

PUBLIC LIBRARIES

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Hand in Hand Museums and Libraries Working Together

Betsy Diamant-Cohen and Dina Sherman

Library and museum collaborations are the wave of the future. Sharing resources and expertise can help institutions save money, build new audiences, and expand programming capabilities. Two examples of long-term, successful collaborations are the Exploration Center at the Port Discovery Children's Museum and the Brooklyn Expedition.

It sounds so simple: museums and libraries working together. But while they share similar missions and similar audiences, it doesn't happen very often. However, when it does, amazing things can happen! There are many possible ways to collaborate, from small, one-time programs to large, long-term projects that can drastically change the way people think about these institutions.

What are the benefits of partnerships? Simply put, the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts. Collaborations can save institutions money by allowing them to share resources and can lend support to overworked staff by bringing in programs from a partner site. Staff development is a natural outcome of these partnerships, as museum staff and librarians learn from one another as they work together.

Marketing and audience development are also areas in which collaborations add strength. In Brooklyn, New York, collaboration has gone beyond one or two partners. Six cultural institutions have joined together to create the Heart of Brooklyn. The goal of the consortium is "not only to market each of the institutions to the entirety of Brooklyn and the city, but also to do some collaborative programming," says Sofia Sequenzia, deputy director for public service for the Brooklyn Public Library. "One of the areas we started focusing on was attracting children and families to the various institutions."

Collaborative projects often have an impact on more than just the institutions involved, and as such, they can make community members sit up and take notice in ways they haven't before. In Indianapolis, Indiana, the public library system has opened a full-service branch in the local children's museum. The branch was created by seed money from the Institute of Museum of Library Services, and a \$5.3 million endowment will support it in the future. "It will be the only branch that is not funded through our operating budget. It is not funded by the city . . . , [and] the local politicians are very pleased about [that]," says Chris Cairo, director of project development for Indianapolis Marion Public Library.

Two examples of successful long-term collaborations are the Exploration Center (a project of the Enoch Pratt Free Library and the Port Discovery Children's Museum, Baltimore) and the Brooklyn Expedition project (a collaborative venture of the Brooklyn Children's Museum, Brooklyn Public Library, and Brooklyn Museum of Art). These two projects function in very different ways, yet both have combined the resources of museums and libraries to provide new and exciting services to the public.

Pratt at the Port: An Overview of the Exploration Center

In December 1998 the Baltimore children's museum, Port Discovery, opened its doors to the public. Inside Port Discovery was the Exploration Center, a public library. The Exploration Center is a part of the Enoch Pratt Free Library, serving as a public library for the State of Maryland as well as Baltimore. Maryland residents are able to obtain library cards there, check out books, and return them to any public library in the state. Deserving of its name, the Exploration Center offers computers and books that enable visitors to explore and expand upon different aspects of the museum exhibits. Children can often be found in the library using the Internet, playing games on computers, participating in programs, and looking at books.

In the planning stages of the museum, Port Discovery had approached several cultural institutions in Baltimore with the idea of a collaboration that would help launch kids into lifelong learning. Although an art museum, a science center, and a few other nonprofit organizations were invited to participate, Baltimore's public library system, the Enoch Pratt Free Library, was the only organization that rose to the challenge. The museum raised private money that was earmarked for capital expenses relating to establishing the center. Once the library opened, Port Discovery agreed to be responsible for cleaning, electric bills, housekeeping, insurance, security, and other facility-related issues. The Enoch Pratt Free Library agreed to provide the staff and to be responsible for salaries, materials, supplies, and maintenance of the computer network.

The center's materials collection is eclectic, yet everything is related to the concepts and programs in the museum. For example, young customers to the museum can "perform" brain surgery while hearing about Ben Carson, the notable African-American neurosurgeon and director of pediatric neurosurgery at the Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions in Baltimore. In the Exploration Center, they can "perform" heart surgery using computer games and read Carson's autobiography. In the museum, visitors travel

This article was solicited by the feature editor.

to ancient Egypt while trying to find a hidden tomb. In the library, they can read books about mummies, pyramids, and pharaohs and be linked to related Web sites.


