

Traveling the

SILK ROAD

Ancient Pathway to the Modern World

Collaborative Stakeholder Evaluation Education and Public Programs Report

September 2010

Rockman et al
Independent · Insightful · Informative

In cooperation with:

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY 

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Executive Summary..... | 3 |
| Background | 4 |
| Overall Themes and Trends | 5 |
| How visitors describe the exhibition..... | 5 |
| Educator and Student Experiences | 5 |
| Sunday-Performances..... | 5 |
| Extra-Exhibition Experiences..... | 5 |
| Educator and Student Feedback | 6 |
| Silk Road Educators’ Night | 6 |
| Student Feedback..... | 11 |
| Feedback on Music Performances | 12 |
| Visitor Reactions to the Music Performances | 12 |
| Musicians’ Reactions to the Performances | 14 |
| Interactions Between Visitors and Musicians | 14 |
| Learning from the Music Performances..... | 15 |
| Public Program Feedback | 16 |
| Program Findings | 16 |
| Impact of Museum Programming..... | 26 |
| Recommendations | 28 |
| Educators’ Suggestions | 28 |
| Suggestions for Music Performances..... | 28 |
| Suggestions for Other Programs..... | 29 |
| Logistical Suggestions..... | 29 |

Executive Summary

Rockman Et Al, an evaluation firm that specializes in museum-based evaluations, was asked to facilitate a collaborative evaluation with staff at the American Museum of Natural History around their exhibition, *Traveling the Silk Road: Ancient Pathway to the Modern World*. The Silk Road exhibition takes visitors on a journey through four cities on the Silk Road route, and demonstrates through artifacts, text, and interactives how goods and ideas were exchanged among different cultures. The purpose of the Silk Road evaluation was to explore visitors' interest in and understanding of the exhibition and related programming. The evaluation was also designed to incorporate museum staff and stakeholders in the process of instrument development, data collection, analysis, and reporting.

Public programming helped to extend visitors' exhibit experience—attendees were highly satisfied with the Silk Road-related programming, and thought that it had high educational value. Many program attendees reported having visited the Silk Road exhibition before going to a museum event. Afterwards, participants often talked to friends or family members about the program they attended. Programs with food and live music were the most popular with the public. Most participants felt that the Silk Road programming had been better than other AMNH programming as well as other museum's offerings.

Educational outreach held at the museum enabled teachers to see connections between the Silk Road exhibition and their classroom curriculum. Teachers also welcomed the opportunity to network with colleagues around instructional ideas and Silk Road content. Over half of the educators (56%) who responded to our survey indicated that they had returned to the Silk Road exhibition with their students. Several educators also indicated that the museum event had given them ideas about how to incorporate exhibit content and resources into their classrooms.

The collaborative evaluation facilitated rich cross-departmental interactions. Staff and volunteers who participated in the data collection process felt they would use the skills and contacts obtained through the collaborative evaluation in the future. Almost all participants indicated that, if the opportunity arose, they would participate in a collaborative evaluation again. Overall the collaborative evaluation experience seemed to be both positive and productive. Staff and volunteers gained new skills and made new connections within the museum. The evaluation team, aided by the museum stakeholders, was successfully able to establish, implement and refine a process for collaboratively evaluating a major exhibition.

Background

Traveling the Silk Road: Ancient Pathway to the Modern World, is an exhibit designed by, and initially housed within, the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. The exhibit opened in November 2009 and ran through the middle of September 2010.

Toward the end of the Silk Road exhibition's ten-month run at AMNH asked Rockman et al, an evaluation firm that specializes in museum-based evaluations, to aid the museum in conducting a collaborative evaluation that included the expectations and experiences of creators, educators and explainers, an analysis of data that had been collected from participants in public programs, the musical residency program, and feedback from educators and students. The result was a collaborative stakeholder evaluation that included members of the education and exhibitions departments at AMNH as well as exhibit explainers, summer interns, and members of an external evaluation team from Rockman et al.

The goal of the resulting evaluation effort was twofold: First, to assess the extent to which the exhibition and its resources stimulated visitors' interest in and understanding of the Silk Road, including the extent to which visitors were able to make connections between the Silk Road and other experiences within the museum and their lives, and secondly, to help develop additional skills among museum staff and volunteers and a technological infrastructure for collecting, analyzing and reflecting on visitor experiences.

Staff and volunteers at AMNH identified areas of interest within the exhibition, refined research questions, and worked collaboratively with the external evaluators to establish common evaluation objectives. Staff and volunteers also helped to collect survey, interview, and observation data from exhibition visitors.

