

# TELUS WORLD OF SCIENCE & CREATIVE KIDS MUSEUM LEARNING PLAN

**BACKGROUND.** Once in a museum's life, if it is very fortunate, it is able to re-think its future. It may re-craft its mission, vision, and values; create a new home; and perhaps change its community's cultural landscape. Often the choices in these major projects emphasize civic prominence or architectural greatness. Less often is serious and sustained attention given to an institution's community relevance. In planning the new TELUS World of Science and Creative Kids Museum (Calgary), the leadership completed a market analysis, facility master plan, feasibility study, and fundraising plan. What distinguished their planning, however, was a commitment to probing the meaningfulness of the Centre's and Museum's relationship with its community and, pushing harder on the issue of how to increase their capacity to be helpful.

**PROCESS.** With a deep and shared commitment to learning, the organizations engaged Jeanne Vergeront (Vergeront Museum Planning; MN) and Lorrie Beaumont (Evergreene Research and Evaluation; IL) to develop a comprehensive Learning Plan to guide planning for an expanded science centre and a new children's museum. The Plan, set in the context of the community, focused on the learner, probed a strategy for innovation in learning and set a course for implementation.

Grounded in a study of Calgary and Southern Alberta, a Learning Backdrop explored the promise and challenge of the region over the next decade. It examined how museums positively impact their communities and research and theory that show how museums can focus their expertise to motivate learning. A Learning Framework articulated core ideas around the learning value the Centre and Museum bring to the audience and community. With the learner at the center, the Framework created a platform to guide planning and evaluation of all learning experiences to inspire learners *to make courageous choices that change their lives and community*. The Renaissance Learning Centre is an ambitious approach to being an authentic learner-centred and learning organization. A multi-dimensional resource providing access to current ideas on informal learning, it will facilitate both continuous improvement of the Museum and Centre's learning experiences, and a broadly shared learner-centred approach across the entire organization. Finally a Learning Agenda laid out what the organization must accomplish to fully implement the Framework and build state-of-the-art learning knowledge into all it does. It addressed the processes and tools for creating new, compelling learning experiences and for on-going capacity building.

**RESULTS.** This work placed the organization in decidedly new territory where being authentically guest and learner driven is innovative. Museums have typically been guided by learning theory borrowed from researchers primarily interested in schools. But museums are not schools. As they have engaged in more research and evaluation, the limits of borrowing theory from one learning setting and applying it to another have become clear. New theories are emerging and they are accommodating the rich, distinctive museum context and providing methodologies and measures that recognize social, cultural, affective as well as cognitive outcomes.

TELUS World of Science and Creative Kids Museum will be moving forward with a new model. The old model plans for and measures what content or factoids can be taught. A learner-centered approach uses a learner's interests, personal agenda, and prior experience to motivate and extend learning. This shift is possibly counter-intuitive, undoubtedly gradual, and full of unknowns. It is also full of promise, new best practices, and innovation that will create value for the learner, for TELUS World of Science and Creative Kids Museum and for Calgary and Southern Alberta.