed and treated the

space as a part of the display. Today, elements of the influence of modernist design movements are still present in exhibition design, perhaps the most notable being the practice of displaying items in a gallery on white walls and pedestals in a minimalist style. Another practice that is still widely used is designing the exhibition to create a multi-sensory experience for the audience. This practice continues to be an effective and powerful way to communicate with an audience. The ability to transform the space and immerse visitors in the message is what sets exhibitions apart from other types of visual communication (Hughes, 14-15).

Interactive exhibits, which provide a hands-on learning environment for visitors, emerged in the 1960s. These types of exhibits are most successful for people who learn best by doing, or kinesthetic learners. This practice is widely used in children's museums and scientific museums, where the content is best communicated and understood through active engagement (Hughes, 17).

In her book, *The Participatory Museum*, Nina Simon argues for the use of participatory design, inviting the audience to engage with the content, in the development of museum exhibitions. Simon points to a 2009 study by the National Endowment for the Arts in which it was discovered that the rate of visitation at cultural institutions is declining due to a lack of interest:

> Over the last twenty years, audiences for museums, galleries, and performing arts institutions have decreased, and the audiences that remain are older and whiter than the overall population. Cultural institutions argue that their programs provide unique cultural and civic value, but

increasingly people have turned to other sources for entertainment,

learning, and dialogue. (i)

Simon's solution to this issue is participatory exhibition design—allowing the audience

to create, share, and discuss content, which can result in a more meaningful and relevant

experience.

Recent technological advances, specifically the development of the Internet and

social media, have offered new platforms for participatory exhibition design. Cultural

institutions often incorporate an online presence with exhibitions, which allows visitors to

interact with the exhibit without physically being in the museum. This medium also

allows for a greater volume of content to be available to the public. Technology allows

institutions to engage with their audience, sharing and exchanging content before and

after they physically visit the museum.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. provides

visitors with an immersive educational experience and utilizes its online presence to

provide additional content to the public and to enable viewer participation. The online

exhibit features photographs, images of artifacts, and audio and video of personal stories

to communicate with viewers and provides a place for viewers to reflect on the content

and share their thoughts about the subject matter (see figure 1). This two-way

communication and exchange of content between the museum and viewer can cultivate a

more meaningful experience for the viewer, despite the limitations of the screen.

Figure 1. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Online Exhibition (ushmm.org)

Exhibition designers can communicate with the audience and present content in a way that may be more relevant and significant to them, by employing traditional practices and incorporating new technologies to create participatory experiences. The use of participatory methods in exhibition design offers the user a way to interact, engage with, and – given the opportunity – to contribute to the content. This type of relationship between the content and user can lead to a more meaningful experience.

The Contemporary Issues Forum (CIF) at the National Museum of American Jewish History, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, provides an example of how participatory design methods can be employed in a traditional museum setting and can enhance the museum experience for visitors. The CIF invites visitors to discuss current "hot topics" related to the museum's content by posing questions, which visitors then answer via adhesive note cards. The note cards are color-coded by response ("Yes," "No," or "Um"), which results in a display that makes the dominant opinion easily identifiable. In addition, the note cards are scanned and posted in an online forum where visitors can

continue their discussions and video is captured and displayed on a loop in the museum

(localprojects.net).

Figure 2. *Contemporary Issues Forum*, National Museum of American Jewish
History (localprojects.net)

The Landscape of Social Design and Collaborative Design Methods

The social design movement has led to an increase in the use of collaborative

design methods, which seek to actively involve the user in the design process in order to

increase the likelihood of arriving at a design solution that is meaningful to the user.

Traditionally, collaborative design has been used in fields such as product design, where

the user has a direct relationship to the product. However, designers are increasingly

incorporating these design methods in other fields of design, including interior design,

graphic design, environmental design, and exhibition design.

Collaborative design is the process of designing *with* people. In the 20th century,

designers began to emphasize the importance of considering the user during the design

process. However, the consideration was limited to "a quantitative approach based on measuring people's bodies and analyzing the usability of designs in relationship to people's capabilities" (designingwithpeople.org). American designers Charles and Ray Eames were ambassadors of this movement towards user-focused design; their early work was designed with the goal of creating furniture that was functional and affordable for the average American consumer (loc.gov).

In the late 1990s, designers more broadly recognized the benefit of collaborative design and began incorporating the user into the design process (designingwithpeople.org). There are many collaborative design methods, which have proven to be successful at engaging the user. Design workshops, for example, bring users and designers together to participate in collaborative creative design activities and offer a hands-on opportunity for users to learn about the design process and engage in design thinking (Hanington and Martin). In user forums, users and designers exchange ideas and opinions. The forums are an effective collaborative method and differ from focus groups in that they are led by a designer. Typically, the designer poses open-ended questions that allow for the exploration of concepts and ideas (designingwithpeople.org). This method of collaboration is related to the problem-posing method of instruction in educational theory, which will be discussed further in chapter four.

Placemaking is an emerging social design movement focused on creating and sustaining public spaces. This movement relies on collaborative design processes to improve existing spaces and in some cases create new spaces to serve the community in or near where the space exists. These projects range from parks and recreational areas, to community economic centers and entire transportation systems (2014 in Placemaking).

Placemaking and exhibition design both create an immersive or multi-sensory space for the user, although unlike exhibition design, placemaking does not involve a collection of objects. In both cases, however, the success of the project is dependent on the process of collaborating with a community to create a space that is meaningful and useful for them.

The Park(ing) Day is a collaborative placemaking project initiated in 2005 by Rebar, a design studio in California. The project invites artists, designers, and the general public to participate to construct a temporary public park in a metered parking space (see figure 4). The goal of the Park(ing) Day is to raise awareness about the need for public spaces in urban areas. The event takes place simultaneously all over the world on a designated day each year. On Park(ing) Day, participants are encouraged to share photos of their park via social media. The project began as a single installation, but public interest led to the development of a how-to guide, so that other communities could replicate the initiative. Park(ing) Day has evolved from a statement about the need for urban spaces into a platform to raise awareness about a variety of social issues:

> In recent years, participants have built free health clinics, planted temporary urban farms, produced ecology demonstrations, held political seminars, built art installations, opened free bike repair shops and even held a wedding ceremony! All this in the context of this most modest urban territory – the metered parking space. (Park(ing) Day)

This project successfully engages a large number of communities and the how-to guide provides a detailed plan for the development of the exhibit, while also leaving plenty of room for participants to explore new ideas (Park(ing) Day).

<u>Use of Toolkits in Design</u>

Designers recognize that the use of collaborative design methods can result in producing innovative, useful design solutions. In the effort to implement collaboration with the user into the design process, design "toolkits" are becoming a widespread resource. These toolkits provide those who may not be familiar with collaborative design methods with the resources, tools, and methods to guide them through the process of designing with people. The two examples referenced here, the IDEO Human Centered Design Toolkit and the Inclusive Design Toolkit, make these design methods more accessible to designers and the communities they serve.