The external evaluation team worked closely with museum staff and stakeholders throughout the evaluation process. Evaluators from Rockman et al provided training for AMNH staff and volunteers on evaluation methods, including how to approach visitors within the exhibition, how to conduct visitor observations, and explanations of all instruments. Members of the evaluation team were also on-call to answer any questions that arose during the evaluation process.

This report summarizes findings related specifically to educational programming for formal learning groups and the public at large, including feedback about music performances in the exhibition on Sunday afternoons. Additional reports focus on findings related specifically to the exhibition, including reactions from and impacts on visitors.

Overall Themes and Trends

How visitors describe the exhibition

Visitors often cited rich visual and multi-sensory artifacts and experiences, when asked to describe the exhibition. Beyond its beauty and its ability to stimulate visitors' senses, the exhibition also seemed successful in fostering learning and greater understanding of the region and the history of the Silk Road. The concept of a "journey" came through for some, but there was often a stronger sense of multiculturalism and a better understanding of how products and ideas flowed between communities along the Silk Road.

Educator and Student Experiences

Educators and students appreciated the exhibition and the unique opportunity it provided to learn about different cultures and historical events. Interactive elements within the exhibition were a welcome alternative to static textbook descriptions and spoken explanations. Interactions with museum staff (e.g., explainers or museum educators being on hand to answer questions, suggest how to engage with different interactives within the exhibition, and help to lead different educational activities) can help make educational experiences even more powerful for students and teachers.

Sunday-Performances

The musical performances had a significant impact on visitors' experiences within the exhibition. The presence of live music was a pleasant surprise for many visitors, however,



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the Sunday performances also seemed successful at pulling new audiences into the museum specifically for the performances. Exhibition flow-through patterns varied when there was live music—with visitors often moving through the beginning of the exhibition more rapidly to see and hear the musical performance staged at the end of the exhibition. Visitors would sometimes then work backwards back through the exhibition after a musical performance ended. Many visitors enjoyed the opportunity to interact with

the musicians and felt that the performances greatly enhanced the exhibition experience—especially insofar as it added another sensory and richly artistic experience.

Extra-Exhibition Experiences

Many visitors indicated a desire to follow-up on things at home or do other things in the museum or on their own to learn more about things they had seen, heard or done in the Silk Road exhibition. Visitors appreciated the recipe cards that invited them to try a taste of the Silk Road at home. Related-programming also allowed museum patrons to immerse themselves more fully in the culture, history and arts associated with the Silk Road.

Educator and Student Feedback

Museum staff shared data they had collected from teachers and students over the past several months. In addition to previously collected data, we also invited educators who had attended the Silk Road Educators' Night to complete a short online survey.

Silk Road Educators' Night

In September, an online survey was sent to educators who attended the Silk Road Educators' Night on November 18th, 2009. Since it had been several months since their initial Silk Road experience at AMNH, we were pleased to hear what they recalled and what they had done in the intervening months. We sent invitations via email to more than 200 educators who had attended the Educator's Night event and got 44 responses (i.e., just over a 20% response rate).

Respondents who participated in the Silk Road Educators' Night and completed the online survey were mostly female (88%), taught a wide range of grades (see Table 9), and also included a researcher, informal educator, special education teacher, adult educator, and assistant principal (in the "Other" category). Respondents who attended the Silk Road Educators' Night had been teaching an average of 15 years (with a range of 1 to 49 years).

Table 1: Grade Level Taught By Educators' Night Attendees (n=42)

| Grade Level Taught | Number of Respondents | % |
|--------------------|-----------------------|-----|
| Preschool | 5 | 12% |
| Kindergarten | 8 | 19% |
| 1st Grade | 10 | 24% |
| 2nd Grade | 10 | 24% |
| 3rd Grade | 9 | 21% |
| 4th Grade | 9 | 21% |
| 5th Grade | 10 | 24% |
| 6th Grade | 11 | 26% |
| 7th Grade | 12 | 29% |
| 8th Grade | 10 | 24% |
| 9th Grade | 15 | 36% |
| 10th Grade | 14 | 33% |
| 11th Grade | 11 | 26% |
| 12th Grade | 10 | 24% |
| Undergraduates | 3 | 7% |
| Graduates | 1 | 2% |
| Other | 6 | 14% |

Most educators attended the event because they were interested in the topic, wanted to find out how to incorporate Silk Road content and activities into their classrooms, and because the event was free (see Table 2).

