

Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund
Interim Report Narrative
Reporting Period: July 1 – November 30, 2010

1. Please briefly outline your original goals and objectives, as stated in your proposal.

Minnesota Children’s Museum is a nationally recognized leader in building imaginative, immersive exhibits for young learners and in early childhood education. In an effort toward expanding access to arts and cultural experiences, the Museum created *Storyland: A Trip Through Childhood Favorites*, a visually stunning and educational exhibit that engages children, families and educators in the world of books through three beloved stories.

In our proposal to the State of Minnesota and the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund, we outlined the following goals:

- Creating immersive experiences and environments, informed by best practices and current research, to engage both children and adults in play and learning—specifically literacy-focused play.
- Developing high-quality, state-of-the art exhibits.
- Forming a diverse and specialized advisory board.
- Creating strategic partnerships with community organizations.
- Providing high quality child and family-focused training for educators in communities throughout the state.
- Ensuring *Storyland* is accessible to all families.

In addition, the Museum seeks to embed a deeper commitment to reading in families and in so doing, improve literacy skills for young children. To do this, the Museum is planning to tour a smaller version of the *Storyland* exhibit regionally. Funding from the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund will go towards development, design, production, programming and traveling expenses of the exhibit as it tours to six community sites such as libraries, schools, and community gathering places so that children and adults around the state can experience these interactive, literacy-based environments.

Since submitting our original grant request to the State of Minnesota, the Museum refined the Community Partnership Plan associated with the statewide tour of *Storyland* due to in line with the total funding received for this project. This work will instead be addressed through the Museum’s new strategic plan, which calls for fostering intensive partnerships that positively impact under-included children, families, and communities, leading to greater community impact locally and throughout the state.

2. What progress have you made toward your original goals and objectives? What activities led to meeting these goals?

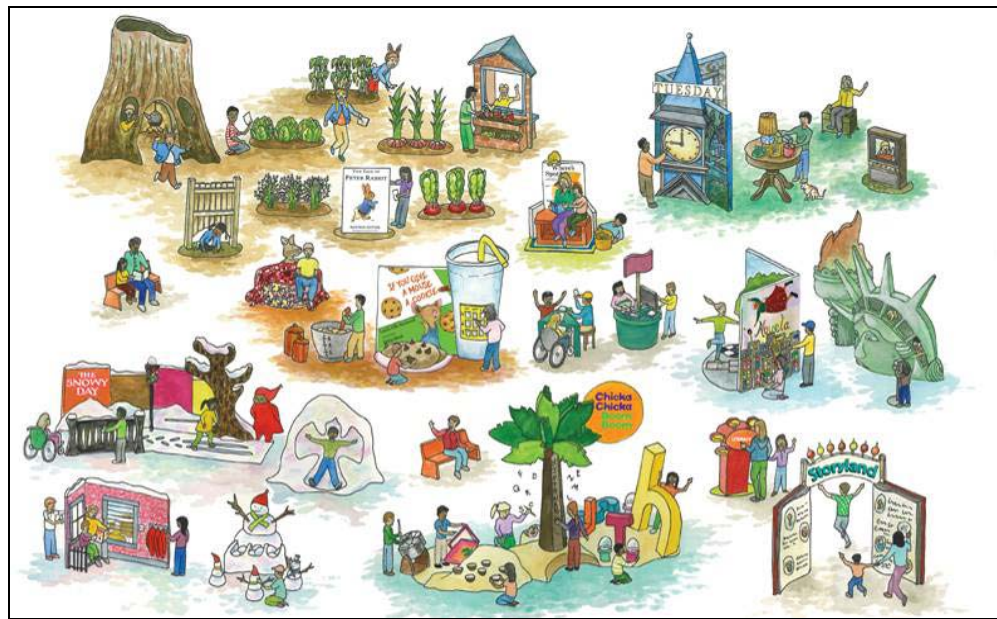
During the last reporting period, the Museum conducted extensive research and preliminary ideation and development that involved input and guidance from an advisory board of literacy experts towards the exhibits’ development. In addition, the project underwent an overall concept modification, reshaping the community partnership component, as well as formalizing the exhibit name: *Storyland: A Trip Through Childhood Favorites*. For this

reporting period, the Museum has been able to incorporate discovery from the prototyping phase into the final design for *Storyland* as well as spend time refining the adult messaging, especially the six pre-literacy skills as defined by the Public Library Association, and the Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the American Library Association. From this point forward we anticipate completing this project, hosting the exhibit on-site and touring regionally by June 2013.

