

Travelling Exhibition: Initial Planning to Evaluation

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Your museum has identified the desire to develop a travelling exhibition from your collection. Where do you start? The first step is to determine what you want to tour.

- What do you have in your museum's collection? Does your museum possess objects that are unique? Is there a collection that your museum is particularly known for?
- What story do you want to tell? Do you have a theme in mind? This could be a historical period, a historical event that took place in your region, a moment articulated by your collection that has significance today (a pandemic or war for instance), a fascinating person from your area that you want to highlight, a craft that is having a resurgence (pottery or rug hooking for example) etc.
- What will be interesting to communities different from your own? What has proven to be especially attractive to your own community?
- What collections are not suitable to tour (fragility, size, rarity, etc.)? You can narrow down your options for a theme by removing these collections from the running.

Once you know what you want to tour, you can begin to develop the travelling exhibition. There are eleven elements you will need to have in place before approaching other institutions to book your exhibition. These elements include: Exhibition Statement, Fact Sheet, Contract, Promotional Materials, Education Guide, Catalogue/Essay, Programming (Beyond Tours), Insurance, Installation Instructions, Condition Report, and Evaluation.

Exhibition Statement

This should be 300 words maximum. Think of it like an elevator pitch. What is the theme, and what is the exhibition about? What is the title? What does the exhibition look like? What story does it tell? Why is your institution the one to tell this story? What will the visitor experience?

This statement will be your touchstone for promotional materials, grant applications and reports, and programming. It will shape your essay and catalogue. It should hook people and make them want to book your exhibition or visit a hosting (or partner) museum.

Example:

Waste Not - 100 Years of Rug Hooking from Southwestern Saskatchewan is a unique and comprehensive travelling exhibition of hooked rugs from the collection of the Southwestern Saskatchewan Museum of Craft. *Waste Not* reveals the material conditions and pressing concerns of the creative makers of the region over the past one-hundred years. Featuring patterns inspired by geometry and nature, scenes from the makers own life, religious imagery, portraiture, and text like slogans or proverbs illustrates parallels to the rug hookers of today. Comprised of works mounted on walls, plinths, and low platforms, the exhibition is an immersive experience of colour and texture. Speaking to the tenacity of the makers, *Waste Not* asks the viewer to consider the creativity that can emerge from adversity.

Fact Sheet

Your fact sheet will accompany your Exhibition Statement when you approach potential partnering institutions. It should be simple and brief, and answer all of the logistical considerations that the other institution will want to know before committing to your travelling exhibition. Your fact sheet should include the following:

- Number of objects;
- Number of crates;
- Running Footage (or space required);
- Cost of booking;
- When it is available and duration of tour;
- Party that covers the cost of shipping;
- Party that covers the cost of insurance;
- Environmental requirements (humidity control, guarded facility, etc.);
- Promotional material provided: Press release, Poster, Catalogue (who covers the cost of printing), Social Media Templates, and Video Teasers;
- Exhibition Materials Provided: object labels, didactic panels, education guide, programming ideas, plinths, cases, mounts, etc.

Contract

Contracts are a necessity when touring your exhibition. They protect all parties, clearly define expectations, and serve as a binding document that outlines important details pertaining to deadlines, fees, and duties. Contracts should include at a minimum the following elements:

- Names of all parties;
- Dates signed;
- Deadlines;
- Location of activities;
- Fee schedule;
- Insurance amount and coverage details;
- Duties or actions to be completed by each party;
- Shipping and storage;
- Security;
- List of objects in the exhibition;
- Signatures.

Note on shipping and storage:



Shipping: one-way shipping can alleviate the stress of coordinating the transportation of the exhibition by having the receiving institution pay for shipping on to the next participant. (For more information on shipping see *Tip Sheet – Travelling Exhibition: Handling, Packing, and Crating for Tour.*)



Storage: the receiving institution must be able to store the exhibition crates before and during the exhibition. They need to have sufficient storage space to hold the crate(s) until they can arrange for shipping to the next participant.

Promotional Materials

There are two types of promotional materials you can make for a travelling exhibition. There will be (1) the promotional materials you create to sell the idea of your exhibition to other institutions and (2) the optional materials you can create for the institutions that book your exhibition. Creating materials for the booking institutions to use can be more work for you but will give you control over the consistency of the message. Luckily, creating promotional materials is accessible and simple with online programs like Canva.¹

Types of Promotional Materials:

- Press release
- Poster
- Catalogue/Brochure
- Social Media Posts
- Postcards
- Video teasers or trailers

Aesthetic should remain consistent across all promotional materials. Think about the colours, fonts, and design style (fun, academic, historical, etc.) you want to tell the story of your exhibition. If the tone of the exhibition is solemn, the promotional materials should match the tone, an exuberant/joyful promotion would feel out of place with such an exhibition.

Adobe InDesign² is a classic for creating promotional materials but does require some knowledge of the program to use effectively. YouTube is an invaluable resource for learning how to use the program.

Canva is a free online program that is great for folks who do not have a background in design. You can search their customizable templates by promotional type, theme, colour, etc. If you use Canva for promotional materials created for partnering institutions you can lock certain elements like your logo on the design, ensuring proper credit in all posts. There is a Pro version you can subscribe to that is worth the cost. This is an especially useful tool if you are a small museum that does not have a marketing or communications position.



One image should be used across all promotional materials. Font and copy should remain consistent as well. Make sure to include your logo, funders logos, and partnering logos.

