

**Great Lakes Science Center  
Biomedical Technology Project  
Formative Evaluation**

***A Framework for Describing Exhibit Unit Intentions***

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To complete a successful formative evaluation, it's important for the evaluators to have a clear picture of the intentions of the exhibit development team. These intentions are described in three ways: goals; messages; and visitor engagements. These are not—and are not meant to be—mutually exclusive. The following framework can be used as a guide for describing the exhibit team's intentions for a particular exhibit unit.

Goals are those things you want this exhibit unit to achieve. Selinda's approach to goals focuses on what visitors will take away from the exhibit unit. Therefore, goals always start with "Visitors will...." Goals tend to be pretty big statements. They tend to be about developing appreciation for or greater understanding of something. Examples might include such things as: "Visitors will develop a greater appreciation for the contribution of biomedical technology to their lives."

- *What is the goal for this exhibit unit?*

Messages are the content of the exhibit. They are comprised of Big Ideas and educational messages. A Big Idea is a single descriptive unifying idea or theme for an exhibition (Serrell, 1996<sup>1</sup>). The Big Idea for this exhibition is, "Rapidly advancing biomedical technologies give doctors new tools to improve personal and public health."

The educational messages are a description of the main ideas you want visitors to walk away from the exhibit with. For example, an educational message might be "The information doctors need to diagnose diseases and injuries can be hidden inside a patient's body," and "Medical imaging devices allow doctors to visualize inside patients' bodies non-invasively, or without surgery."

- *What are the educational messages of the exhibit unit that will be tested?*

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<sup>1</sup> Serrell, B. (1996). *Exhibit labels: An interpretive approach*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.



Physical engagements are all the physical things visitors do at an exhibit, for example, sitting, standing, looking, reading, pointing, touching, and manipulating dials. It also includes how long visitors are expected to spend with the exhibit.

- *How long will visitors spend with this exhibit unit?*
- *What will they be doing, specifically?*
- *What about visitors with specific needs, such as those in wheelchairs, those with physical disabilities, those who do not speak English, those who are very young? How long will they spend with this exhibit, and what will they be doing and seeing?*
- *How will families and other social groups use this exhibit?*

Intellectual engagements are all the ways in which visitors engage cognitively with an exhibit, including thinking about, processing, and making meaning of their experiences.

- *How will visitors be engaged intellectually? What mental processes will they be using (observing, hypothesizing, appreciating, experimenting, comparing, contemplating, etc.)?*
- *In what ways will visitors be thinking about and making connections between what they already know and have experienced?*
- *What things will be going through visitors' minds as they engage with this exhibit? What will they be thinking about?*

Social engagements are all the ways in which visitors engage with each other within the context of the exhibit, including verbal exchanges as well as body language. This could include directing attention, asking a question, coming up with an explanation together, reading a label out loud.

- *How will visitors engage with each other?*
- *How close/far away will visitors be to each other?*
- *What types of teaching/learning and meaning-making interactions will they participate in?*
- *What will they talk about and how will they talk about it?*
- *What types of social interactions will they **not** be engaged in?*

Emotional engagements are all the ways that visitors engage emotionally with the exhibit; examples include surprise, delight, awe, satisfaction, feelings of competence, intimidation, and frustration.

- *What will be visitors' primary emotional experiences with the exhibit?*
- *What other emotions will visitors feel while they are engaged with the exhibit?*
- *What kinds of emotional experiences will visitors **not** have?*