IDEO, a global design company, created the *Human Centered Design Toolkit* (HCDT) for non-governmental organizations and social activist groups, specifically those who serve communities in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, where they may face limited resources, language barriers, and other territorial challenges. This open-source toolkit focuses on a human-centered design approach, which is a collaborative design method. The HCDT guides groups through the process of learning a community's needs and working with them to develop innovative design solutions. Groups can purchase a printed version of the toolkit (see figure 3) or download a free PDF version via the IDEO website (IDEO.com).

The audience for the toolkit, NGOs and social enterprise groups, may have little to no experience with design thinking or a human-centered approach. The toolkit provides a starting point for them by educating the user about the method step by step: providing guidance for listening the community to determine needs, executing a workshop to collaborate with the community, and implementing the ideas within

constraints such as limited resources and a lack of financial stability (Human-Centered Design Toolkit). Successful projects resulting from this toolkit include the Blood Donor system for the Red Cross, which collects approximately 5.6 million blood donations per year (redcross.org).

Figure 3. *Human Centered Design Toolkit*, IDEO (IDEO.com)

The *Inclusive Design Toolkit*, a guide to collaborative methods in the field of product design, was developed in 2007 by the University of Cambridge, Engineering Design Centre, in conjunction with the companion website designingwithpeople.org. The toolkit provides a definition of inclusive design, which "applies an understanding of customer diversity to the design of mainstream products to better satisfy the needs of more people" (Inclusive Design Toolkit). Inclusive design adopts the collaborative design approach of designing *with* (rather than *for*) users in order to develop products to be used by a diverse user base.

The goals of the *Inclusive Design Toolkit* are to educate users about the inclusive design method and how to use it most effectively in the product design process. To meet these goals, the toolkit provides a set of inclusive design tools, including a design process

checklist, a design log, and an exclusion calculator. The calculator is particularly useful

because it provides a method of determining the portion of the population that may not be

able to complete a task. The toolkit also provides case studies of projects that were

successful in using the process. The toolkit currently exists as a website; the printed book

is temporarily out of print, pending updates. It was also adapted into a two-day training

course for those who want to better understand the collaborative methods of inclusive

design and implement them in their product design process (Inclusive Design Toolkit).

The following case studies demonstrate current design practices in developing

collaborative community exhibitions.

<u>Community Exhibition Case Studies</u>

Miranda July and Harrell Fletcher's project, "Learning to Love You More,"

utilized open-source collaboration to create a mobile community exhibition with an

online component (see figure 2). The project challenged participants to complete a

variety of assignments developed by the artists and document their results. Participants

were asked to submit their documentation in the form of photos, audio/video recordings,

essays, drawings, etc., which were then posted to the online exhibition. Some of the

documentation was also developed into a series of physical exhibitions, which were

presented at various venues across the globe. The form of the exhibition was adaptable

depending on the venue, ranging from traditional gallery exhibitions to installations,

video screenings, and radio broadcasts. During the run of the project from 2002 to 2009,

there were over 8,000 participants. In 2010, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

acquired the online archive to ensure its continued existence (July).
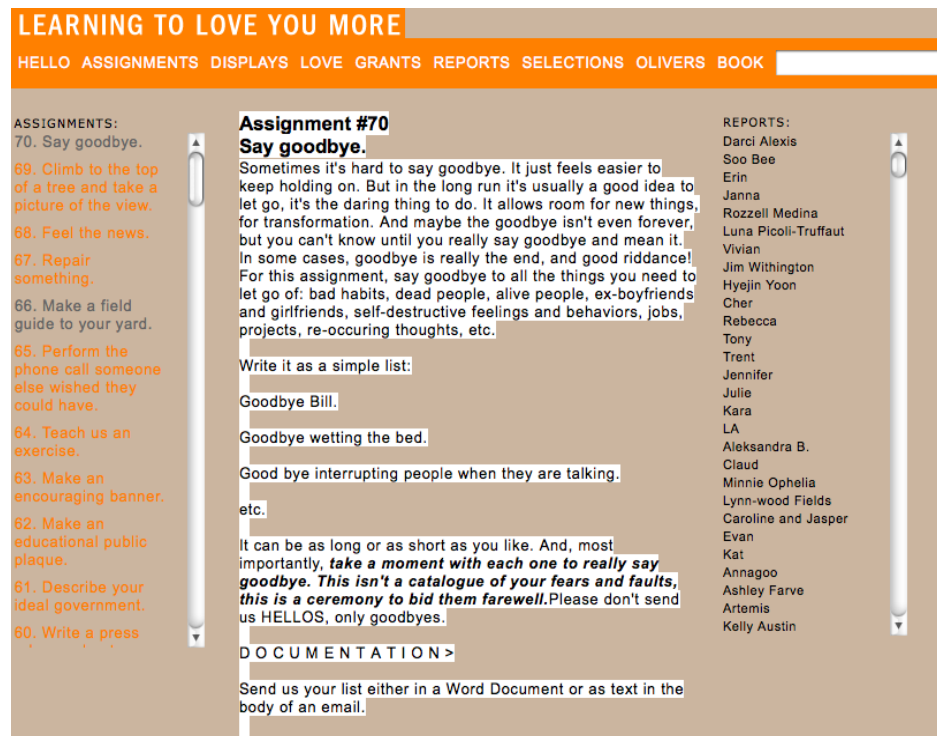
Figure 4. *Learning to Love You More*, Miranda July and Harrell Fletcher (July)

Neighborland is an online forum and public installation created by Candy Chang, Dan Parham, and Tee Parham with support from Tulane University. The project, which originated in 2011 in New Orleans, is now run by Dan Parham and Tee Parham and is available everywhere in the U.S. The goal of the project is to help organizations collaborate with local communities and engage in discussion with the residents in the community in an effort to identify opportunities for change. Interested organizations (businesses, government agencies, stakeholders, etc.) pose questions to the community via public installations, an online forum, and/or social media. Residents respond to the questions through the various platforms and the responses are shared and voted on. The project provides a simple platform for organizers and users to collaborate on projects to make sure the community is being served. Residents can follow the progress of projects

online and share ideas about implementation with each other and the organizers to ensure that the projects they support are realized (Chang, Neighborland).

This project has resulted in the successful completion of community-driven initiatives, including the night market at the United Nations Plaza in San Francisco, California and reformed laws making it easier for food trucks to operate in New Orleans, Louisiana (neighborland.com).

Figure 5. *Neighborland*; Candy Chang, Dan Parham, Tee Parham;
New Orleans, 2011 (Chang, Neighborland)

Participate in Design (P!D) is a non-profit organization located in Singapore with the goal to help local neighborhoods and public institutions design community-owned spaces and solutions. In September of 2012, P!D collaborated with students from the Singapore Polytechnic Design School to create an exhibition for the residents of MacPherson (see figure 6). The design team collected stories from residents, which included personal stories, local urban legends, and other oral histories through the process of conversations and interviews. These stories were then developed into engaging visual

pieces through the process of collaborative workshops. The launch of *Retellings: A Community Art Exhibition* included a potluck meal to further encourage collaboration and community engagement (participateindesign.org).

Figure 6. *Retellings*, Participate in Design (participateindesign.org)

These case studies show how involving the community that the exhibit is meant to serve in the design process leads to a solution that is more accessible and beneficial to them. The community's engagement in the process brings up considerations that may not have been revealed without their input.