During the early research and ideation phase the Museum conducted background research into children's early literacy development and best practices, and met with a select group of content experts for recommendations that were used in completing conceptual development of the exhibits (*please see appendix A for the roster of experts*).

A key outcome of this early work was changing the exhibits' stated target audience from children ages 2 through 8, to children *birth* through 8 and adults, better aligning with the exhibits' stated goals and messages. The group also encouraged the team to highlight talking and writing—in addition to reading—as important elements of literacy development, and to use multi-media messages for adults. The Museum also created concept sketches, secured permissions for use of the exhibits' featured books, and began preliminary development and design of the exhibits.

Preliminary and detailed development included a number of review phases between the exhibit team, education staff and the external content advisors. The result for this phase included a set of design drawings and a comprehensive description of the exhibit, its interactive content and an adult messaging plan. Moving forward, all of these elements will be finalized, culminating in the exhibits' production.



Storyland Detailed Design Hand Rendering

The detailed development and design phase included a particular focus on activities to specifically encourage interaction between adults and children and reflection on their exhibit experience. Through a writing and drawing station, a word play game station, and a computer
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component that presents questions based on visitors' experiences encouraging child-adult conversations. The planning and selection of exhibit props and costumes was also completed during this phase.



Word Play Game Station and Writing & Drawing Station

The team began work with a local exhibit fabrication firm, incorporating their input and fabrication expertise throughout the remaining development and design process in order to ensure the exhibits' designs align with the production budget. The team also completed prototyping of exhibit activities with children and families at the Museum, which informed additions and revisions to the exhibit design.



Prototyping activities: Matching upper and lowercase letters on the *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* tree; searching for objects in *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* garden; creating snow people in *The Snowy Day*

One of the most important developments during this period was the adult messaging. Work included a review by the external advisory board and the engagement of consultant Judith Schickedanz, a nationally recognized early literacy expert. One of the key outcomes was the revision of the six pre-reading skill definitions used in the adult messaging to more precisely align with its academic origin while maintaining commonly used language in order to be understandable to a broad audience.

Finally, the Museum launched the application process for selecting the first three community hosts on the statewide tour. After reviewing how the exhibit would meet specific needs in the community and fulfill specific community partnerships, three partners have been chosen

based on their ability to host the exhibit, anticipated reach and access to diverse audiences, and availability of staff to engage in the programming component of the exhibit:

- District 518 Early Childhood Family Education, Worthington
- Elk River Early Childhood Coalition
- Redwood Area Early Childhood Coalition, Redwood Falls.

3. Please share any significant findings or accomplishments in this period.

Learning the most effective ways to communicate ideas and messages to adults within a children's museum experience is an evolving paradigm shift in the broader museum field. The team did a significant amount of work during this period to determine its approach to integrating adult messaging in *Storyland* with the result being a robust plan to incorporate multi-sensory interactives and graphics throughout the exhibit. Through this multi-sensory approach, messaging will not rely on the graphics alone, as is common practice in exhibits, but also on audio and visual elements (pictures and symbols) that model literacy-rich interactions between children and adults. In addition, the graphics will utilize a consistent set of symbols to quickly convey messages. The planned formal evaluation of these elements in the exhibit will be useful for *Storyland*, and future exhibits.

The symbols (*see Appendix B*) used in the adult messaging graphics are based on the six pre-reading skills defined by the Public Library Association and the Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the American Library Association. The six skills are Print Motivation, Print Awareness, Vocabulary, Narrative Skills, Letter Knowledge, and Phonological Awareness. During this period, the *Storyland* team translated the six skills from academic language in order to make them more accessible to parents and other adults: Love Books, Read Everything, Learn Words, Tell Stories, Know Letters, and Hear Sounds. Work in this area continues, and will wrap up at the end of the final design phase.