Table 2: Reasons for Attending the Silk Road Educators' Night

| Reasons for Attending | Number of Respondents | % |
|--|-----------------------|-----|
| I am Interested in the topic. | 40 | 93% |
| I wanted to find out how to incorporate Silk Road into my classroom. | 31 | 72% |
| It was free. | 25 | 58% |
| The food. | 10 | 23% |
| I was invited by a friend, family member, or colleague. | 13 | 30% |
| It was an opportunity to network with other educators. | 18 | 42% |
| Other | 5 | 12% |

Popular Educators' Night activities included viewing the Silk Road exhibition and receiving handouts from organizations present at the event (see Table 11). Many attendees also reported listening to an overview of the Silk Road Educators' Guide as well as an overview of the exhibition from the exhibit curator, and eating the food provided.

Table 3: Percentage of Attendees Who Participated in Various Silk Road Educators' Night Activities

| Activities | Number of Respondents | % |
|---|-----------------------|-----|
| Curator Overview of Exhibition | 35 | 83% |
| Overview of Educator Guide | 35 | 83% |
| Professional Development with Silk Road Project | 17 | 40% |
| Viewing the Silk Road Exhibition | 36 | 86% |
| Indigo Dye Demo | 12 | 29% |
| Sensory Explorations (spices, fragrances) | 16 | 38% |
| Papermaking | 14 | 33% |
| Hearing about other organizations' resources | 22 | 52% |
| Getting handouts/resources from other organizations | 36 | 86% |
| Performance by Silk Road Ensemble | 30 | 71% |
| Ate food provided | 35 | 83% |
| Other | 1 | 2% |

Educators' favorite activity at the event was viewing the exhibition (see Table 12):

I like to see all the exhibits at the museum. It allows me to read the information and see for myself some of the highlights and most important parts of the Silk Road. It was a great experience to walk through at my own pace and see the exhibit.

Superb multi-sensory exhibit on an important topic that should be better known and more prominently a part of the curriculum. Gave hands-on opportunities for students, excellent maps and text labels and beautiful, aesthetic displays.

It was excellent hands-on experience. The visuals were very helpful for ELL's (English Language Learners). The music and fragrances engaged other senses. Seeing the way silk is made and seeing real silk worms helped to put things in perspective.

It is a wonderful example of how interconnected the people on the planet are...Across the centuries people have invented ways to open trade with one another, it is a 'Wow' concept for students to grasp.

Many attendees also enjoyed the curator’s exhibition overview and the teacher professional development class on the Silk Road:

I have taught the Silk Road every year that I have been a teacher, and yet I learned some new things from the overview. I must admit, however, the music and the food were really memorable too!

I very much enjoyed hearing about how the project was put together; the rationale behind the selection of locations to feature, the historical significance of those places, and the generally "big picture" approach to the topic. I teach ancient and medieval history with a definitely Euro-centric focus, so this allowed me to see a bigger picture. I will expand my approach to the development of the Middle Eastern and European worlds.

The amount of information and the graphic presentation of the information in the class for educators and the lecture in the main hall about the Silk Road led to a much better appreciation of the exhibit later. The created materials for the classroom were outstanding and useful to bring back to my school.

Table 4: Attendees’ Favorite Educators’ Night Activity

| Activity | Number of Respondents | % |
|---|-----------------------|-----|
| Curator Overview of Exhibition | 10 | 23% |
| Professional Development with Silk Road Project | 9 | 21% |
| Viewing the Silk Road Exhibition | 16 | 37% |
| Papermaking | 1 | 2% |
| Performance by Silk Road Ensemble | 7 | 16% |

Note: No one selected “Overview of Educator Guide,” “Indigo Dye Demo,” “Sensory Explorations,” “Hearing about other organizations’ resources,” and “Getting handouts/resources from other organizations.”

Attendees were also asked to disclose their least favorite Educators’ Night activity. For the most part, participants seemed to enjoy all aspects of the evening. However, a few respondents (n=5) disliked the overview of the Educator’s Guide because they felt that they could have read it on their own time. Other “least favorite” elements included: hearing about other organization’s resources (n=4), a performance by Silk Road ensemble (n=3),

listening to the curator overview of exhibition (n=2), sensory explorations (n=2), and one mention of each of the following: indigo dye demo, papermaking, food, crowds/lines, and parking fees.

Educators' Reactions to The Silk Road Educators' Night

Attendees mentioned several benefits to participating in The Silk Road Educators' Night. Most of the benefits centered around learning ways to tie AMNH offerings into existing curriculum:

This enabled us to expand our unit on Asia and incorporate many isolated regions into one, cohesive journey.

History is one of the most important things I learned. I think the silk road exhibit teaches and introduces a new culture. I can teach students about where and how things developed and also teach students geography. It is a topic that can be taught to all ages.