CHAPTER III

Statement of the Problem

This project seeks to explore the process of collaborative design, or designing with people, and its application to the creation of community exhibitions. The research will consist of qualitative observations measuring the success of collaborative design strategies for community engagement through the execution of a collaborative design workshop. The design solution will take the form of a toolkit that presents the best strategy, and the tools and resources needed, for designers to work with a community to develop an exhibition. The toolkit will help simplify the process of designing with communities by meeting the following objectives:

- Provide the tools for designers to work with a community to develop an exhibition. The exhibition should reflect a social or cultural issue relevant to the community's needs and interests and present it in an engaging format, with an emphasis on audience participation.

- Outline the process as a series of steps.

- Provide detailed activities for each step of the process, including required resources.

- Provide tools for collaborative design.

- Facilitate the creative process to create a meaningful experience for the community, as well as the exhibition's audience, who may or may not be a part of the community.

The collaborative design process engages the community in the creation of content, which relates to their needs and interests. The exhibition therefore has the potential to become more significant to the audience (Simon).

The criteria for measuring success in social impact design is still in development and may vary based on the nature of a project and the goals established by the designer and/or the community (Nasadowski, 134). It is proposed here that success of the community exhibit be evaluated based on the benefits of the process for the participants, level of engagement from the audience, and positive outcomes for everyone involved, including meaningful dialogue within the community. It should also be understood that not all collaborative processes will result in a traditional or even a physical exhibition. In some cases the process may lead to a solution that fits outside the traditional definition of an exhibition; or it may unearth new questions or problems, which require resources that are not available. In these cases it should not be assumed that the project was unsuccessful, but instead, success may be redefined.

CHAPTER IV

Methods

The Design Workshop

Design workshops are an effective way to engage in collaborative design and activity-based research (Hanington, 62). As part of my research process, the collaborative design workshop served as a forum to explore strategies for community engagement, in order to inform the content of the toolkit that I would develop as the final design solution. During the workshop participants engaged in a collaborative creative process, which included the following steps: defining the exhibition's audience and goals, developing a theme, designing the exhibition, and producing the exhibition. Each step was comprised of various collaborative design activities.

The workshop participants were 10 high school students from the Upward Bound program at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas. Upward Bound was chosen as a pilot community for this workshop because the group represents a community with shared interests. I met with the group for 45 minutes twice a week for six weeks. At the end of the six-week workshop the students displayed their exhibition at the Upward Bound showcase.

About Upward Bound

Upward Bound is one of eight federal TRIO programs. The program was initiated in 1965 in an effort to improve access to higher education for underserved communities. This group often includes students from low-income areas, first-generation college students, and those in rural areas (ed.gov). Texas State University was one of the first chapters established in Texas and currently there are more than 700 programs at universities across the nation. The program at St. Mary's was established in 1967 (stmarytx.edu).

Upward Bound offers students the opportunity to attend classes taught at the college level by college educators and earn credit while they are still in high school. Program activities also include cultural and educational field trips, college campus visits, keynote presentations by prominent members of the local community, networking opportunities with professionals and businesses, and assistance with the process of applying to college and securing financial aid.

The program requires a sustained commitment from the students. The program classes are rigorous, however students recognize the benefits of participating in the program and they often remain in the program until they graduate. The Upward Bound program at St. Mary's University is led by program director, Dr. Jacqueline O. Dansby.

<center>The Designer's Role</center>

Part of the research was to identify my role as a designer in the collaborative process. There are three types of designer/user relationships. They are identified and defined below:

> Designing for people, in which designers study and consult people in their role as experts in the design process; designing with people, in which designers share the design process with people, who become active participants in the work; and designing by people, in which designers act as facilitators to enable people to make their own design decisions. Some design methods span all three types of relationship; others relate to just one. (The Methods Lab)

One of the goals of this project is to help define the "designing with people" relationship between the designer and the community participants. Because the process of the workshop was the primary focus of my research, it was critical for me to engage and collaborate with the students. One of the challenges I faced working with students who are conditioned to a traditional teacher-student relationship – where the teacher communicates from a place of authority – was to break down that traditional hierarchy. In opposition to the traditional classroom setting, it was important to create a "problem-posing" environment. In this type of setting, the students would be encouraged to ask critical questions, discuss, and debate with me and each other (Freire, 76). As part of this effort to build empathy and form connections with the group, I participated in many of the activities with the group.

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Design Workshop Activities

The activities I chose for the participants were based on the goals of the workshop and adapted based on the size of the group and the limited available resources. In thinking more broadly about how the toolkit would be used by other designers, additional factors I considered were its adaptability for various communities, time and resources needed, and level of difficulty.

The first goal for the student participants was to define the audience and goals for their exhibition. Many of the students were unfamiliar with exhibitions, so the first task for the group was to define what an exhibition is. The activity I chose for this first phase was a show and tell exercise. I shared examples of traditional and non-traditional exhibitions with the group, then I asked the students to bring in examples of what they considered an exhibition, to share with one another. Finally, we discussed their examples and – based on the dialogue – the group collaborated to form their own definition of an exhibition. Through the conversation we also determined that the audience for this project would be made up of the Upward Bound community, which included students, parents, faculty, and staff. It was also established that the participants of the workshop were a part of the community.

Our next goal was to develop a theme for the exhibition. The sticky note brainstorming activity helped the participants to define the shared goals of the Upward Bound community. Students were asked a series of questions to which they responded with a word or an idea on a sticky note. Students were permitted to provide multiple answers. I posed the following questions to the group:

- What are the benefits of being a part of the community?

- How does the community support your personal goals?

- What characteristics define this community?

- What is your role in the community?

The movable sticky notes were useful for organizing the responses and grouping common ideas together. Some of the major themes that appeared during this phase were family, education, and the future. After discussing opportunities for each of the themes, the students were most excited about developing an exhibition around the theme of "the future," because they felt it encompassed what Upward Bound represented as a program and as a community.

Next, we created a word map to connect the theme to physical objects. Similar to the sticky note activity, the word map allowed us to make connections and visually group items together quickly. The difference in this activity was that all of the responses were based on the same question: What physical spaces or objects represent "the future"? The prevailing concept that emerged from this activity was the word *dream*, which can literally represent a physical act (dreaming) and figuratively, an aspiration or goal.

The next task was to begin the visual design phase of the exhibition. Earlier, the group had defined the goals of their exhibition:

- To communicate the message in a physical space

- To engage the audience and encourage participation

- To create a piece that represents the community

We made a word list of physical items that are representational of a dream. Because two of their goals were to engage the audience and to create an installation that represented the community, the group chose a bed to be the physical item that would become the symbol of the exhibition.

One of the major obstacles we faced was not having a dedicated space for our exhibit. In order to best serve the community, the exhibit would take place during the program showcase, which is scheduled to accommodate parents who do not have flexible work schedules. The showcase lasts a total of 3 hours and includes presentations by students and faculty, a keynote speaker, as well as an awards ceremony. Our exhibit would be temporary and enclosed in a small space. The solution that the students developed was inspired by the temporary aspect of the Park(ing) Day project, as well as the simplicity and participatory aspects of Candy Chang's work, both described in chapter 1.