Also completed during this time frame was a significant amount of design and development of the exhibit entry piece, outfitting the entrance to accomplish the dual goals of introducing the content and crediting partners and funders, and also tying it to the adult messaging by introducing the six pre-reading skills language and symbols adults will encounter throughout the exhibit.

Based on feedback from the advisory board, the team also refined the word play game station to provide multiple access levels, such as easier and more challenging questions—labeled with suggested age ranges—for families with children of different ages and varying literacy skill levels. The writing and drawing station also includes messages supporting the idea that writing at any level, from scribbles to script, is valid and is part of the literacy development process. Work also ensured that the game further reinforces the six pre-reading skills.

4. Other achievements or lessons learned in this period?

The team began working with the first three statewide tour community hosts on exhibit logistics, gathering floor plans and photos of their sites to ensure the design of the exhibit is as flexible as possible to accommodate their varying spaces. As opposed to museum galleries which are usually designed to specifically host exhibits, these sites will make use of a variety

of community buildings. District 518 Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) in Worthington will be hosting the exhibit at their West Building Learning Center, at which ECFE classes are held. Redwood Area Early Childhood Coalition will be hosting the exhibit at Redwood Falls Public Library. Elk River Early Childhood Coalition will be hosting the exhibit at the Handke Family Center, a school building owned by the district at which ECFE, Head Start and other early childhood programs are housed.

5. Conclusion

Support from the State of Minnesota's Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund has provided the means to develop this important literacy-based exhibit. Over the past 18 months, this project has matured into a fully realized exhibit concept that will empower adults to play a key role in building their child's literacy skills through an arts/cultural experience. Funding from the State has ensured the Museum can provide this educational exhibit that will enhance learning experiences for children throughout the State. Over the next two years, we will complete the designs, build the exhibit and host *Storyland* locally-- all made possible by the State of Minnesota and the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund.

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Appendix A

The goal for selecting the advisors was to build a board of specialists with diverse cultural perspectives. The following criteria were used to qualify candidates:

- Academic credentials in early literacy
- Involved in national, regional, statewide literacy programs, and/or
- Practical experience in early learning.

The advisory board is comprised of:

- **Adele Binning**, Exhibit Developer and Elementary Education Licensure Candidate with Focus on Literacy. Has over 15 years of exhibit development experience with the Science Museum of Minnesota.
- **Becky Beane**, Adjunct Instructor at Rasmussen College, Former Director of the Wicoie Nandagikendan Early Childhood Language Immersion Project of the Alliance of Early Childhood Professionals. Specializing in creating environments for children that "are as bias-free as possible."
- **Casey Cavanaugh**, First Grade Educator, Adams Spanish Immersion Magnet School, bilingual educator who teaches Spanish to native English speakers.
- **Dr. Matthew Miller**, Associate Professor, Elementary Education, Western Washington University. Experienced in exhibit development with Minnesota History Center Education. Teaches graduate level classes in literacy and creative curriculum.
- **Spencer Peterson**, Second Grade Educator, Academia Cesar Chavez, bilingual educator who teaches English to native Spanish speakers.
- **Terry Kohlmeier**, Director of Education, Parents In Community Action, Inc. (PICA) Head Start. Specializes in bilingual early literacy.
- **Yvonne Lerew**, Education Department Manager, *Comunidades Latinos Unidas en Servicio (CLUES)*. A bilingual education specialist and former Education Program Coordinator at Refugee and Immigration Center. Expertise in program implementation, organizational leadership and cross-cultural communication.

National Advisor

Judith Schickedanz a professor at Boston University in the Department of Literacy and Language, Counseling and Development, is the author of *Much More than the ABC's and Increasing the Power of Instruction: Integration of Language, Literacy, and Math Across the Preschool Day* (NAEYC, 1999; and 2008) and co-author of *Writing in Preschool: Orchestrating Meaning and Marks* (IRA, 2009). Schickedanz serves as a literacy consultant to several Early Reading First projects.

DRAFT ILLUSTRATION





Minnesota Children's Museum
Smart Play

Storyland: A Trip Through Childhood Favorites
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