Education Guide

An education guide should create access to your travelling exhibition to all school age children. Educators should feel confident interpreting the content of your travelling exhibition for their students. The guide should enhance the key themes and concepts present in the exhibition.

Breaking down the guide into a few age ranges helps educators determine what activities are suitable for their students. K-grade 3, grade 4- grade 8, and grade 9- grade 12 is an example. There should be activities you can do in the exhibition space, and activities that can be done back in the classroom. This will help to cement the ideas present in the exhibition. As well, a page on vocabulary should be included. Each activity should have the curriculum outcomes expected, age range, materials, key concepts, process, and evaluation.

Curriculum focus is an important element in your education guide. A page at the beginning of your guide that outlines exactly what curriculum outcomes can be expected from using the guide will help the educator pinpoint what will work in their lesson plans. The Saskatchewan Curriculum is available online.³

Catalogue/Essay

A catalogue or essay will enhance the exhibition for visitors by providing context and narrative to the exhibition. Your museum will have other exhibits, didactics, and information that help tell the story of the collections. Think of the catalogue or essay as a written version of that context. What needs to be communicated that cannot be summed up on a label card or in the object itself?

You can begin your essay with the exhibition statement, it serves as a thesis statement. Build your essay as if someone were walking through the exhibition. You don't need to animate every object, choose objects that stand out or exemplify the theme exceptionally well. This is your opportunity to tell the story that captivated you about the objects in the beginning. Try to channel that excitement or reverence. The language does not need to be academic, plain language creates accessibility to more people.

The catalogue will be the item that carries the exhibition on into the future. Once the last booking is complete and the crates are repacked the catalogue will remain as a document of the endeavour. Therefore, make it comprehensive and attractive.

Programming (Beyond Tours)

Public programming will extend the reach of your exhibition and the experience of the visitors. Work with partnering/host institutions to determine who their core audience is and what makes for successful programming in their space. Does the exhibition have the potential to attract new visitors? That could be a selling feature when approaching institutions. A list of programming ideas developed to activate the exhibition will make the exhibit more attractive to partnering institutions as it reduces their workload.

Insurance

A solid insurance policy is also a necessity. It protects the objects and your investment. Either institution can cover the cost of insurance, that is a detail to determine either beforehand as a perk (you cover the cost), or to be negotiated upon contract development. It would be a simple addition to your current policy for the objects in your collection.

Talk to your insurance broker for rates and coverage options. See the MAS tip sheet *Taking Control - Insurance and You*.⁴

Installation Instructions

When the host/partnering institution opens the crates, they will need detailed instructions for unpacking the objects, and how to install them in their space. Diagrams and installation order are essential. Note which objects mount on the wall, which are displayed on plinths and mounts, and which are installed as floor pieces. All objects should be clearly labelled, and information cards should accompany the objects for ease of identification. Images of the installed exhibition from your institution can provide a clear understanding of how the installed exhibit should look.

For further information see: *Travelling Exhibitions: Handling, Packing, and Crating for Tour*.⁵



Condition Report

Condition reports are essential for insurance purposes. They will note the name of the person reporting, the date, and where the exhibition has arrived from. There should be an incoming and outgoing condition report completed by each institution. They will note any structural or surface damage. There should be an area for photos to be included. The MAS website has an excellent condition report template that you can modify for your purposes.⁶ If any damage occurs during the tour, your insurance company will want to see the condition reports before and after the damage has occurred in order to process a claim.

Condition reports must be completed from each host institution for each object's incoming condition and outgoing condition. Also, refer to *Travelling Exhibitions: Handling, Packing, and Crating for Tour*.

Evaluation

The final step is an evaluation of the travelling exhibition. A simple online form will make it easier for the partnering institutions to complete. It should gather information like audience numbers and demographics, rating of the quality of the exhibition, rating of the quality of supplementary materials, photos, links to any press coverage, and any recommendations for improvement. Some of this information will be required by your funders, and some will help you improve the quality of your next travelling exhibition.

Additional Resources

Museums and Galleries of NSW. "Fact Sheet: Basics of touring an exhibition". Museums and Galleries of NSW, 2019. Accessed 14 Dec 2022, https://mgnsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/fact_sheet_basics_of_touring_an_exhibition.pdf.

Walhimer, Mark. "Creating a Traveling Exhibition". Museum Planner, 17 October 2011. Accessed 14 December 2022, <https://www.museumplanner.org/traveling-exhibition/>.

Huber, Melissa and Koch, Margaret. "Tips And Considerations For Developing Compact Traveling Exhibitions". Humanities Texas and the Texas State History Museum, 2020. 14 December 2022, <https://www.thc.texas.gov/public/upload/preserve/museums/files/Current%20Events%20Exhibits%20Tip%20Sheet.pdf>.

Footnotes

1. Canva. Accessed 14 December 2022. <https://www.canva.com>
2. Adobe InDesign. Accessed 14 December 2022. <https://www.adobe.com/ca/products/indesign.html>
3. "Saskatchewan Curriculum". Accessed 14 December 2022. <https://www.edonline.sk.ca/webapps/moe-curriculum-BB5f208b6da4613/Home?language=en>
4. "Taking Control - Insurance and You" 2018. Museums Association of Saskatchewan https://www.saskmuseums.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/FINAL_-_WEB_-_v_1_-_Taking_Control_-_Insurance_and_You.pdf
5. "Travelling Exhibitions: Handling, Packing, and Crating for Tour" 2023. Museums Association of Saskatchewan [link needed](#)
6. "Condition Report." Museums Association of Saskatchewan. https://www.saskmuseums.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Condition_Report_FINAL.docx

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