TOOLKIT

CAMPUS

EXHIBITIONS

IN ADVANCEMENT OF CIVIC AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Campus Compact

NATIONAL MUSEUM AND CENTER FOR SERVICE

Welcome

Campus Compact launched the Campus Museums of Service initiative in partnership with the National Museum and Center for Service in 2023.

This open-source Toolkit is the product of our six-member Design Team who convened throughout 2023–2024 and who are committed to sharing exhibitions that tell the stories of our communities and the ways that students, staff, and faculty are engaging meaningfully with them. We hope the Toolkit will be a helpful resource for campuses across our network seeking to advance civic and community engagement in innovative ways.

This Toolkit was part of a larger initiative by the National Museum and Center for Service to establish a physical museum near the National Mall in Washington DC. While they work towards this goal, they partnered with Campus Compact and others to develop three toolkits showcasing how to develop community-based exhibitions. These additional toolkits, one focused on exhibitions with PK–12 schools and one in partnership with community organizations, can be found on their website.

Toolkit Contents

Project Team

Urkovia Andrews
Assistant Director for Service-Learning, Office of Leadership & Community Engagement, Georgia Southern University

Alexandra Byrum
Campus Compact 2023–2024 Campus Exhibitions Fellow & Project Team Lead
Director of Communications and Community Relations, Bonner Center for Civic Engagement, University of Richmond

Mariam Ismail
Digital Projects Coordinator
Virginia Tech Publishing, Virginia Tech

Gina Lee-Olukoya
Director of Civic Life, Office of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Leslie Lombre
Director, External Relations, Leo T. McCarthy Center for Public Service and the Common Good, University of San Francisco

Shelley Errington Nicholson
Dean of Students
Greenfield Community College

Ashley Sawyer
Project Coordinator
National Museum and Center for Service

Laura Weaver
Special Project Manager
Campus Compact

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Introduction

Designed with faculty and administrators in mind, this toolkit centers five exhibition case studies and a framework for exhibition planning. It is a starting point if you'd like to develop an exhibition in collaboration with other stakeholders.

Every campus is unique, with different opportunities and challenges, but we hope this toolkit will provide helpful guidelines and examples that center civic and community engagement in their focus and/or through their development. In other words, some of the exhibitions are *about* civic and community engagement and some are the *result of* community-engaged processes. The toolkit is not an attempt to represent the full scope of exhibitions at institutional museums, nor does it represent the only ways of sharing your campus-community's stories of civic and community engagement.

Exhibitions may be curated for a gallery space or a hallway. They may be created with existing resources, or a modest or medium-sized budget, or in some cases, a six-figure grant. Designing and fabrication may be done in-house or in collaboration with outside partners or consultants. Whatever form they take, campuses of higher education and community partner sites can house exhibitions that inspire meaningful civic action, deepen understanding of our communities and complex and interconnected social issues, and provide new opportunities for collaboration and learning.

Why Create an Exhibition?

Museums across the world are wrestling with questions of their role in catalyzing public engagement. Likewise, institutions of higher education are committed to preparing students for active citizenship. Exhibitions on campus and collaborations with local museums or community partners can play a pivotal role in meeting our highest aspirations.

Here are a few reasons to create an exhibition centered on civic and community engagement.

⭐ **Exhibitions celebrate, inform, and inspire service and action.**

⭐ **Exhibitions amplify stories that need to be told.**

⭐ **Exhibitions invite meaningful community-campus dialogue and reflection.**

⭐ **Exhibitions provide deep learning through interdisciplinary collaboration, research, and creative thinking.**

⭐ **Exhibitions advance key community-campus partnerships.**

What is the purpose of your exhibition?
Use the worksheet at the end of this guide with your team to plan your exhibition.

Selected Resources

Benetua, L., Simon, N., & Garcia, S. M. (2018). *Community issue exhibition toolkit*. Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History. https://c3.santacruzmah.org/toolkit/

Klobe, T. (2012). *Exhibitions: Concept, planning and design*. AAM Press of the American Association of Museums.

Lord, G. D., & Lord, B. (1999). *The manual of museum planning*. Altamira Press.

McKenna-Cress, P. & Kamien, J. A. (2013). *Creating exhibitions: Collaboration in the planning, development, and design of innovative experiences*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Murawski, M. (2021). *Museums as agents of change: A guide to becoming a changemaker*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Piacente, M. (2022). *Manual of museum exhibitions*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Serrell, B. (2015). *Exhibit labels: An interpretive approach*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Silverman, L. H. (2020). *The social work of museums*. Routledge.

