

WONDERSCOPE CHILDREN'S MUSEUM EXHIBIT MASTER PLAN

BACKGROUND. Wonderscope Children's Museum of Kansas City (WCMKC) was a new children's museum with a fifteen-year history of serving children in the Kansas City area. Between May 2007 and May 2008, three Kansas City area children's museums merged. Wonderscope Children's Museum, Beyond the Book and Children's Museum of Kansas City shared a commitment to young children and the important adults in their lives, confidence in the power of learning through play and a belief in the value of rich connections among arts sciences and literature. An opportunity to reinvent a children's museum, consolidate the experience and expertise of these three museums, and a vision of becoming a regional resource inspired a major planning effort.

PROCESS. In parallel with other planning for a new museum, Wonderscope engaged Vergeront Museum Planning (Minneapolis, MN) and Argyle Design, Inc (Brooklyn, NY) to lead an exhibit master planning process that would:

Create a shared vision for how the Museum can deliver dynamic, relevant interactive learning experiences that *spark a lifelong love of learning through the power of play.*

Between January and July 2008 a planning process actively engaged representatives from all three museums. Members of the New Museum Planning Team, the board, staff and selected stakeholders explored WCMKC's most significant educational interests in order to forge a common foundation for all of its learning experiences and create a plan for compelling, interactive exhibits that deliver learning value to its audience.

RESULTS. The process actively affirmed a commitment to all children 10 years and under, their families, caregivers, and educators in the Kansas City region. At the same time the process deepened the Museum's understanding of the connections between play and learning, of targeting experiences for specific age and developmental groups as well as framed potential learner impacts.

Four complementary educational assets through which WCMKC can deliver educational value and serve its full age range with choice emerged through planning. Exhibits, programs, a recycled materials center and community outreach together position WCMKC as a multi-dimensional learning and community resource for the Kansas City region.

A dynamic set of interactive exhibits form the centerpiece of the new Museum. Grounded in the Museum's understanding of its educational value, of its audience and distinguishing it from other informal learning and leisure settings for families, WCMKC's interactive exhibit experiences will encourage varied types of play, offer solid content across the arts, sciences and literacy and invite adult engagement. A set of preliminary concept drawings and descriptions capture activities and design for twelve exhibit areas in 20,000 square feet of space inside and out.

In imagining a new children's museum and a regional resource, WCMKC moved to a distinctly new position on the regional landscape. Its Exhibit Master Plan was a keystone in this effort and central to forging a robust organization and identity for Wonderscope Children's Museum of Kansas City.