It is a very tangible reminder of how valuable AMNH exhibits are for curriculum support.

Attendees also appreciated the opportunity to network with colleagues around instructional ideas:

I felt so professional; as though the museum realizes it is important for educators continue to be stimulated, but in a fun, "high-class: manner. It was such an elegant evening.

I didn't get to experience many things in my life outside of the area I lived in the Bronx so whenever I get to see new places and learn about different cultures it always excites me. I also like to talk to other educators and to see what style they bring to their classroom so I can strengthen my teaching skills.

Next Steps

All respondents (n=44) indicated that they would participate in another Educators' Night in the future, and that they would recommend the Silk Road Educators' Night to friends or colleagues. One respondent even mentioned discussing the exhibition with families during her school's Parent's Night.

Most educators (79%, n=42) reported using the Educators' Guide after the Educators' Night. Of these, most used it to construct lessons for their classroom, as a resource for their co-workers, or as preparation for a field trip to the exhibition.

Several educators (57%, n=44) indicated that they had returned to the Silk Road exhibition. Many returned with family or friends (80%, n=25). Some (56%, n=25) came back to the exhibition with their students, which had been an intended goal of the outreach event:

I brought 3 classes to the exhibit, accompanying 2 others i.e., about 170 kids! It was interesting, engaging, and dynamic. It was full of information and presented in a fresh and wonderful way. I also liked that I could bring my classes for free.

I loved how some sections - the camels at the beginning, and the night market - were such realistic, immersive experiences for my students. For young children, helping it come alive is so important - and those sections in particular were great for that.

Table 5 shows the grade level of the students whom educators brought back to the exhibition.

Table 5: Number of Educators Who Brought Students to the Silk Road Exhibition At Each Grade Level (n=12)

| Grade Level | Number of Educators | % |
|---------------|---------------------|-----|
| Kindergarten | 0 | 0% |
| 1st Grade | 0 | 0% |
| 2nd Grade | 0 | 0% |
| 3rd Grade | 2 | 17% |
| 4th Grade | 0 | 0% |
| 5th Grade | 1 | 8% |
| 6th Grade | 5 | 42% |
| 7th Grade | 0 | 0% |
| 8th Grade | 0 | 0% |
| 9th Grade | 3 | 25% |
| 10th Grade | 1 | 8% |
| 11th Grade | 1 | 8% |
| 12th Grade | 1 | 8% |
| Undergraduate | 1 | 8% |

These educators reported that these field trips covered topics such as the origin of objects, transportation and commerce, geography and climate, cultural traditions, Arab and Asian civilizations, inventions, religion, art, the science behind the exhibit, and how different materials are made. Several educators also talked about plans to incorporate exhibit content into their classrooms:

I plan to work up a re-enactment, as it were, of trading along the route, using silk samples, whole spices, tea, 'porcelain,' etc.

[I] have already created a Voicethread to anchor an entire unit on the Silk Road, inspired by this exhibit and the educator's guide.

Student Feedback

An evaluation of a structured learning experience for 6th grade students around the Silk Road exhibition revealed that two in three students were able to describe a basic version of the exhibition’s main idea, and one in four were able to elaborate more specifically. Half of the students could relate some part of the exhibition to their lives, although most mentioned a general interest or value in the exhibition’s educational value. Around half the students were also able to come up with specific questions about Silk Road content.

These students also wrote letters to the museum to thank staff for the opportunity to visit the Silk Road exhibition. The following are excerpts from some of their letters:

The exhibit was cool and had many reasons why it was cool. First, the live silk worms were awesome! I wonder what those silkworms eat. Second, the technologies shown in Baghdad were fascinating. I was surprise [sic] how people back them had some technology that we have right now.

About a year ago, I wasn’t interested in ay part of social studies, but ever since 6th grade started and ever since I visited this Museum, I got more and more interested in the subject.

You trusted us with handling and being around several exotic items. Like your covinelian [sic], glass, silk, etc. To tell you the truth, I had never experienced anything like this.

In addition, six high school students who came to the Silk Road on a field trip sent the museum their top three favorite exhibit activities (see table below).

Table 6: High School Students’ Favorite Exhibit Activities

| Exhibit Activity | Number of Students Who Chose |
|------------------------|------------------------------|
| Live Silk Worms | 3 |
| Marketplace | 3 |
| Astrolabe | 2 |
| Camel | 2 |
| Water Clock | 1 |
| Interactive Map | 1 |
| Karez Water System | 1 |
| Storybook | 1 |
| Loom | 1 |
| Glass Objects | 1 |
| Ship | 1 |
| Scientific Instruments | 1 |

While student feedback was not a primary focus of this collaborative evaluation effort—primarily because it was conducted during the summer months when most schools were on break—it is important to note that the feedback shared by educators and via museum staff members was quite positive.

