

THE BAKKEN MUSEUM LEARNING FRAMEWORK

BACKGROUND. The Bakken Museum, a science museum and library focusing on the history and nature of electricity and magnetism, occupies a gracious 1930's home located on the chain of lakes in Minneapolis (MN). In 2009 the Museum launched a round of organizational planning. Through a *real-time strategic planning* process that actively engaged staff and board, The Bakken committed itself to:

Inspiring a passion for science and its potential for social good by helping people explore the history and nature of electricity and magnetism.

The effort also defined The Bakken's audience; clarified its intended impact, competitive advantage, and business model; and crafted an approach for assessing complex issues and making decisions. Planning also laid the foundation for articulating how The Bakken would accomplish its mission and achieve its impact through exhibits, programs, and collections.

With guidance and direction from its strategic plan, The Bakken began development of a Learning Framework and Exhibit Master Plan in Spring 2009. A Learning Framework is a strong set of foundational ideas consistent with a museum's vision, mission, and values. It consolidates the most important ideas around a museum's learning interests and its potential to create and deliver value, in particular learning value, for its visitors and the community. An Exhibit Master Plan applies the Framework to a museum's exhibit experiences, identifying exhibit topics, providing direction for specific exhibits, and identifying criteria for planning and assessing exhibits.

PROCESS. An interactive and inclusive planning process engaged staff in viewing The Bakken's learning interests through the fresh perspective of its new strategic framework. Echoing its mission, The Bakken's learning focus emerged as *the science and history of electricity and magnetism*. A rich set of ideas incorporates the perspective of the human experience, emphasizes the process of *doing* science, and positions science in a social context to distinguish The Bakken and highlight its learning and public value. By deepening its understanding of these ideas, The Bakken is able to integrate them into exhibits and programs as messages, through artifacts and activities, and staff facilitation.

RESULTS. The Framework and Plan build on The Bakken's expertise and what it does well. Through an established school partnership program, it develops Science Assets in students and teachers. A collection of rare books, manuscripts, and scientific instruments is available for research and exhibit and program planning. Exhibits bring together interactive experiences and artifacts from the collection for learners of every age to explore the science and history of electricity and magnetism. Staff, well prepared to interact with visitors of all ages, lead tours, and facilitate workshops.

A sharpened sense of the role of exhibits is the starting point for the Exhibit Master Plan that will play out over five years. Guided by the Plan, The Bakken's exhibits will:

- Serve its full audience;
- Focus on learning areas in which it can offer learning value;
- Provide a robust platform for varied, engaging learning experiences;
- Optimize use of the facility and site, managing the challenge of small exhibit spaces; and
- Attract interest and support from stakeholders.