The idea for collaborating with the audience was simple; we would ask them a question: What is your dream? The bed would serve as a canvas for the audience to write their dreams on. This physical object would represent both the literal and figurative concept of dreaming. One of the shared community goals of Upward Bound is to serve as a support system to help community members achieve personal, academic, and professional goals; the group felt this collaborative exhibition would represent the community by acting as a catalyst for sharing dreams and aspirations.

The workshop group also decided to share their personal spaces. Each person provided a photograph of their bedroom to share as part of the exhibition. As a way to

keep these personal spaces somewhat anonymous, each person shared a dream or goal along with the photo, instead of their name.

<div align="center">Workshop Outcome</div>

On the day of the exhibition, we created a bed out of the table we were provided. We covered it with a white sheet, a white pillow, and a white duvet cover. Colored sharpies were provided for the audience to write on the bed. Behind the bed we hung the photographs on "clouds" that the students had created during one of the workshop sessions.

Overall, the exhibition was successful in that the audience was willing to engage with the installation. The students were enthusiastic and willing to participate by writing on the bed and sharing their dreams with each other (see figure 6). The exhibition also gave students the opportunity to engage in dialog about their personal goals and how their involvement with Upward Bound is a benefit to them. This type of meaningful discussion is important to the community because it encourages the students to remain active in the program. The workshop process gave the students the opportunity to engage in the creative process, learn critical thinking skills, and creative problem solving methods. For me as the designer, the process of the workshop was a beneficial way to explore and evaluate collaborative design methods to determine activities to include in the toolkit. Although the exhibition was temporary, the duvet cover with the dreams of the students written on it will remain a lasting document that represents the community. This piece of the exhibition will be kept in the Upward Bound office.
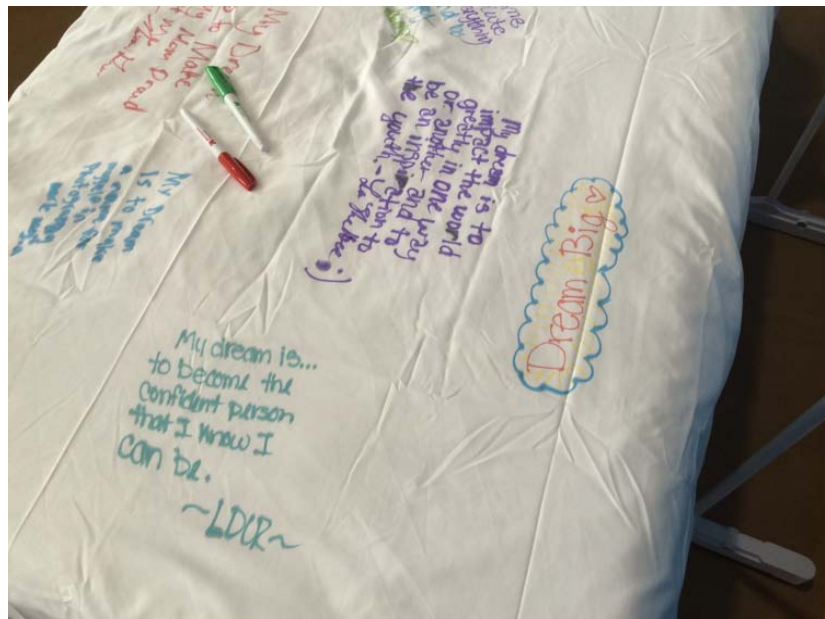
Figure 7. What is your Dream?

CHAPTER V

Results

Design Solution

Designing Collaborative Community Exhibitions (DCCE) is a set of tools and resources for designers, which guides them through a collaborative design process in the development of a community exhibition. The toolkit outlines a streamlined three-step process: Inform, Explore, and Create. The process is specific enough to provide guidance yet flexible enough that designers can modify and adapt the process to meet the needs of the particular community with which they are working. For each step of the process, the toolkit provides an overview, a set of questions to answer, and suggestions for collaborative activities. Additional resources for further study are also included throughout the book.

DCCE was written for an audience of designers, so it assumes a working vocabulary of basic design principles and some knowledge of design. The printed book has a page size of 5.5" x 8.5" in order for the booklet to be conveniently carried, and it is spiral bound so it can easily be opened flat. This is particularly important because the participant workbook pages in the back are designed to be photocopied as needed. The page size also makes it possible for the book to be provided online as a PDF that users can download and print on standard-size paper. In keeping with the goal to make the process streamlined, I chose to use one typeface in various weights to visually reflect the concept of simplicity.

The sans-serif typeface, Avenir, designed by Adrian Frutiger, was chosen for the toolkit because it is a clean and simple typeface that reads well on screen and in print. The Avenir type family is available in various weights, which allows for it to be used for headlines as well as body text.

The DCCE toolkit is divided into five sections: an introduction; each of the three steps: Inform, Explore, and Create; and a participant workbook (see figures 7-24). Each section is color-coded to visually separate one from another. The final section of the participant workbook is designed in black and white so that it may be reproduced at a minimal cost to the user.

Figure 8. DCCE Cover

WELCOME

Before **You Start**

Get to know your community. Whether they chose you or you chose them, you're a new member or a long time member, you need to be familiar with the community and its goals. If you are not already part of the community, spend time there. This will allow you not only to better understand the community, but it will also build empathy and cultivate trust. The stronger the level of trust is between yourself and the community, the more the participants will open up and be willing to work with you. This will lead to a more powerful exhibition piece and a more meaningful experience for you, the participants and the audience.

Part of building empathy and trust is being transparent with the group. Let the participants know up front what your intentions are, whether you plan to engage with them long-term or only for the duration of the project. Attempt to Identify any biases or areas of conflict that may arise. While these things can't always be avoided it will beneficial to identify them early and prepare to deal with them.

Make a plan. This toolkit is meant to be a guide for you. I will outline a process and make suggestions for activities. However, it's up to you to assess the situation and determine the best plan for your workshop based on your goals for the project.

Figure 9. DCCE welcome page

Process Overview

Don't be afraid to change the plan. While you should have a plan laid out, be flexible and open to change. An idea, conflict, or obstacle may come up which will cause the plan to change. Don't panic. As with any other design project, regroup, refocus and keep moving forward.

Successes may vary. It should be understood that not all collaborative processes will result in a traditional or even a physical exhibition. In some cases the process may lead to a solution that fits outside the traditional definition of an exhibition; or it may unearth new questions or problems, which require resources that are not available. In these cases it should not be assumed that the project was unsuccessful, but instead, "success" may be redefined. The success of the community exhibit may be evaluated based on the benefits of the process for the participants, level of engagement from the audience, and any positive outcomes for everyone involved including meaningful dialogue within the community.

STEP **1** INFORM

STEP **2** EXPLORE

STEP **3** CREATE

Figure 10. DCCE process overview

Step One: **Inform**

Also known as the 'getting to know you' stage, this is the stage in which you will get to know the workshop participants and vice versa. In this stage you will introduce the participants to design, specifically exhibition, community-based design, and participatory design.