Feedback on Music Performances

Visitors who attended the Silk Road exhibition on a Sunday were asked to share their opinions of the Sunday music performances on a visitor survey. Forty-one visitors completed the music performance survey. Ten musicians who performed in the space also filled out a survey to reflect on their experiences. Additionally, AMNH staff members recorded detailed observations of visitor-musician interactions at two of the music performances.

Visitor Reactions to the Music Performances

More than half (63%) of the visitors who completed the additional survey questions about the music performances did not know about the Sunday music performances before arriving at the exhibition. Of those who did know in advance, several found out about the music performances from an AMNH staff member (29%), museum pamphlet (21%), the Silk Road website (21%), or by hearing the music in the exhibition (21%). Eighty-eight percent of the respondents indicated that they had watched some of the music performance. Of these, sixty-three percent watched for ten minutes or less, and twenty-four percent reported listening to the performances for more than thirty minutes.

The performances provided visitors with an opportunity to experience something that most had not seen before—71% of respondents indicated they had not previously seen similar performances. Ten respondents said they had seen similar musical performances in other countries like Morocco, India, and Asia, and at festivals or street fairs. These respondents indicated that the music performances in the Silk Road exhibition were as good or better than ones they had seen elsewhere.

Visitors generally had positive reactions to the music in the exhibition. Most visitors felt that the performances connected to the rest of the Silk Road exhibition, and found the performances enjoyable (see Table 7).

Table 7: Visitor Reactions to the Music Performances

| The music performances... | Response | % |
|---|----------|-----|
| Connected to the rest of the exhibition | 24 | 77% |
| Enhanced my exhibit experience | 13 | 37% |
| Brought the exhibition to life | 10 | 29% |
| Made my experience more enjoyable | 25 | 71% |
| Felt like a distraction | 2 | 6% |
| Made no difference in my exhibit experience | 3 | 9% |
| I didn't notice the music | 0 | 0% |

(Note: response numbers and % are based on 31 responses to the first question and 35 responses to all remaining questions in the table above).

When asked to describe the music performances, most visitors used adjectives like “nice,” “beautiful,” “lively,” and “rich” (see Figure 1).

Musicians' Reactions to the Performances

The musicians had varied reasons for participating in the Silk Road performances such as the educational value of the experience, gaining experience playing in different venues, being invited to perform, and liking fun and challenging experiences:

The opportunity to partake in the AMNH residency in an educational forum with other Silk Road musicians was something I was personally very excited about. I grew up attending the museum as a child so, to be a part of the exhibits there as a professional musician, and being able to share folk music from the Silk Road with the AMNH audience was a great experience.

I loved feeling like part of the museum- a true cultural icon of NYC, even if it was temporary. And it's always fun to introduce new music to kids.

The AMNH experience gave us the challenge of finding the links between our music and the Silk Road, links that exist, but that we hadn't thought about overtly before. It provided us with the wonderful challenge of working in a small space with an audience of varied ages. It felt like a concert, but it was short and intimate enough that it also had the feel of a musical salon.

A few of the musicians had participated in other residencies at cultural institutions. They pointed out that the AMNH experience was unique because it offered a formal residency, placed the musicians in the exhibit space, and offered musical performances as part of a series, rather than being a stand-alone event. Some of the musicians had also participated in residencies where they led visitor workshops or had performed several times over the course of a week.

To prepare for the performances, many of the musicians practiced together and determined what songs and instruments they would play (e.g., "We chose our set list based on songs from the Armenian folk music collection that would be pleasant to the Western ear, but also that helped tell a story, of markets, of traders, and so on...to help provide a visual guide for the listener"). A few musicians went through the exhibit space beforehand, watched other performers, or went to the Silk Road website.

As a whole, the musicians felt that the experience at AMNH had been rewarding because it was "fun", "challenging" and "therapeutic" to be part of the exhibit experience. They also appreciated opportunities to engage with visitors, introduce children to their music, and increase visitors' interest in music. Most thought that it was effective to play their music within the exhibition because it was "the right context" for the music and added to the exhibit experience. However, a few of the musicians noted that the performance space was "oddly laid out" and "small".