Policy

The Exploration Center was designed to expand upon the topics of the museum. In order to make the collaboration as successful as possible, the partners agreed on a plan of outreach as well as simply one of supplementation.


One of the first challenges was to set a policy of how the library could utilize museum exhibits. This is not as simple as it seems: entrance to the library is free, but entrance into museum exhibits requires admission tickets. It was finally agreed that nonpaying visitors would be allowed into museum exhibits as part of a scheduled library program, with a librarian in attendance at all times.

This opened the door for some exciting and fun collaborative programming. One good example is a storytime program featuring Tomie de Paola's *Bill and Pete* and *Bill and Pete Go Down the Nile*. During the storytime, the group leaves the Exploration Center and takes a trip to the museum's ancient Egypt exhibit. Having heard about pyramids, the Nile river, and mummies (and seeing Bill pushed into a sarcophagus!), children now get a chance to ferry themselves across the Nile, to walk inside long stone corridors similar to those of a pyramid, to view a mummy, and to climb into a sarcophagus. When they return to the Exploration Center, they are directed to both serious and fun Web sites on Ancient Egypt.

The Exploration Center staff works with the Port Discovery staff on collaborative programs that introduce the library to kids, families, and teachers. One successful example was a Harry Potter weekend, which brought in thousands of eager fans. Sponsored by the library, all activities were free and held in the main entry hall of the museum. Since the museum helped with planning, materials, and technical assistance, the event occurred on a grand scale with exciting signs and props. For instance, when children went through the sorting hat ceremony, a library volunteer used the museum's cordless mike with a radio receiver, making it seem as if the hat itself was speaking. Once children were assigned to their house, a picture was taken with the museum's Polaroid camera, pasted onto a Hogwarts ID card, laminated, and given to the child. Children



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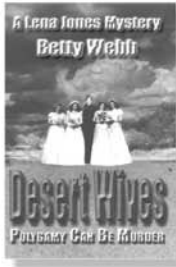
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then divided into their houses for a "Hogwarts final exam" administered by library staff; the museum gift shop provided prizes. After enjoying the free events, about half of the visitors purchased tickets into the museum. They were able to participate in a museumwide Harry Potter scavenger hunt. In just one weekend, both the museum and library had gained new fans.

Library resources and staff are available to assist the museum staff in

their research for other programs and exhibits. The Exploration Center also has traditional library programs such as preschool storytimes, booktalk programs geared for ages six to ten, film screenings, and three weekly Mother Goose on the Loose nursery rhyme programs for children of ages three months to two years with a parent or caregiver.

Naturally, logistical questions arise all the time, from major issues to minute ones such as who is responsible for

Other Museum–Public Library Collaborations

The **Strong Museum** (www.strongmuseum.org) in Rochester, New York, is a highly interactive history museum that operates its lending library in partnership with the **Central Library of Rochester and Monroe County** (<http://mcls.rochester.lib.ny.us/central>). Museum visitors can choose books from shelves in the exhibits as they walk through the museum and check them out through a public circulation system upon exiting the museum.

The **Four County Library System** (www.4cls.org) in the Southern Tier of New York State is a public library that works with a children's and science museum and a history and art museum in Binghamton. They share joint programming and collections. The library also provides reading areas in the museum exhibits.

The **Children's Museum of Houston**, Texas, hosts the Parent Resource Library (www.cmhouston.org/library/library.htm), part of the **Houston Public Library** system. Parents can check out both parenting and children's materials. The public library system provides the collection, and the museum provides the space, equipment, and staff.

The **Boston Children's Museum** (www.bostonkids.org) and the **Boston Public Library** (www.bpl.org) system in Boston, Massachusetts, run a program called "Countdown to Kindergarten" (www.bostonkids.org/news/kindergarten.htm; www.bpl.org/kids/booklists/countdown.htm). Families with children entering kindergarten sign up for the program at their neighborhood library and receive invitations to a school-readiness event at the Children's Museum. Buses pick up families from designated spots (including some neighborhood libraries) and bring them to the museum for a few hours of fun, practical information about going to school in Boston, and reading readiness activities.