During this stage you will need to discuss the basics of exhibition design, introduce common practices and basic theories. If your community is unfamiliar with exhibition design you will want to show some examples of traditional and non-traditional exhibition design to participants. During this stage the group will define what "exhibition" means to them.

Answer the following questions:

‣ Who is the designer?
‣ Who are the participants?
‣ Who is part of the community?
‣ What are the community goals?
‣ What common values make this a community?
‣ What is an exhibition? Traditionally? Non-traditionally?

Figure 11. Step one: Inform

Suggested **Activities**

'My World' Maps
Have each participant create a "map" of their world. This can be drawn on paper or a 3-D model dependent on resources. Participants may choose to include photographs or other important items to complete their maps. After the maps are completed have each participant share his/her map and/or create a mini exhibition using the maps.

Personal Interviews
Participants should form small groups of 2–3 and interview each other. You may have questions or prompts prepared or let the participants create their own. After the interviews have the participants take turns introducing their partners to the rest of the group.

Show and Tell
Have each participant bring in 1–2 items that are important to them. Each participant should introduce themselves and the item they chose explaining why it is important to their life.

Personal Timelines
Each participant should create a timeline of their life starting from the present moment and ending with birth. The timelines should be shared and discussed among the group. This activity is useful for identifying consistencies and differences among the group.

Additional **Resources**

Nina Simon's *The Participatory Museum* and Museum 2.0 Blog:
Nina Simon is a writer, designer, and leading expert in participatory museum experiences. She currently works as the Executive Director of the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History. Her book, *The Participatory Museum* explores community and collaborative design in an effort to engage visitors and "make cultural institutions more dynamic, relevant, essential places."

Download the book here for FREE:
www.participatorymuseum.org

Check out her blog here:
museumtwo.blogspot.com

Figure 12. Step one suggested activities and additional resources

School of the Future
Candy Chang

"As part of the Futures exhibit at the Centre for the Living Arts in Mobile, Candy Chang created an installation exploring the role of school in shaping our values and what is important to learn in life. Four blocks from the gallery is Barton Academy, an abandoned building that was the first public school in Alabama and a topic of current debate. The gallery is filled with red balls to invite visitors to play like children again. A central ramp leads to a 1900s school desk. On the wall is a halftone image of Barton Academy that becomes more abstract as visitors approach. On the desk lies a notebook that invites visitors to share what they wish they learned in school."

(via candychang.com)

Photos courtesy of candychang.com

Figure 13. Exhibition examples: School of the Future

Park(ing) Day **REBAR Group**

"In 2005, Rebar identified a site in an area of downtown San Francisco that is under served by public outdoor space and installed a small, temporary public park that provided nature, seating, and shade.

This simple two hour intervention has blossomed into an international event called Park(ing) Day where people around the globe reclaim the streets for people, for fun, and for play."

(rebargroup.org)
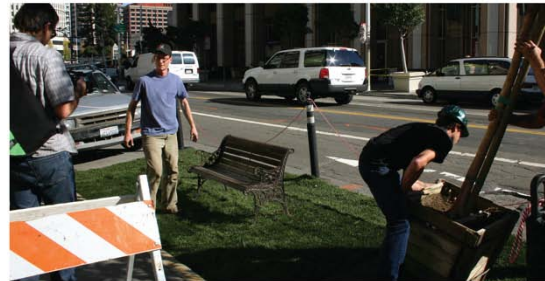
Photos courtesy of rebargroup.org

Figure 14. Exhibition examples: Park(ing) Day

Contemporary Issues Forum
National Museum of American Jewish History
Local Projects

"Located at the new National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia PA, the Contemporary Issues Forum encourages visitors to engage, consider, and debate current issues of vital importance. Visitors are invited to document their personal insights and feelings on hot-button topics of the day and to dialogue with others as they work through the opinions that resemble theirs and those that do not.

After reading each of the four walls that present different questions to respond to, visitors write their response on cards, have them quickly scanned and then post their cards to the wall.

Not to leave technology by the wayside — the scanned card images are simultaneously shuttled to an online microsite (cif.nmajh.org) where visitors can later see their cards, see other opinions and continue the debate. Lastly, video is captured of the visitors posting their cards and then re-projected as an attract loop not only to help demonstrate the function of the gallery but to create an association of responsibility by linking an image of the visitors who posted the opinion with the opinion itself."

(localprojects.net)

Photos courtesy of localprojects.net

Figure 15. Exhibition examples: Contemporary Issues Forum

EXPLORE

2

Step Two: **Explore**

In this stage, you will explore the possibilities for your project. This is the phase to encourage the participants to present any and all ideas. There are no wrong answers at this point. By the end of this phase you will have determined the theme/subject of your exhibition.

Answer the following questions:

▶ What message do we want to communicate?

▶ What type of physical/emotional experience do we want the audience to have? How can we create this experience?

▶ What might we learn from the audience?

▶ How can we address the goals of the community?

▶ What is the theme of the exhibition?

▶ Does the theme/message address the goals of the community?

▶ Who is the audience for the exhibition?

▶ Is the audience part of the community? If not, how can we create an experience that is meaningful to them?

▶ What do we know about the audience?

▶ What are the goals for the exhibition?

Figure 16. Step two: Explore

Suggested **Activities**

Sticky Note Brainstorming
Before the brainstorming session, you may want to create a list of questions to get the group thinking about the project. The questions should be specific to the community, but allow for creative responses. This is optional, but encouraged as it provides a solid starting point.

Each participant should be given a stack of sticky notes. The group should be instructed to write a single idea on each sticky note. Ideas can be a word, phrase or drawing. Explain that any idea that comes to mind should be noted. Even if the idea isn't complete it can often spark something bigger. Limit the idea generating activity to 10–15 minutes.

Next, each person should read off their ideas. There should be no discussion or critique at this point. Clarifying questions are permissible, but the idea is just to get all of the ideas out. As the ideas are being presented they should be put up on the wall. Similar ideas should be grouped together.

Once all the ideas are up on the wall, the participants should discuss the ideas (avoiding critique) and identify common themes. These themes can then be discussed, critiqued, and expanded in to more developed ideas.

