

WHITE PAPER: SPARKS! IGNITION GRANTS FOR MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

1. ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

- Institution: Minnesota Children's Museum
- Project Title: Parent Messaging Initiative
- Award Amount: \$25,000
- Project Date: October 1, 2015-September 30, 2016
- Program Director: Nichole Polifka
- Project Team: Nichole Polifka- Director of Learning & Impact, Barbara Hahn- Vice President of Learning Innovation, Bob Ingrassia- Vice President of External Relations, Jamie Brother- Learning Experience Specialist

2. PROJECT SUMMARY

The Parent Messaging Initiative, a project consisting of a technology scan and a national convening of children's museum professionals, resulted in key information and insights that helped shape Minnesota Children's Museum plan to effectively engage parenting adults. Minnesota Children's Museum set out to determine the best way to share information on the power and benefits of play, and ultimately build a community committed to supporting learning through play.

Research shows that play is critical to healthy brain and overall development. Yet, children play an average of eight hours per week less today than they did just 20 years ago. Children are missing opportunities to develop skills needed in an ever-changing, innovative world in school, at work, in relationships, and throughout their entire lives.

Many children's museums across the country include play as part of their mission and/or vision. Through championing the power of play, we are committed to supporting parents in understanding, embracing and practicing playful learning with their children—at Minnesota Children's Museum and in all settings.

With the help of the Sparks! Ignition Grant, the Parent Messaging Initiative was an opportunity for Minnesota Children's Museum to conduct a scan of the ways in which technology is being used to engage and educate parents across the museum field . Through extensive research into effective practices, Minnesota Children's Museum is creating a Parent Education: Mobile Engagement Platform. In addition, a cohort of children's museum professionals convened to identify best practices for engaging with and educating parents on the benefits of play. Strategies and information shared at the convening have informed parent education and engagement priorities and plans. These projects were invaluable in informing the approach and strategies used to support and engage parenting adults.

Minnesota Children's Museum's goal is to develop a parent engagement initiative that brings content to parents through a variety of channels including the web, social media, texting, in person events, in-gallery messaging and staff modeling. These tools will help us share the importance of play along with practical ways that parents can incorporate more play into their children's lives. As we move forward, using what we learned from the technology scan and the convening, we plan to share content with parenting adults in two content categories: 1) the benefits of play and 2) how to effectively support play.

3. PROCESS

TECHNOLOGY SCAN

The focus of the technology scan was to gather information about how children's museums, cultural organizations and other entertainment entities engage visitors via technology. The museum engaged a

strategic communications agency, Evantage, to conduct a thorough scan of the mobile and onsite technology landscape. The agency performed a literature review and looked in-depth at technology projects at dozens of institutions nationwide. Evantage interviewed officials at five organizations to gain further knowledge and perspective. The analysis also included the downloading and test use of a variety of mobile technology solutions in use by various institutions.

After conducting research into the use of mobile and digital communications technology, Evantage shared the findings with Minnesota Children's Museum. The vast range of type, use and application of technology led to specific questions Evantage felt the museum needed to consider before further developing high-level content. In addition, they recommended developing a plan to evaluate ever-changing technology options and content approaches in the new museum.

PARENT CONVENING

In December 2015, Minnesota Children's Museum began planning an event to convene children's museum leaders from across the country to share information and further best practices around parent education. Minnesota Children's Museum hosted the invitation-only convening during the annual industry conference, Interactivity, in Stamford, Connecticut. The invitation list was composed of select members of the Association of Children's Museums (ACM), including the Interactivity 2016 host museum, as well as museums connected to the ACM Research Network. Hosting at Interactivity, rather than at Minnesota Children's Museum, was a course correction, in response to the museum's revised construction timeline and offering the opportunity to leverage the conference time and setting. The event, entitled *Parent Education: What's Working, What's Not*, engaged representatives of fifteen children's museums. Participating museum professionals shared their parent education goals and examples of strategies considered "massive successes" and "epic fails."

Eighteen children's museums were invited to participate in the convening at ACM Interactivity 2016. Invitations were extended to museums with a variety of demographic characteristics including: Bay Area Discovery Museum, Boston Children's Museum, Chicago Children's Museum, Children's Discovery Museum of San Jose, Children's Museum of Denver at Marsico Campus, Children's Museum of Indianapolis, Children's Museum of Manhattan, Children's Museum of Phoenix, Children's Museum of Pittsburgh, Children's Museum of South Dakota, Children's Museum of Tacoma, DuPage Children's Museum, Marbles Kids Museum, Omaha Children's Museum, Portland Children's Museum, Providence Children's Museum, Stepping Stones Museum for Children, and The Magic House.