Simon, N. (2016). *The art of relevance*. Museum 2.0. https:// artofrelevance.org

Smithsonian Exhibits (n.d.). *A guide to exhibit development*. Smithsonian Exhibits. https://exhibits.si.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Guide-to-Exhibit-Development.pdf

The J. Paul Getty Museum. (2011). *Complete guide to adult audience interpretive materials: Gallery texts and graphics*. J. Paul Getty Trust. https://www.getty.edu/education/museum_educators/downloads/aaim_quickguide.pdf

Defining the Exhibition Purpose

The first step in planning an exhibition is to articulate your purpose and to identify the main idea you want to communicate to viewers. We recommend defining the exhibition purpose in collaboration with other stakeholders—community partners, staff, faculty, and students.

As you think about your goals, consider possible exhibition content—photographs, objects, text panels, other materials—and how you plan to organize the exhibition.

Key Questions to Consider

What is the purpose of your exhibition?
- What do you want to communicate to viewers about your community?
- What are your goals for the exhibition?

How are you centering civic and community engagement?
- Is your exhibition organized around a key concept, social issue, or historical moment?
- Is your exhibition honoring stories of your community?
- Is your exhibition celebrating service and action?
- Is your exhibition deepening connections between your institution and your community?

Who is your target audience?
- How will your target audience inform your planning (location, content, writing, etc.)?
- How will you ensure that your exhibition speaks to your intended audience?

How does this exhibition align with your organization's mission, vision, and values?
- How will your institutional or organizational civic and community engagement priorities inform your planning?

"Exhibitions are about meaning: they are intentional creations, planned and installed to express something: ideas, impressions, experience or even just visual access to objects."

Gail Dexter Lord and Barry Lord
The Manual of Museum Planning

Collaboration & Funding

Stakeholders & Venues

Exhibitions are almost always developed in collaboration with other stakeholders. It's important to identify your exhibition committee and/or partners at the beginning of your planning. As administrators or faculty, we should consider many different stakeholders for our exhibition projects.

Students can play many roles in the development of an exhibition, from photographer to designer to curator.

Community partners may be eager to partner with you on an exhibition project to amplify their work, and to connect students, staff, and faculty to engagement opportunities.

When exploring possible venues, it's best to reach out to potential campus partners, local museums, and libraries well in advance. Possible exhibition venues may be a wall in a campus building, at the entrance to a dining hall, the center of the campus library, a formal gallery space, or community partner headquarters. There are many venue options for creating impactful exhibitions.

Funding

Many times you will need to secure funding for your exhibition. This may come through your department budget or grants from organizations such at the National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities, or your local community foundation. We recommend reaching out to your institution's office of development or advancement to identify potential funding.

Large teams are often behind major museum exhibition projects.

For campus exhibitions, the team may be smaller, but the work still takes place in these key areas:

Administration: project management, scheduling meetings, ensuring space availability, and funding

Curatorial: exhibition content and writing

Design and Production: design and production of any panels, labels, or other exhibition materials

Installation: installing all exhibition pieces

Programming: connected educational events or resources such as the exhibition opening

Promotion: all marketing and communications

✳ When created in the context of a community-based learning class, there is an opportunity to engage your students on project teams or to assign work as it best suits the learning goals of your class.

Key Questions to Consider

How will the exhibition be developed in collaboration with community partners?
- How will you connect with campus partners to further the impact of your exhibition?
- If you're working with a community partner to develop the exhibition, how will you ensure that it is a mutually beneficial collaboration?
- Will the exhibition be part of a community-based learning course?

How will the exhibition be funded?
- What are the costs of the exhibition?
- Are there institutional or external grants that you can apply for?

Creating a Project Timeline

Exhibitions are developed over the course of several months, sometimes a year or more, depending on the scope of your project. Every project has a different timeline, but creating a project plan and schedule is critical.

It's helpful to identify when you hope to open the exhibition and work backwards, ensuring that there is enough time to develop your content and print all of your panels and labels. Depending on the printer you are using, it may take up to three weeks for printing.

Below is a sample timeline for how an exhibition might develop over 10 weeks.

Sample Timeline

Weeks 1–3	Exhibition proposal and building support
Weeks 4–6	Research and content development
Weeks 7–8	Writing, editing, and design
Weeks 9–10	Exhibition installation and opening

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Exhibition proposal and building support

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Weeks 9—10
Exhibition installation and opening

Key Questions to Consider

When do you hope to open your exhibition?
- Will there be an exhibition opening event?
- Is the exhibition tied to another event, festival, occasion?