In Cambridge, Massachusetts, all residents visiting the **Harvard Museum of Natural History** (www.hmn.harvard.edu) can participate in the Library Ambassador program. Individuals can pick up a pass at the Cambridge Public Library (www.ci.cambridge.ma.us/~CPL) and present it at the museum admissions desk for entry with a \$1 copay per person.

The **Denver Public Library** (www.denver.lib.co.us) is located across a plaza from the **Denver Art Museum** (www.denverartmuseum.org). Joint programming takes place between these two institutions: librarians give storytimes in the museum, and art educators lead art projects in the library. Since these programs have started, more families have been visiting the museum.

In Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, the **Dauphin County Library System** (www.dcls.org) has included local museums as destinations on summer reading-club program scavenger hunts.

The **Providence (R.I.) Public Library** (www.provlib.org) and the **Rhode Island School of Design Museum** (www.risd.edu/museum.cfm) collaborate through Art ConText (www.risd.edu/artcontext/index.htm), a program that brings art and reading to Rhode Island residents.

The **Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum** (www.lywam.org) and the **Marathon County Public Library** (www.mcpl.lib.wi.us) in Wausau, Wisconsin, produced a series of public programs with visits by Australian and American authors, an exhibition of illustrations by American and Australian children's book illustrators, and an interactive Web site for children, parents, and teachers called "Down under and over Here" (www.imls.gov/closer/archive/hlt_c0200.htm).

The Colorado Digitization Project (<http://coloradodigital.coalition.org>) has given the public access to state historical and cultural resources—such as letters, diaries, government documents, manuscripts, photographs, maps, digital versions of exhibits, artifacts, and oral histories—through a large virtual collection available on the Internet. Partners include **Colorado State Library**, the **University of Denver**, **Denver Museum of Natural History**, **Littleton Historical Society**, and the **Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries**.

The **Seattle Museum of History**, **Seattle Public Library**, **King County Public Library**, and **Seattle Pacific University** in Seattle, Washington, combined forces to create "Nearby History" (www.imls.gov/closer/archive/hlt_m0100.htm). The program consists of free workshops presented by museum professionals in public libraries, exploring the skills needed to conduct historical research from scratch.

hanging a clock behind the circulation desk! But the answer to any question can usually be found by focusing on the one central question: "How can we best serve the museum while maintaining our autonomy as a public library?"

The Brooklyn Expedition: A Virtual Experience in Collaboration

In June 1998 the Brooklyn Expedition Web site was officially introduced to the

people of Brooklyn, New York. The Brooklyn Expedition is a collaborative project of three leading cultural institutions: Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn Museum of Art, and Brooklyn Children's Museum.

The Web site is arranged thematically and draws on objects, books, and photographs from the three institutions. There are three themes currently active on the site: "Latin America," "Structures," and "Brooklyn." A fourth theme, "Africa," is in development. The Latin American theme focuses on the arts, cultures, and environments of Mexico and South

America from pre-Columbian times to today. "Structures" explores the characteristics shared among animal skeletons, animal homes, architecture, art forms, and information cataloguing systems. The Brooklyn theme celebrates the history and culture of this unique borough of New York City. While the primary output is the Web site, the project also includes components of teacher and librarian training and a teen program.

The partnership began in 1997, when the Brooklyn Children's Museum, Brooklyn Museum of Art, and Brooklyn Public Library, in response to sugges-

tions from their directors and funders, began a collaborative technology project. While they have been neighbors in the borough of Brooklyn for more than one hundred years—situated within one mile of each other—they had never worked together on a large project. A Web site was conceived, to be called the “Brooklyn Expedition,” that would allow young people and their families to explore the collections of the three institutions. The Web site would excite users about the themes they explored and encourage them to extend the experience of their virtual expedition by visiting the institutions.