Fifteen museums accepted the invitation and engaged in "pre-work," where each museum shared information about their museum overall, as well as organizational goals and role and strategies in relation to parent engagement and education. Representatives provided an example of a "massive success" and an "epic failure" in their respective museum's parent engagement and education work. The failures and successes were summarized and shared to crowd source presentation topics for the May convening. The convening was tailored using the most compelling examples of successes and failures in working with parenting adults based on other participants' votes.

In May 2016, twenty-one children's museum professionals from fifteen museums gathered to hear the massive successes and epic fails from five different museums, including Minnesota Children's Museum. The six examples, three failures and three successes, were presented in 10-minute presentations and additional 10-minute question and answer time periods. The half-day gathering offered time to reflect and tease apart the threads running through the failures and successes across museums. Participants

shared resulting goals or aspirations as well as takeaways and overall feedback about the convening through a written survey (Appendix A).

4. PROJECT RESULTS

TECHNOLOGY SCAN

The technology scan provided an up-to-date compilation of examples and trends in the use of digital technology in museums and other cultural organizations (Appendix B). Evantage shared five trends and observations key to the use of technology in museums and cultural organizations. Those trends and observations include: 1) BYOD, Bring Your Own Device, a key driver in choosing mobile apps; 2) The use of free (or sponsored) Wi-Fi, as well as device charging stations to accommodate BYOD learning experiences; 3) A growing consumer expectation for delivering contextual content through interactive kiosks and large displays and the evolving use of location awareness technology; 4) A strong desire for social media sharing by millennial adults with young children; 5) Allowing visitors to explore emerging technology during their museum visit, (e.g.: augmented or virtual reality).

Results highlighted that leveraging technology could amplify the museum's goal of engaging parenting adults in recognizing, appreciating and supporting learning through play within the museum and beyond. An additional benefit of the use of technology could be to optimize visitor experiences. Evantage offered five specific considerations for Minnesota Children's Museum in pursuing the use of technology for our particular setting and parent education and engagement goals. The considerations included: 1) Connecting Exhibit to Learning; 2) Enhancing Non-Exhibit Experience; 3) Ensuring Low Disruption to Child-Parent Interaction; 4) Creating Out-of-Museum Continuity and 5) Providing Ease of Use (Ensuring Accessibility).

The technology scan resulted in a helpful list of questions for all museums to consider (see Recommendations). Leaders at Minnesota Children's Museum reflected on these seven questions to determine the most useful technology strategies for delivering parent education in our setting. Discussions of the results and questions by the leadership team were used to develop a Parent Education: Mobile Engagement Platform for Minnesota Children's Museum (See Appendix C).