Interactions Between Visitors and Musicians

The musicians indicated that their main interactions with visitors were either in answering questions or sharing personal experiences with the music and the culture being represented. Observations conducted in the space revealed a rich variety of questions being asked about the origin of the music and the instruments, the musicians' personal connections to the instruments, how the ensembles themselves were formed, and the cultural significance of the instruments. Although the performance space was often crowded due to its small size and the popularity of the experience, many performers felt that the intimate space was conducive to visitor interaction:

I feel the location helped to dissolve the audience/performer boundary that might be reinforced in a concert hall setting. It felt more interactive and I sensed that people were more willing to engage with [the musician]. There also seemed to be more freedom for them to come and go, and less of an obligation to engage with the half-hour performance as a single experience.

When the musicians were not present (i.e., on breaks between sets), visitors appreciated interacting with volunteers (especially if the instruments were left out). Volunteers also helped direct the traffic flow and established a welcoming atmosphere in the space.

Learning from the Music Performances

Visitors felt that the music helped them learn about specific instruments and “how music can bring cultures together.” Similarly, several musicians noted connections between their music and the Silk Road:

How cultures shared things as they physically travelled along this passage from east to west. The music we play draws on the geographical areas around Greece, and you can hear the influences of the countries surrounding it.

Science of sound, how different cultures build instruments to take advantage of those science phenomena, how local resources affects the design and construction of the instrument, leading to different instrument designs and sound strategies.

Visitors also felt that the music helped them gain a new understanding of music as a “universal language”. Some even likened the performances to a spiritual experience.

Public Program Feedback

In addition to the Silk Road exhibition, several public programs were run highlighting the food, music, and culture of the Silk Road. After some of these programs, visitors were asked to fill out paper surveys. We followed up with these paper survey respondents several months later online to see if they had participated in any other programs, visited the exhibition or the website, or sought out more information about the program topics. First, we will highlight specific program findings, then discuss the potential impact of public program attendance on exhibition and website visitation.

Program Findings

Global Kitchen: The Silk Road Through Spices

At this event, the speaker talked about traditional uses of spices and how to incorporate them into one's cooking. The event also had several opportunities to taste and smell different spices.

Sixty-three attendees took the paper survey. Overall, Global Kitchen attracted mostly adults 61 years and above (37%), with a high number of people ranging from 51-60 years (20%) and some from 26-30 years (11%). There were significantly more females (70%) in attendance than males. Fifty-seven percent of attendees were non-museum members. A little more than half of the respondents had attended other AMNH events (53%). Although occupations varied considerably, there were a lot of retired people in attendance. Many attendees came to the program with spouses, friends, children, or by themselves:

[We] were members for many years, but visit less frequently as kids have grown... These programs are nice way for us to reconnect when [the] timing works out.

Most visitors heard about the event largely from word of mouth, while some found out about it from print and flyer sources. People came to the event mainly because of the topic, the advertising, or because they had heard good things about the exhibition. Some participants also indicated that they had attended due to the scheduled lecturer, because they wanted to extend their museum experience, or because of a friend.

Of the seven online respondents, most were satisfied with the program and felt that it had educational value. These respondents liked learning about the uses of different spices, learning how to incorporate spices into one's cooking, and the speaker's expertise. However, some respondents found the program unsatisfactory and lacking depth (i.e. "The program about spices was done at the kindergarten level.") and organization (i.e. the selection of speakers).

Most would come again, and would recommend this series to their friends. Those that would come again said that the subject and presentation had been interesting. Many attendees indicated that the program had been as good or better than other AMNH and outside museum offerings.

Several attendees made recommendations to improve the program. Most people liked the time slot, but some felt that a later start time for this event would have been better. Others

wanted a closer tie-in between the subject matter and the Silk Road. A few wanted a more formal lecture. One respondent also mentioned a desire for spice sampling, saying that the lack of sampling stations “limited socializing opportunities”.

Global Kitchen: Aromatics Along the Silk Road

During this program, a renowned perfumer discussed the history of aromatics. Fifty attendees took the paper survey. Overall, there was a wide age range of visitors who attended Global Kitchen (ranging from 20-60+years of age). The majority of attendees were female and non-members. Several participants attended the event with friends, spouses, parents and other relatives. For most people, the GK: Aromatics Along the Silk Road was their first museum event. There was a huge variance in participants' occupations. The majority of people heard about this program through word of mouth and the AMNH website. Almost everyone purchased their tickets online.

Almost everybody attended the program primarily because of the topic. Other reasons included hearing good things about the exhibition and wanting to extend the museum experience.

Overall, it seemed like most people enjoyed the program. In fact, one attendee mentioned that he had joined the museum after attending the program. Of the five online respondents, 60% gave a satisfaction rating between 8 and 10 (with 1 being low and 10 being high). Eighty percent of online respondents gave the program a rating between 7 to 10. Most were interested in purchasing a series pass to Global Kitchen events. All attendees indicated that they would recommend this program to a friend.

