

Architecture Exhibition Proposal Guidelines

For individuals and organizations new to world of architecture exhibition making, the following sample document from the National Building Museum provides a straight forward template for considering the feasibility and fit of various projects to your organization's overarching goals.

COMPLETE PLAN REPRINTED ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES



National Building Museum Exhibition Proposal Guidelines

The National Building Museum receives many unsolicited exhibition proposals and ideas for exhibitions each year. The following guidelines are intended to assist individuals and organizations in developing proposals for consideration.

How the Museum Selects Exhibitions

Each formal exhibition proposal received by the Museum is thoroughly reviewed by a curatorial team member who prepares a report summarizing the proposal's strengths and weaknesses. The proposal and accompanying report are then submitted to the Exhibition Review Committee, which is composed of curators and senior staff and meets approximately once per quarter, for careful consideration. The Exhibition Review Committee presents its recommendations and concerns regarding proposed exhibitions to the executive director, who, in turn, presents final recommendations to the appropriate board committee for formal approval.

Proposals are evaluated based on the following criteria:

Evaluation Criteria

- The proposed exhibition supports the Museum's mission to educate the public about the built environment and its impact on people's lives.
- The proposed exhibition's content is informed by current scholarship, is presented in an unbiased manner, and is intellectually accessible to visitors.
- The proposed exhibition employs a rich array of images, original artifacts, and interactive elements presented in a visually appealing way.
- There are ample opportunities for compelling public programming related to the proposed exhibition.
- The proposal suggests strong prospects to obtain the funding necessary to present such an exhibition.

Essential Elements of an Exhibition Proposal

Each of the items outlined below should be fully addressed:

Goals—What are the central ideas that the exhibition will communicate to visitors? What is important, unusual, or distinctive about this project? Why is it important for the public to learn about the subject?

Likely content—What is the story line? What objects, images, exhibition components, and environments will be included, and how do they relate to the exhibition themes and sub-themes? How will this exhibition make its important ideas clear to the public?

Funding—What is the estimated cost of the exhibition? Who are potential funders?

Programming—What education programs (for adults and children) and other ancillary activities might complement this exhibition?

Staffing—Who are the potential exhibition team members (i.e., curators, designer)? What involvement of National Building Museum staff do you envision?

Samples—Include graphics of possible objects, potential images, and design ideas.

What Makes a Successful Exhibition?

Excerpted from Roger Miles, "Communicating Science to the Public," in *Museums and the Communication of Science*.

A successful exhibition:

- makes the subject come to life;
- makes its point quickly;
- has something for all ages;
- is memorable;
- makes it clear where one should begin and how one should continue;
- uses modern display techniques that help one learn;
- uses familiar things and experiences to make its points;
- includes a comprehensive display of objects.

Helpful Hints When Conceptualizing Exhibitions

- Engage visitors' interest by posing questions that cause them to take a fresh look at a familiar subject.
- Place information in a larger context—identify and use timeless or universal issues and principals to structure information.
- Challenge visitors to participate—to think, to question, to compare, to analyze, to try it themselves.
- Tell a story.
- Think about the variety of media or methods of communicating information (audio, video, objects, photographs, graphics, cartoons, maps, interactive devices and activities).
- Don't lecture to visitors—create a framework that lets them draw their own conclusions.
- Let visitors know what we (the experts) don't know.
- Don't use jargon—explain and define terms, make language conversational and use short sentences.
- Keep label copy brief and break it into "bite-size" pieces.
- Utilize the three-dimensional format of the exhibition.

SEND PROPOSALS AND OTHER CORRESPONDENCE TO:

Stephanie Hess, Curatorial Associate
National Building Museum
401 F Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001

Phone: 202 272-2448 ext. 3701
Fax: 202 724-0136
Email: shess@nbm.org

Addendum: Checklist used by Exhibition Review Committee to evaluate proposals

- All issues listed must be treated in order for the proposal to be considered.

Description of goals _____

Topic and interpretation _____

Potential artifacts and images _____

Target audience _____

Budget and funding possibilities _____

Public programming ideas _____

Potential exhibition team members _____

Design ideas with sample illustrations _____

- Proposals for already completed traveling exhibitions should also include the following:

Exhibition label text _____

Exhibition and artifact checklist _____

Space (linear and square footage) _____

Installation requirements _____

Fee information _____

Sample contract _____

Brochure example _____