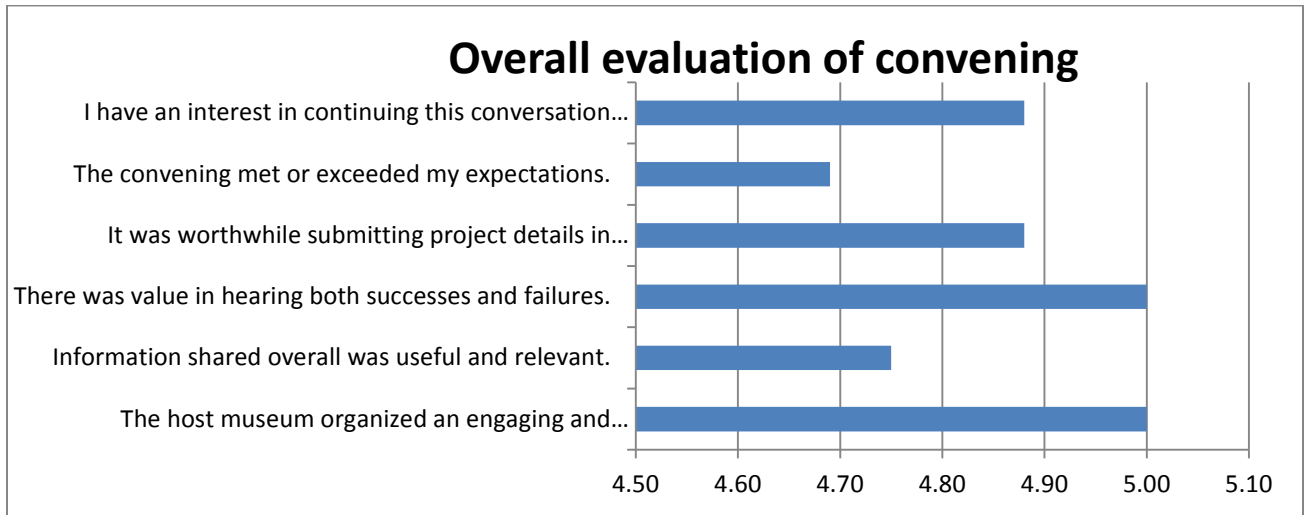
PARENT CONVENING

Success of the national convening was evaluated by participation, feedback from participants and concrete positive steps that resulted from information shared and connections made during the event. The gathering of a total of 21 representatives, representing 15 different museums, convened for four hours on May 4, 2016, in Stamford, CT. Representatives from five different museums shared details of their failures and successes with the remaining participants. The audience engaged with the presenters and the group through thoughtful questions, meaningful connections and shared reflections.

All participants were given an evaluation form to share their feedback about the convening. The form included six Likert scale questions and four open-ended questions. Participants ranked the organization, information and value of the convening on a scale of 5 (agree) to 1 (disagree). Open-ended questions asked respondents to share their top takeaway, a goal or aspiration resulting from the convening, three words to describe the national convening and space was provided for any additional comments. Five of the twenty-one participants were from Minnesota Children's Museum; therefore, we received feedback from sixteen participants. Analysis of the feedback forms revealed that all respondents felt the convening was engaging and interesting (100%- 5). When asked if the information shared overall was useful and relevant, twelve out of sixteen participants agreed (5) and the remaining four participants mostly agreed (4). All respondents (100%-5) also saw value in hearing both successes and failures. Several respondents commented that hearing about failures was helpful. One participant wrote, "I really

appreciated the failures- I took so much away from seeing and hearing what was learned through those experiences.” The convening met or exceeded the expectations of 69% of participants (11) with the remaining mostly agreeing (4). Based on these evaluations, the convening was successful in meeting the goals set forth in the proposed project. See Figure 1 for likert scale results.

FIGURE 1: Overall Evaluation of Convening Feedback: Ratings: 1 disagree to 5 agree



The convening was also successful in influencing thinking about parent education and engagement at Minnesota Children’s Museum. The five participants from MCM took notes and recorded reflections throughout the convening. We discussed our key takeaways while at Interactivity 2016 and upon returning to Minnesota Children’s Museum. Some of our takeaways were that:

- Several museums have spent time evolving their messaging to parents, and in the end have taken a “strengths-based” approach to their parent education, referring to it as parent “support” and “engagement” rather than “education,” explicitly validating what parents are already doing and being careful about tone
- Asking parents/adults what they want or need is a necessary step, yet answers are often limited to conventional answers, or limited by what they currently know
- Most museums wrestle with how to effectively communicate the concept of “learning through play,” i.e.: it is a vague term and is in need of continued work to communicate the value
- Testing the meaning and impact of messages directly with visitors using open-ended questions such as “what does this mean to you?” is a valuable exercise

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

TECHNOLOGY SCAN

The technology scan surfaced concepts and questions that extended beyond the role of technology in parent education. It highlighted areas where choices and prioritization are needed to inform a broader technology strategy. The following are the questions and issues that any children’s museum should tackle and consider before embarking on a technology strategy:

- Educating parents in or out of the museum
- Tech experience geared solely towards parents or children as well

- Device usage in exhibits or museum common areas
- Native apps or mobile-responsive experience
- Ubiquitous or emerging technology
- Device dependent or hands-free (non-disruptive) technology
- BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) or loaner device programs

PARENT CONVENING

Through feedback and reflection from the national convening of children's museum professionals, Minnesota Children's Museum recommends that children's museums consider their thinking about parent education and how they view "parent education." Having a strengths-based view of parents leads us to thinking of our work as parent support or parent engagement. When we engage parents, we consider and validate where they are and ensure our tone reflects that understanding. Participants in the convening discussed the importance of asking parents what they need, rather than making assumptions about what they need. When gathering information from parenting adults, we may receive conventionally appropriate responses, telling us what they think we want to hear. Another step in evaluating the messages being shared with parenting adults is to ask them directly. Rather than waiting for visitors to see the messages, pointing out the messages and asking open-ended questions about what is valuable is a more direct way of evaluating the impact of the message to parents. Using a variety of approaches within a comprehensive engagement platform is necessary to communicate the power of playful learning. Effectively communicating the power of play is a challenge for many museums so continuing to connect with other children's museum colleagues through ongoing dialogue and reflection on effective *and unsuccessful* strategies supports this challenging work.