Additional **Resources**

DesigningWithPeople.org - Methods

Created by the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design at the Royal College of Art, this site provides a variety of methods and resources for designing with community groups and fostering an inclusive design environment.

designingwithpeople.rca.ac.uk/methods

IDEO Method Cards

"IDEO Method Cards is a collection of 51 cards representing diverse ways that design teams can understand the people they are designing for. They are used to make a number of different methods accessible to all members of a design team, to explain how and when the methods are best used, and to demonstrate how they have been applied to real design projects." (ideo.com)

www.ideo.com/work/method-cards/
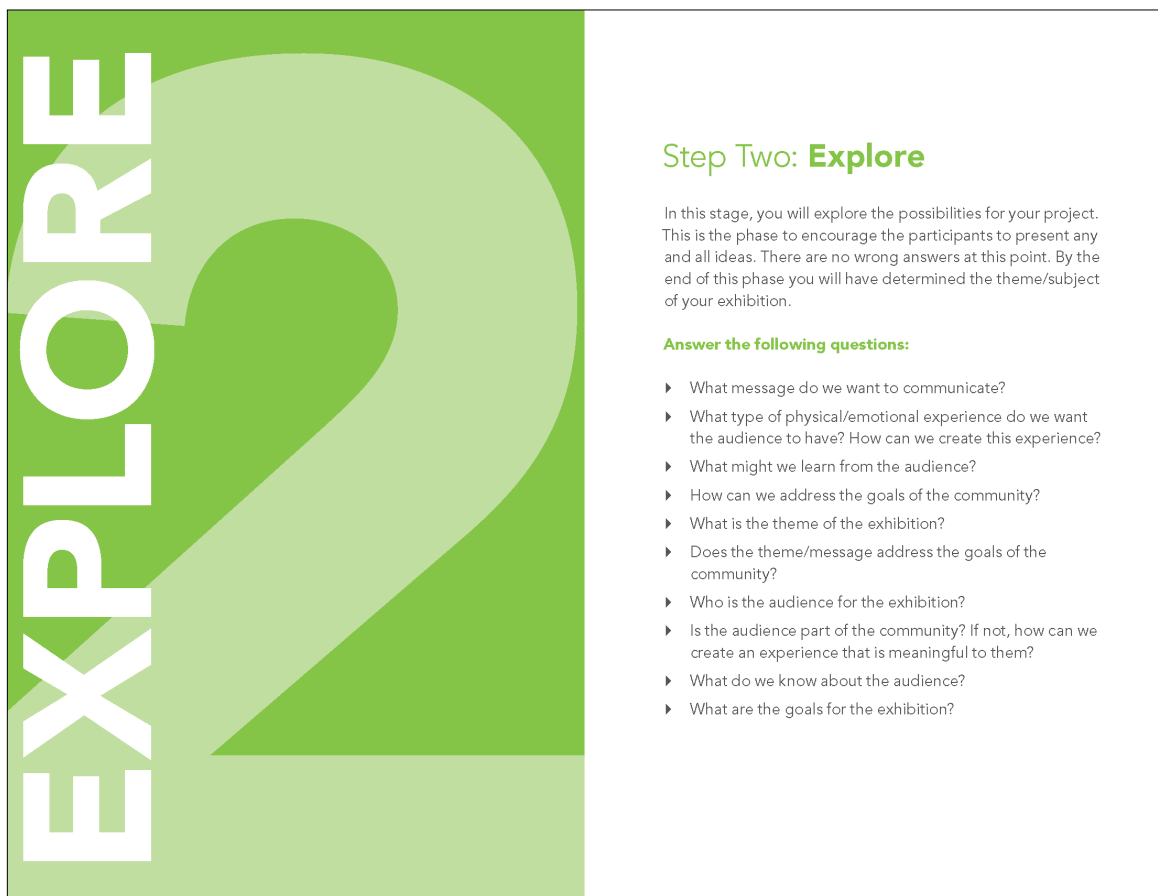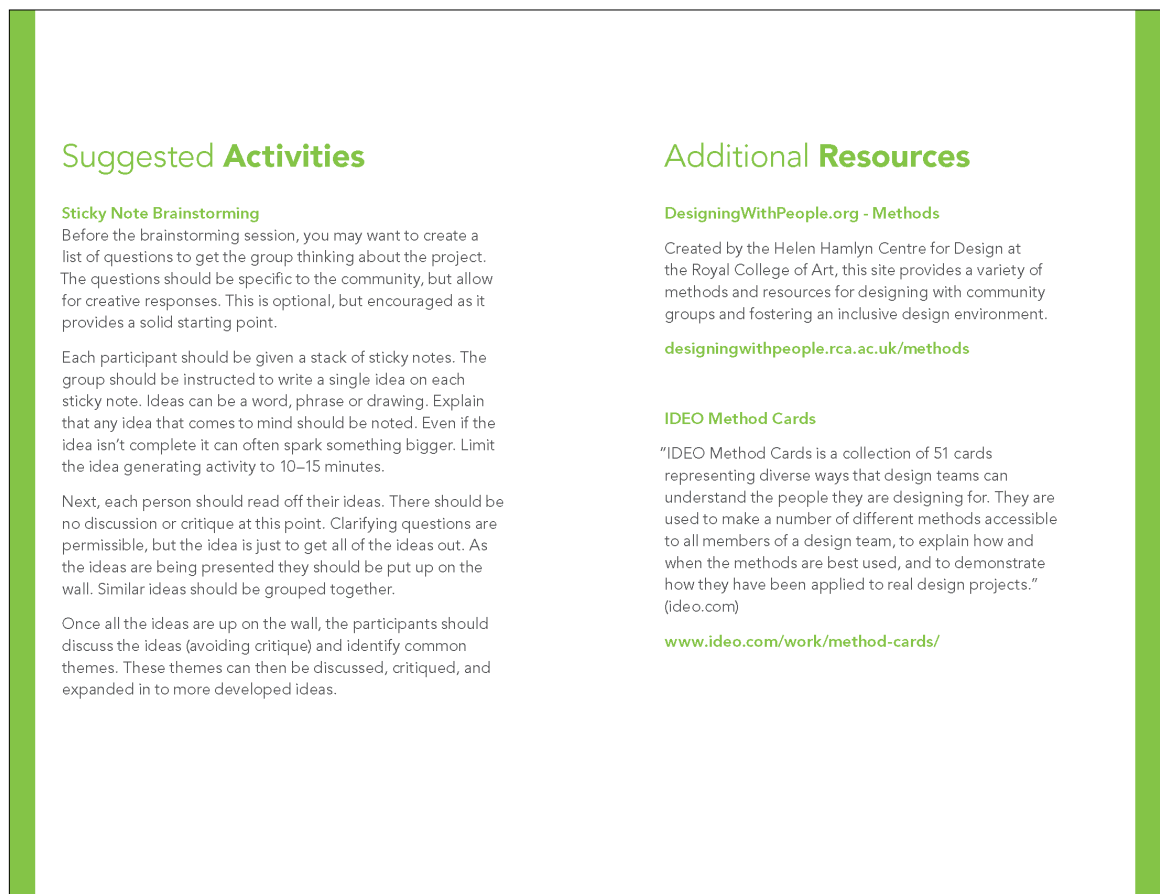
Figure 17. Step two suggested activities and additional resources

Step Three: **Create**

During this stage you will work with the participants to define what the exhibition will be and how the solution relates to the community goals and the goals for the exhibition. At this point, you and the participants should have a clear understanding about who the audience is and the design solution should address this. You should also consider your role in the design process.

At this point, you need to evaluate the level of experience your community has with design. If you are working with a community of designers and/or artists you may allow the participants to make their own design choices as you facilitate the process. If the community has little or no design experience you may make the design choices based on their input and find ways to include them in the process.

Answer the following questions:

▶   How will your role impact the community and project goals?

▶   What resources do we have/need?

▶   Where will the exhibition be held?

▶   What are the constraints?

▶   How will you facilitate the build process?