Does the project need to be completed within the academic year or a single semester?
- How will your timeline or syllabi support the completion of the project?

Creating the Exhibition

Exhibitions can feature a wide variety of content including art, original or reproduction photographs, archival material, objects, multimedia, books, poems, and interactive displays. They typically include the following components:

- **Exhibition title**
- **Introductory panel with an exhibition description and acknowledgement of the creators**
- **Main exhibition content**

Deciding what to include in an exhibition and wrestling with your many options—Why this photograph and not the other?—is part of what makes this work both stimulating and challenging.

Depending on the scale of your exhibition, you may want to have an **object list** with important details. This spreadsheet can include artist, title, date, source, description, status, community organization/ representation, service component, etc. Online catalogs, such as the Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Online Catalog, Yale Digital Content, and the New York Public Library Digital Collections, are excellent sources for pulling historical content.

Section Panels & Labels

Many exhibitions also include section panels and most include labels. Section panels introduce new themes or a set of objects within the exhibition while Labels provide information about each object.

Labels should include:

- **The artist's name** *if available*
- **The artist's nationality, birth year** *optional*
- **Title** *(in bold or italic)* **and year the work was created**
- **Medium used to create the work**
- **Brief description.** *This is where you include any information such as why and how the piece was created or inforation about the artist.*

The J. Paul Getty Museum's Complete Guide to Adult Audience Interpretive Materials: Gallery Texts and Graphics offers excellent examples of labels.

Interactive Components

Exhibitions provide opportunity for reflection on some of your communities' most pressing challenges and inequalities. Including interactivity in the exhibition enables designers to engage viewers. Your exhibition not only serves as a platform for sharing stories and ideas but also vehicle for open dialogue and connecting people of differing perspectives.

Editing

Exhibition text should be edited to ensure accuracy, correct spelling and grammar, and consistent tone. If the exhibition is being developed as part of a community–based learning class, it's particularly important to allow enough time for this step in the syllabi.

✳ Helpful Tools

Check out these helpful tools for creating your exhibition:

- For panels, labels, and other visualizations: Canva, Adobe Express, and Kumu
- For online exhibitions: WordPress, Knightlab's Storymap, and Genially
- For integrating sound or video: Audacity and DaVinci Resolve

Key Questions to Consider

How are you working with community partners and project team members on the exhibition?
- Are you meeting regularly with collaborators to ensure that everyone's voice is heard and you're all on the same page?

What is the content of your exhibition?
- Will the exhibition be virtual or in person or both?
- Will you include objects, photographs, or other materials?
- How does the exhibition content contribute to the central idea?
- What criteria are you using to select the content for the exhibition? Who has final say?
- What display options are available to you? (i.e. display case, tables, shelves)

What is your exhibition narrative?
- How is your exhibition organized and does each section and major themes all relate to the main idea?
- Do you have a specific target outcome or call to action for the audience?
- Will there be a leaflet, guide, or other distributable material accompanying the exhibition to provide additional context to visitors?
- How does the content reflect diversity and inclusivity?

Will there be an interactive component of your exhibition?
- Do you want to engage your audience in a response or action related to the exhibition?
- What logistical and technical support will be needed for the exhibition setup?
- What platforms or technologies will you use?

Exhibition Costs

Exhibition costs vary widely depending on your content. Carleton College provides two different examples of exhibition budgets on their Teaching with Exhibitions website.

Small-scale photography display
Consisted of 40 photos with labels. Photos were mounted in the hallway using 3M adhesive tabs.

8x10 inch photos printed on photo paper	40	$95.00
3M adhesive tabs	4 packs	$12.50
Total		**$107.50**

Large-scale photography exhibition with additional programming
Consisted of approximately 20 framed photos with labels. Exhibition was displayed at Gould Library. The opening featured a guest lecturer and expert in the field.

Frames & plexiglass for mounting photos	$684.00
Shipping photos to & from international institution	$400.00
Publicity posters for Exhibition and Opening	$10.80
Artist honorarium	$600.00
Guest Lecturer honorarium, travel, accommodations & food	$2,820.00
Opening reception catered refreshments	$250.00
Total	**$4,765.00**

Marketing the Exhibition

Promoting the exhibition through posters, digital flyers, social media, and direct email is an important step in the exhibition process. Many campus communications offices will also support a media release about your exhibition.