6. NEXT STEPS

One of our main organizational goals is to help parents recognize, appreciate and support the learning that happens through play – at the Museum and beyond. We aim to achieve this goal in a variety of ways – through content on various MCM channels, social media activations, media relations, grassroots events and onsite messaging.

As a result of the Parent Engagement Initiative, the leadership team at Minnesota Children's Museum developed Parent Education/Engagement Priorities & Plans (Appendix D) in service of our community impact goal: "Parents embrace their children's playful learning in the museum and beyond." Our first priority is to engage our members and general admission visitors through museum experiences and offering "fun, bite-size" ideas to take home connected to their experiences in the gallery. We will engage our members with a variety of technology and social media platforms for learning and sharing. The convening inspired us to use a variety of tactics to reach parenting adults, both on-site and off-site, including in-gallery signage, staff modeling, web content, social media as well as membership and other printed materials and events for visitors.

Our second priority is to reach the broader community with the message of powerful play. We will expand connections in the community and meet parents "where they are" by interacting when childhood development is top of mind for them. By leveraging pediatricians, corporate and community events and offering pop-up experiences in the community, we can connect with parenting adults throughout the community.

The leadership team at Minnesota Children's Museum reviewed the technology scan results and considered the seven key questions to determine a direction for the use of technology in the museum's parent education and engagement work. Based on those discussions, the museum will pursue in-

museum digital technology as a component of our strategy to advance the power of play with our members and visitors. Additionally, the engagement approach extends beyond the museum, prioritizing tech/mobile-based interventions to effect change in attitudes and behaviors and in advancing our vision that “Kids play more. Adults do, too. We thrive as a happier, healthier and more innovative community through the radiant power of play.” Our goal is for parenting adults to interact and actively participate in experiences *with* their child, therefore, any technology use should not interrupt the adult-child experience and should not put a device directly between the parent and child. We will leverage BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) because of the high adoption of mobile devices within our audience and to mediate and maximize museum budget. Based on the research conducted by Evantage, MCM is pursuing a plan to share parent education content via a platform that combines text messaging with mobile-responsive web-based content – supported by free and robust Wi-Fi. We will pursue sponsorships and partnerships to extend resources for technology use, such as offering free Wi-Fi. When, and how, to gather information from parenting adults and overall visitors about these strategies is still under further consideration by the leadership team. Based on the above considerations, a Parent Education Journey was developed to show how the various elements of the intervention fit together in our overall engagement platform. See Appendix E for the Parent Education Journey document.

Within our expanded museum, we are developing onsite printed signage to share information with parenting adults while also inspiring them to think about the importance of play. We are also exploring options for digital/mobile technology that will offer deeper engagement with our power of play content – within the museum walls and beyond. MCM will deliver play-related content to visitors on their own mobile devices via texting and the web. There are two key times for delivery of parent education content- on-site, during their visit, and off-site, after their visit. The content will vary based on whether it is accessed on-site or off-site. The key takeaways from the convening, along with the considerations and results of the technology scan, influenced the approach and content we plan to share with visitors in, and about, the newly renovated Minnesota Children's Museum and play. Moving forward with our Parent Education: Mobile Engagement Platform (Appendix C), content will fall into one of two categories: 1) sharing the benefits of play and/or 2) how parenting adults can support play.

The Parent Messaging Initiative, through the Sparks! Ignition Grant, allowed Minnesota Children's Museum's to make steps toward our vision of kids, and adults, playing more. The information and insights inspired the development of a Parent Education Journey, a comprehensive, multi-strategy plan leveraging technology as just one way to communicate the benefits of playful learning and the role of parenting adults in supporting play. The Parent Messaging Initiative was an initial step in Minnesota Children's Museum's ultimate goal of reaching out to the broader community to champion the power of play.