Attendees indicated that their favorite aspects of the program had been learning how different aromatics are made and used on the Silk Road, smelling the aromas, and the speaker's expertise:

The combination of smelling them and learning about them was very interesting indeed.

[I] had smelled many of the aromatics before; never know just what lengths people had gone to get them.

I love the subject and want to learn from experts in the subject and listen to their experience in the field and the history of the aromatics used in the Silk Road and have the opportunity to smell the aromas. It was a wonderful experience.

Most felt that the program had been as good or better than other AMNH offerings. All five online respondents thought that the program was on par with or better than programs at other museums.

A few attendees had suggestions for improvement. One participant wanted to have time to visit the exhibition built-in after the program. Another felt that the presentation format was lacking:

The expert read from articles she had written, which detracted from the experience. Please ask presenters to prepare a PRESENTATION, not just read from written material, which is too language rich to absorb when so many other things are going on.

Global Kitchen: Wines With Ancient Lineage

At this event, an expert sommelier and wine director and a grape geneticist discussed the early history of viticulture. Wine tastings were also provided.

Twenty-five attendees took the paper survey. The majority of participants were ages 26-35. The male to female ratio leaned towards females, although it was more or less even. There was an extremely wide variance in occupations. The majority of people were not members. The majority of people had been to at least one museum program prior to the Global Kitchen program. Participants reported coming to the event with friends or spouses. Almost everybody bought tickets online at www.amnh.org.

There was an even distribution of the method in which people heard about the event and most people attended because of the topic and secondly because of the lecturer(s). One respondent also indicated an interest in extending his or her museum experience.

Overall, it seems as though everyone enjoyed the experience. All attendees said they would recommend this program to a friend. Of the two online survey respondents, one gave a satisfaction rating of 8 and the other of 10 (with 1 being low and 10 being high). Both respondents rated the program's educational value at an 8. These attendees indicated that their favorite features of the program had been learning about how different wines are made and learning the history of the wine trade:

The history of our long relationship with alcohol is fascinating.

I like history from different perspectives.

The two online respondents felt that this program had been as good or better than previous AMNH offerings. They both thought that the program was better than what other museums had to offer.

Curry Economics: Food As A Driving Force of Economic Development

At this event, several guest speakers discussed food as a driving force behind economic expansion, industrial development, and geopolitical competition.

Thirty-three attendees took the paper survey. Overall, Curry Economics attracted mostly 65-69 year olds (23%) and a mix of young adults (20%, 20-29) and older adults (26%, 55-64).

There were more females than males in attendance, and 75% of program participants were non-members. Although occupations varied considerably, there were a few students in attendance. Attendees indicated that they came alone, with friends, with spouses, and with their children.



Curry Economics Program
The Kaufmann Theater - photo by Craig Chesek, AMNH

Many respondents had attended other AMNH events (65%). A few people heard about the event through print media, but many other respondents heard about it through word of mouth, flyers, AMNH e-mails and the museum website. Participants came largely for the topic.

There was a mix of comments from people who liked the program and people who had complaints. Some people had trouble with buying tickets and thought the prices were too high. Others felt that the lecture hall was too hot, the lighting wasn't adequate, and that the overall event needed better marketing/labeling. Those who liked the event thought it was interesting and that the lecture was good.

Seven attendees responded to the online survey. On a scale of 1-10 (with 1 being low and 10 being high), they rated their level of satisfaction with this program between a 7 and a 10, with 50% at a level 10. On a similar scale, attendees rated the programs educational value as between a 7 and a 10, with 75% choosing a 10 rating. These respondents indicated that their favorite things about the program were learning about food as part of economic expansion and the speaker's expertise. One attendee liked the program because "it is not an idea that would have occurred to me". Another thought that the panel was "worthwhile" and that the speaker was "brilliant". In fact, attendees felt that this program was as good or better than other AMNH offerings:

Fantastic topic - and interesting on many levels. I would love to hear the presenters again.

I went to the one in which Tom Standage spoke, only because a friend thought to review it for the NYTimes and we went as part of a social evening, and were very much surprised and delighted by how good it was.

They also felt that the program was on par or better than programming at other museums.

The Looting of the Iraq Museum: An Evening With Dr. Donny George Youkhanna

At this special presentation, the former Director General of the Iraq National Museum shared his perspective on the current archeological and museum conditions in Iraq.