Key Questions to Consider

How will you promote the exhibition on campus and beyond?
- Do you have a plan for generating coverage, including a media release and invitations for journalists (student or professional) to write about the exhibition?
- Who can you invite to visit the exhibition, including local schools and community partners?

How will you honor your community in the opening celebration?

How will you engage your campus and greater community in the exhibition throughout the time that it's on view?
- Will you host relevant programming?

Measuring Impact

Thinking about evaluation measures sometimes falls to the bottom of the list, but it's **important to consider with your project team what success will look like for you and for your community partners.**

Key Questions to Consider

What metrics will you use to measure the success of your exhibition?
- Will you capture attendance numbers, social media engagement, or audience critiques?
- How will you ensure your project team and community partners are part of the conversation and that you understand what evaluation measures would be most useful to your partners?

Will you collect feedback from visitors through surveys, comment cards, or online forms?
- What are common themes or comments, and how can it inform future exhibitions?
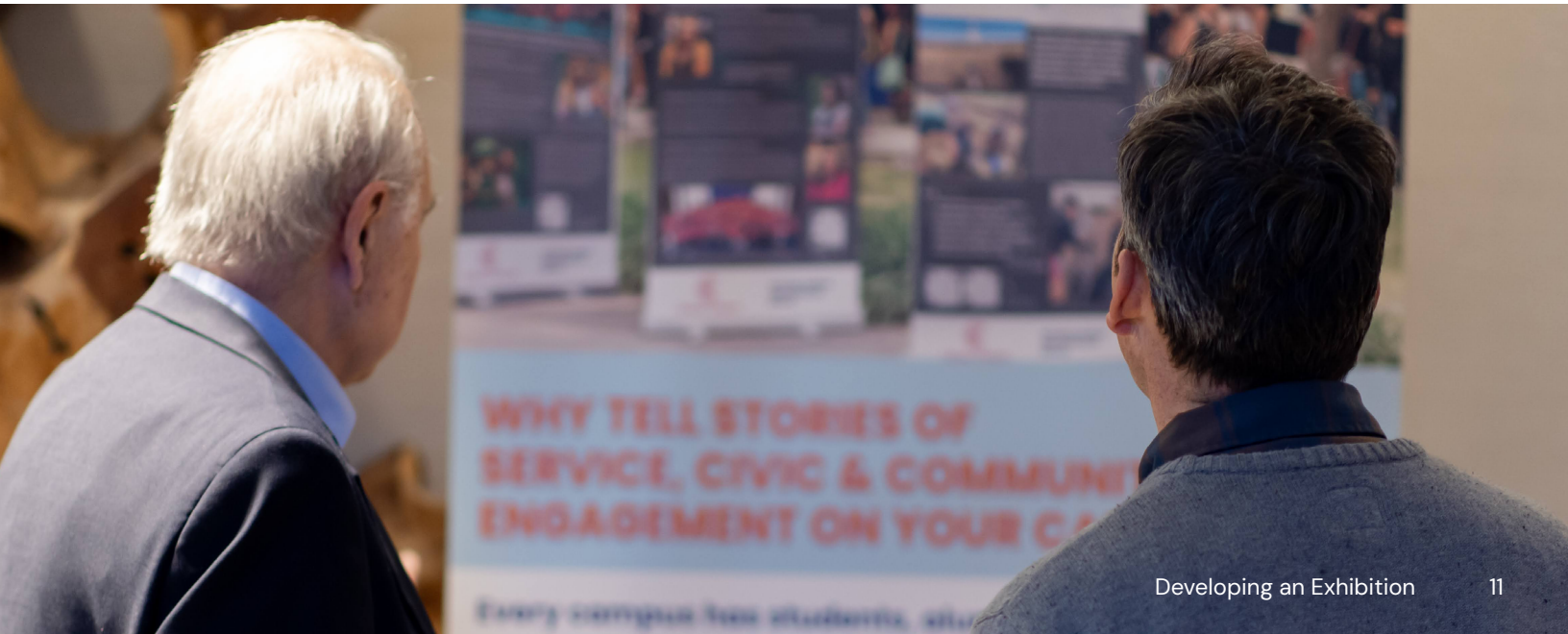
NATIONAL MUSEUM AND CENTER FOR SERVICE

About NMCFS

The National Museum and Center for Service is a national organization developing a truly national museum and center dedicated to honoring and inspiring service in ALL its forms.

Campus Compact

Campus Compact
89 South Street, Suite 603
Boston, MA 02210

compact.org

About Campus Compact

Campus Compact is a national coalition of colleges and universities committed to advancing the public puroses of higher education.