Figure 18. Step three: Create
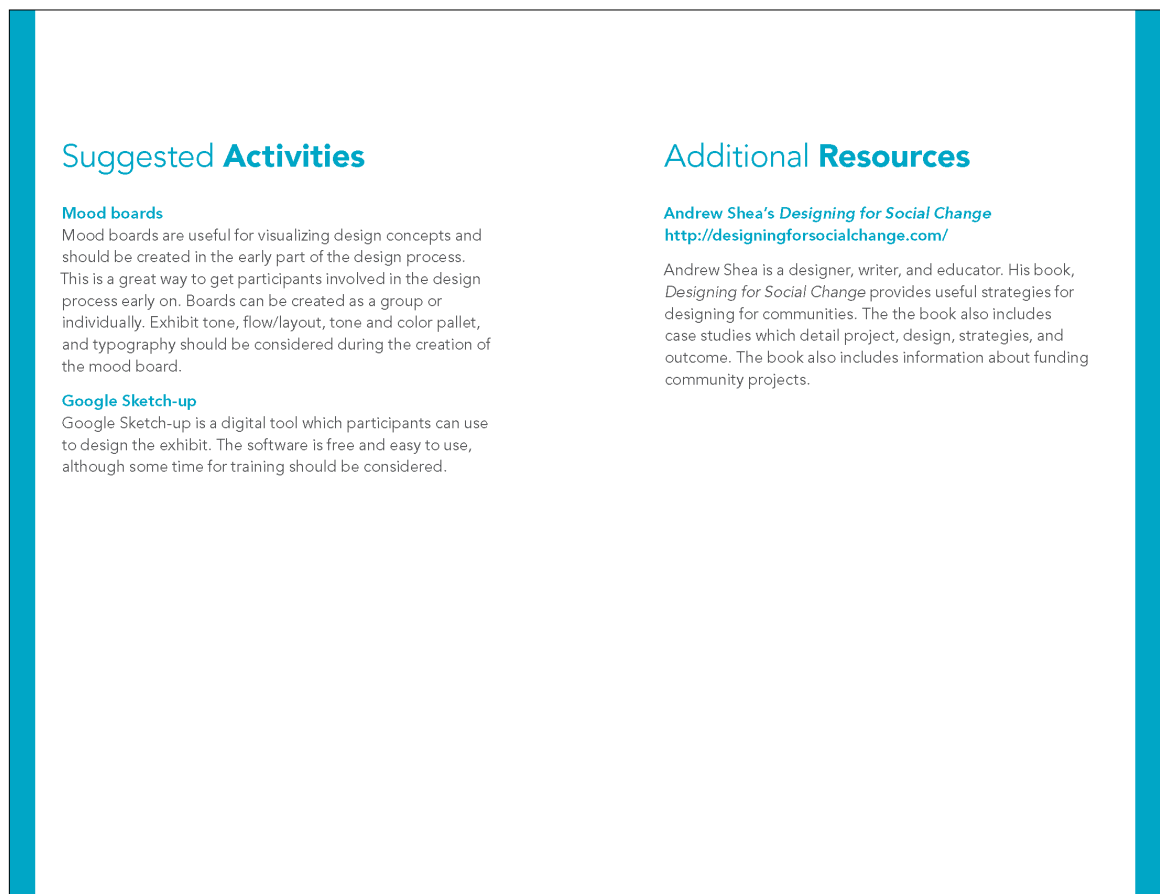
Suggested **Activities**

Mood boards
Mood boards are useful for visualizing design concepts and should be created in the early part of the design process. This is a great way to get participants involved in the design process early on. Boards can be created as a group or individually. Exhibit tone, flow/layout, tone and color pallet, and typography should be considered during the creation of the mood board.

Google Sketch-up
Google Sketch-up is a digital tool which participants can use to design the exhibit. The software is free and easy to use, although some time for training should be considered.

Additional **Resources**

Andrew Shea's *Designing for Social Change*
http://designingforsocialchange.com/

Andrew Shea is a designer, writer, and educator. His book, *Designing for Social Change* provides useful strategies for designing for communities. The the book also includes case studies which detail project, design, strategies, and outcome. The book also includes information about funding community projects.

Figure 19. Step three suggested activities and additional resources

Additional **Considerations**

The following things may also be considered during the design process:

Marketing
How are you going to get the word out about the exhibition? Word of mouth is useful if the audience reach is not far outside of the community. If you are trying to reach a larger audience, however, other marketing methods should be considered based on available resources. Social media can be a useful tool in marketing if it will reach your audience. Posters, postcards and printed invitations can also be a low cost tool for marketing.

Signage/wayfinding
How will people find your exhibition? Do you need signage to help guide them through the exhibit?

Docents/guides
Will the exhibition experience be self-led, or will someone guide them throughout the exhibition. The use of docents or guides can impact the experience of your exhibition greatly. Consider who should be telling the story? Can the story be told on its own or does it need a voice to help drive it? If this is the case a docent would be useful. When choosing docents consider whether or not they should come from within the

community, have been involved in the design of the exhibition and/or can be trained to provide the best experience for your audience. In all cases, docents should be an enhancement to the experience and not distract from it.

Gathering feedback
Consider designing a way to get feedback into the exhibition. If that is not possible, provide comment cards to guests so they may provide feedback
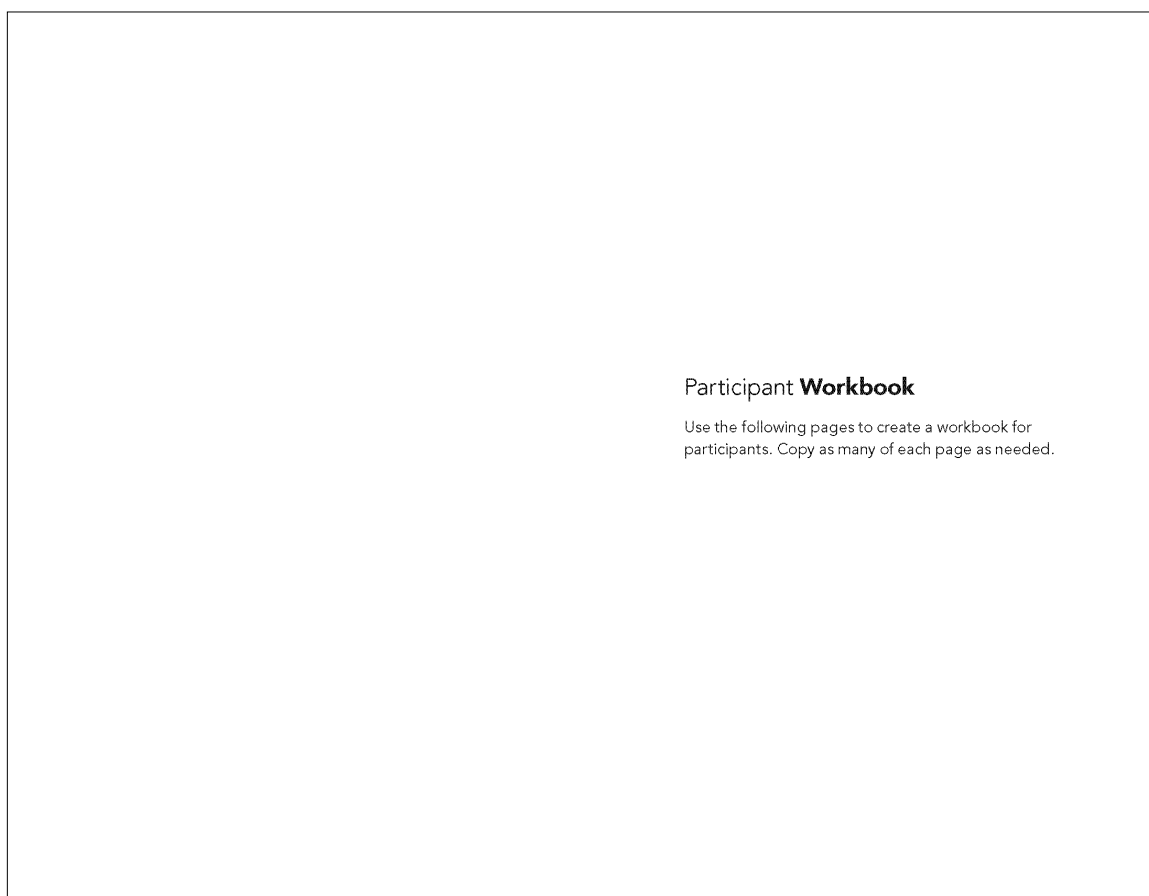
Figure 20. Additional considerations