The Evolution of the Collaboration

A steering committee was formed, made up of one representative from each partner institution, and staff from each institution came on board to help provide content. “Structures” was the first theme created. The content was divided into three large categories: structures of animals, structures made by animals and people, and structures of information. Each institution took sections within these categories and created its own content. In addition to creating content, the Brooklyn Public Library took on the responsibility of designing, hosting, and maintaining the site. When “Structures” was finished, the result was encyclopedic, with its few interesting bits of information buried under too much text and small images. It was agreed by all that while the idea was correct, the implementation had somehow failed.

Rather than launch the site as it was, the steering committee decided to make some changes and create the Latin American theme in a different way. The committee hired a project manager and created a core team of content developers, staffed from each institution. The development team brainstormed content material, sharing ideas of objects and books from each agency. Through regular meetings the group put together seven subthemes, each including objects and books from the collections of the three partners. The final step was the hiring of a professional Web designer, who gave the site a cohesive look and style and introduced the team to new ways of making the content come alive. When it was completed, “Latin America” was a colorful, interactive Web site.

Having learned valuable lessons, the team revisited “Structures.” New sub-

themes were created, using the integrated process that had worked so well for “Latin America.” As the team’s comfort level with the technology grew, more interactive ideas were developed. A highlight of “Structures,” and one of the most popular parts of the entire site, was created. The game “Build-a-Bug” allows users to create their own imaginary insects by using virtual parts from real insects such as grasshoppers, butterflies, and mosquitoes. For each finished

The game “Build-a-Bug” allows users to create their own imaginary insects by using virtual parts from real insects . . .

insect, a “bug bio” is produced that includes two views of the insect, as well as details about the insect they’ve created. Children can print this page out and color in the bug, and thought-provoking questions encourage them to think about how the bug might move, what it might eat, what they might call it, and more.

For a third, new theme, the team focused inward for a bit and chose Brooklyn. At the same time, the project launched its newest component, the Brooklyn Expedition Explainer Corps (BEEC). BEEC was envisioned as a teen-employment program. Teens from Brooklyn were hired to work in the partner institutions, facilitating the use of the Web site for the public. They were also trained in basic Web development to assist in the creation of content for the site, and they served as advisors to the staff to keep the site “kid friendly.”

“Brooklyn” differed from the first two themes because it was based on oral histories and personalities rather than on physical objects. Because it is about the history and the people of Brooklyn, the theme remains an open and ever-growing part of the site, inviting residents of Brooklyn to tell their stories and contribute their histories.

Every part of the Brooklyn Expedition project has been a learning experience. Changes in technology, staff turnover, and the reality of time constraints have on occasion slowed the process down or made the team change direction. The current focus of the proj-

ect is to complete “Africa” and to begin creating tools that will make the site even more interactive and fun for children. Once these developments are in place, the Brooklyn Expedition can become what it has always been meant to be: a virtual addition to the already rich collections of the three partner institutions.

Conclusion

With so many librarians working with or in museums and other cultural and educational institutions, the next step is to create a network of librarians from similar situations who can provide support for one another, share ideas, and discuss topics of interest. At the 2002 American Library Association Annual Conference, the first-ever Librarians and Museums Roundtable meeting was held. This was an informal meeting of approximately ten librarians as well as representatives from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Out of this meeting, an electronic discussion list is being developed, and future meetings will be scheduled. The hope is that the group can become an official roundtable of ALA, and perhaps even host its own small conference, as well as presenting at conferences around the country and the world. If you are interested in signing up for the list or attending future meetings, contact Dina Sherman at dinasherman@yahoo.com.

Based on the number of different types of successful collaborations already at work between public libraries and museums, it is clear that this is a trend that is going to grow. Combining resources to create better programs while reducing expenses is the wave of the future. The wide variety of examples given here proves that it can be done virtually, physically, through programs, through kiosks, through printed materials, or through many other ways no one has yet tried! Start thinking—see if you can find a way for your institution to partner with another today! ■

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