7. RESOURCES

WEBSITES:

Van Gogh vs. Candy Crush: How museums are fighting tech with tech to win your eyes:

<http://www.digitaltrends.com/cool-tech/how-museums-are-using-technology/>

Positioning Visitors with iBeacons:

<https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/community/blogosphere/2014/10/14/positioning-visitors-with-ibeacons/>

Museum Mobile Wiki: Media and Technology on the Go: <http://wiki.museummobile.info>

Democratizing history through digital media and tools: <http://chnm.gmu.edu/labs/mobile-for-museums/>

8. APPENDICES:

Appendix A: Evaluation form

Appendix B: Museum Technology Scan

Appendix C: Parent Education: Mobile Engagement Platform

Appendix D: Parent Education/Engagement Priorities & Plans

Appendix E: Parent Education Journey

9. FIGURES:

Figure 1: Overall Evaluation of Convening Feedback

APPENDIX A

**Parent Education: What's Working, What's Not?
Evaluation Form**

Parent Education: What's Working, What's Not? Evaluation Form

May 4, 2016

	5-agree 1-disagree
1. The host museum organized an engaging and interesting convening.	5 4 3 2 1
2. Information shared overall was useful and relevant.	5 4 3 2 1
3. There was value in hearing both successes and failures.	5 4 3 2 1
4. It was worthwhile submitting project details in advance.	5 4 3 2 1
5. The convening met or exceeded my expectations.	5 4 3 2 1
6. I have an interest in continuing this conversation longer term.	5 4 3 2 1

The top “take-away” I gained from this convening is...

A goal or aspiration I now have as a result of attending this convening is *(hint: what you wrote in the box in your packet)*...

“3 Words” I would use to describe this national convening on parent education:

Other comments:

APPENDIX B
Museum Technology Scan

APPENDIX C

Parent Education: Mobile Engagement Platform

Parent Education: Mobile Engagement Platform

Deliver play-related content to visitors on their own mobile devices via texting and the web

Onsite (During Visit)		Offsite (After Visit)	
Process	Content Approach	Process	Content Approach
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visitors opt-in via text <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ex: User texts “play” to 12345 to join • Signage, staff and other prompts encourage opt-in • After opt-in, visitors receive welcome text and other messages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Texts with general information about the power of play • Specific tips to support/enhance the experience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ex: How to ask open-ended questions • Texts with web links to deeper information about playful learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visitors remain opted in until they text “stop” to opt out • MCM sends texts to past visitors with play-related content • Texts may include links to drive to web content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play tips and reminders • Links to deeper information about playful learning

Technology

- **Free public wifi with simple login/terms page**
- **Under consideration: Single vendor (Guide by Cell) that provides unified platform for texting, mobile web content, back end interface and analytics**

Future Enhancements

- **Onsite: Gallery-specific content**
 - **Ex: Text “forces” for texts and links related to experiences in Forces at Play**
- **Offsite: Additional channels for deeper information by topic**
 - **Ex: Text “playmore” to receive suggestions and inspiration for making play a priority beyond the museum**
 - **Ex: Text “healthy” for messages about nutrition and healthy lifestyle choices**
- **Interactive content**
 - **Polls and surveys**
 - **Social sharing**
- **Marketing & development**
 - **Membership promotions**
 - **Discounts (ex: café)**
 - **Donation requests**
- **Customer feedback**
 - **Visitors get link to experience survey day after their visit**

APPENDIX D

Parent Education/Engagement Priorities & Plans



Parent Education/Engagement Priorities & Plans

November 2016

Community Impact Goal

Parents embrace their children’s playful learning in the museum and beyond

	1 st Priority: Members & Visitors		2 nd Priority: Broader Community
	Onsite	Offsite	Offsite
Strategy/Purpose	Use the museum experience to spark interest & offer “fun bite-size” ideas to take home, connected to the experiences in the gallery	Use a variety of technology and social media platforms for learning and sharing	Expand touch points; meet parents “where they are”; interact when childhood development is top of mind
Audience	Members and GA visitors	Primarily members	Parenting adults throughout community, including museum “pipeline” families
Tactics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-gallery signage • Staff modeling • Events • Membership materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web content • Social media • Email newsletter • Other marcomm with integrated play messaging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverage pediatricians • Corporate/community offsite events • Pop-up experiences and/or “Playmobile”
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Onsite/offsite mobile platform <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Texting opt-in ○ Responsive content ○ Public wifi 		
Goals/Metrics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase supportive interactions in museum experiences • Increase knowledge and change attitudes about importance of play (measured by survey) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase views, time with content and shares (more engagement) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show increased reach with play messaging • Demonstrate tie back to museum (awareness and/or attendance)

APPENDIX E
Parent Education Journey

MCM – Parent Education Journey

DRAFT August 2016



Content Focus by Intervention

- Orange = Mostly Power of Play
- Green = Mostly Adult Support
- Red = Both (50/50)

Arrows

- Mostly One-Way Message
- ↔ Opportunity for Conversation

* Interventions being considered/evaluated