Participant **Workbook**

Use the following pages to create a workbook for
participants. Copy as many of each page as needed.

Figure 21. Participant workbook

About **My Community**   Community **Goals**

_____   ▸
_____
_____   ▸
_____
_____   ▸
_____
_____   ▸
_____
_____   ▸
_____
_____   ▸
_____
_____   ▸
_____
_____   ▸
_____
_____
_____

Figure 22. Participant workbook: About and community goals

Participant **Workbook**

Participant **Workbook**

Planning **Calendar**

Planning **Calendar**

Mtg. Date	Items Due/ To Do

Mtg. Date	Items Due/ To Do

Figure 23. Participant workbook: Planning calendar

Participant **Workbook**

Participant **Workbook**

Design **Plan**

Materials **List**

❑

❑

❑

❑

❑

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Figure 24. Participant workbook: Design plan and materials list

Figure 25. Participant workbook: Meeting notes

This toolkit is intended as a resource to support designers who may have little to no experience working collaboratively with a community. It aims to simplify the collaborative process by outlining a three-step process and providing the tools to implement a workshop based on the workshop I conducted with the Upward Bound pilot group. The goal of the toolkit is to empower designers to facilitate a collaborative creative process and support a community in developing an exhibition that will be relevant and meaningful to them and their audience.

<u>Designer Feedback</u>

As a method to evaluate the design solution, the DCCE toolkit was provided to a small group of graphic designers who then responded to a survey. This exploratory group was comprised of 10 designers who work in various design fields. In order to represent the target audience of the toolkit, the designers' level of experience with collaborative design and exhibition design was not considered in the selection of the group participants. What follows is a summary of the responses to the ten survey questions.

The first two questions helped to gauge the level of the designer's familiarity with the collaborative process and exhibition/installation design. The respondents were asked to rate their familiarity on a scale of one to three (1 – not at all; 2 – somewhat; 3 – very). Half of the exploratory group responded that they were somewhat familiar with collaborative design; the other half was very familiar with collaborative design. The majority of the designers was somewhat familiar with exhibition design, however one person responded they were not at all familiar with exhibition/installation design.

Question three asked if the designers had ever used a toolkit or guide as part of the design process. Nine out of ten of the designers responded that they had used a toolkit or guide as part of the creative process. Two of the designers commented that they had also participated in workshops as part of the creative process.

The following question referred specifically to the DCCE toolkit and asked respondents to rate its effectiveness in outlining the collaborative process. Seven of the designers responded that the toolkit outlined the process very effectively. One designer commented that some of the sections could be expanded to better define the exhibition design and planning part of the process.

The next question asked how effectively the DCCE toolkit defines the role of the designer. Six of the designers responded that the toolkit defines their role as the designer very effectively. The remainder responded that it somewhat effectively defines the designer's role. Although it can be ascertained from using the toolkit, the role of the designer is not explicitly stated anywhere in the book.

The sixth question asked the designers: How effectively does the DCCE toolkit facilitate the collaborative process? Eight of the designers responded that the toolkit very effectively facilitates the collaborative process. One of the designers commented that the steps were simple and easy to follow.

Question seven asked the designers which elements of the toolkit they found to be most useful. The top three responses – all with 7 votes each – were as follows: the exhibition examples, the additional resources, and the process overview. One designer commented that although the exhibition examples were the most useful, they didn't seem

to fit in the section where they are located and it would make more sense for them to be in their own section.

The eighth question asked which format of distribution would be most useful: downloadable PDF, website, printed book, or all of the above? Eight designers responded that a website would be the most useful, followed by a downloadable PDF, and then the printed book. One designer responded that the color-coding would translate well to a website. Another designer brought up the point that a website can be easily updated as needed.

The final two questions asked respondents what additional content they would find useful, and whether they had any other comments about the DCCE toolkit. One designer suggested a template for a mood board would be helpful as part of the *explore* step. It was also suggested to include the recommended amount of time for the collaborative activities. One designer also suggested that the toolkit be developed into an, "e-book for mobile reading or an audiobook."

While there are areas for improvement, overall the toolkit did meet the intended goals of serving as guide and resource for designers to engage in the collaborative design process. One designer commented, "[The toolkit is] very well planned out and broken down into manageable and easily understood steps." The DCCE toolkit successfully outlines the collaborative process and provides tools and resources for designers to help them implement a workshop and facilitate the collaborative creative process for a community.

CHAPTER VI

Conclusion

Exhibitions can be a unique way to communicate with an audience and create a meaningful experience, when users have the opportunity to form a connection with the content. Collaborative design methods allow designers to engage a community in the development of the content, which may result in a more relevant and significant experience for the audience. As a result of the collaborative design workshop held with the students of the Upward Bound program, *Designing Collaborative Community Exhibitions* provides designers with effective strategies for engaging in the collaborative process. The toolkit serves as a resource for designers who desire to implement the collaborative process and create meaningful content.

Limitations of Research

Because only one collaborative workshop was held, there were limitations present during the research process. Multiple workshops should be held to further investigate the effectiveness of this method of collaboration. By working with a variety of communities with various backgrounds, resources, and goals, a more comprehensive assessment of collaborative activities could be realized.

Future Investigations

As revealed in the survey results, designers responded that the most effective method of distribution for the toolkit would be a website. The development of a website would allow for the toolkit to be updated as needed. It was also revealed that having the toolkit in some type of digital form would allow for it to be more easily shared among the design community.

The landscape of collaborative design is continually evolving, as new methods and activities are developed. In order to keep pace with the rapid changes in this field, it would be beneficial to consider making the toolkit an open-source resource. An online forum would give designers the opportunity to pose questions, engage in discussion, and exchange ideas based on their experience and knowledge. As the content of the toolkit evolves, by existing in a digital space, it would be more efficient to update the design as needs change.

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