Fifty attendees took the paper survey. Overall, Looting of the Iraq Museum attracted mostly adults 61+ (45%), more females than males, and 56% non-members and 44% members. Most participants had attended other AMNH events (86%). Although occupations varied considerably, there were a lot of retired people in attendance. Several came alone or with a spouse.

Most attendees came to the program largely due to interest in the topic. A few were intrigued by the program advertising. Others wanted to extend their museum experience.

Many people thought it was informative and a great program. Of the six online survey respondents, 75% rated their level of satisfaction with the program as a 9 or a 10 (with 1 being low and 10 being high). They gave similar ratings to the educational value of the program. Respondents also felt that the program was as good or better than comparative programming at AMNH and other museums. When asked what their favorite thing about the program had been, attendees responded that they had equally enjoyed the speaker's expertise and learning about the current museum conditions in Iraq:

Donny is well-informed and able to provide the public with the most up-to-date information.

Because it was a firsthand account.

I was concerned about how much of the collection had disappeared and how much was recovered.

Most would recommend this series to their friends. In fact, one attendee urged the museum to “have more lectures given by specialists”. A few attendees complained about late arrivals being distracting and wanted the lecture to start at 7pm instead.

Buddhist Art of Dunhuang

A professor of Chinese and East Asian Art discussed one of the world’s most extensive collections of Buddhist art and sculptures, including the cave murals of Dunhuang.

Forty-six attendees took the paper survey. Overall, Buddhist Art attracted mostly adults, the largest group being from ages 60-64 (22%) and 65-69 (16%), with some 25-29 year olds (14%). There were more females (72%) in attendance than males. Eighty-nine percent of attendees were non-members. 52% of respondents had attended other AMNH programs. Those who had attended programs before, mostly had attended cultural and film events and some astronomy and science and nature programs. Occupations varied considerably, and included teachers, students, conservators, and museum developers. Several people attended the event with a spouse, organized group, friends, or by themselves. The majority of people purchased their tickets in advance online or by phone. Some also purchased the day-of, on-site.

People came mainly because of the topic and the lecturer. Several also indicated that they have visited or plan to visit Dunhuang. A few participants also attended because they had heard good things about the exhibition, the advertising appealed to them, and they wanted to extend their museum experience.

In general, people seemed to like the program:

Overall, [a] wonderful and informative program. Colorful, historic, artistic.

Please continue such programs. Very insightful and educational.

This was an excellent program. It was very visual and well presented.

Of the eight online respondents who attended this program, 50% were highly satisfied giving the program a rating of 10 (with satisfaction ratings ranging between 6 and 10, on a scale with 1 being low and 10 being high). In addition, 50% felt that the program had high educational value, giving the program a rating of 10 (with satisfaction ratings ranging between 5 and 10). The majority of attendees would recommend this program to a friend. Most attendees thought that the program was as good or better than past programs at AMNH and at other museums. A few felt that it had not been as good as some other museum offerings.

When asked what their favorite thing about the program had been, participants said that they had most enjoyed viewing the artwork:

I'd never seen the artwork in the detail that one could get from large images on a screen. I'd never seen so many of the cave images either.

I had been to the Dunhuang and this was an opportunity to see more of the art - and be reminded of what I had seen nine years before.

A few attendees stated that they had also enjoyed learning about the history of the art and the speaker's expertise:

I was interested in the background and how the art traveled between the cities

I came specifically to hear Prof. Roderick Whitfield speak on a topic of his expertise.

One attendee felt that he had not had "sufficient background/experience to fully appreciate the content." Another had hoped "to learn more background history of the artwork, more historical and religious context." One participant also suggested that the museum let sponsor-level patrons get into events like this for free.

Journey to Mecca: In the Footsteps of Ibn Battuta

This IMAX film follows the story of a young man on a pilgrimage from Morocco to the sacred Muslim city of Mecca in the year 1325.

Two hundred thirty-nine attendees took the paper survey. Overall, Journey To Mecca attracted mostly adults over the age of 26 (69% of visitors), slightly more women than men (68% female), and 54% non-members. Although occupations varied considerably, there were a few more lawyers, teachers, retired folk, and students. Participants mostly attended the event with friends, spouses, or alone. A few also attended with their parents and children or other relatives. Fifty-four percent of the respondents had not attended other AMNH events. They heard about the Journey to Mecca event largely from an AMNH email, by word-of-mouth, and print media.

Most attendees went to the event due to an interest in the topic, because it was a free event, or because their friends were going. Several also attended because the advertising appealed to them, they had heard good things about the exhibition, and because they wanted to extend their exhibit experience.

Many people expressed their appreciation for the free event and food tastings:

I love the audience interaction [and] pre-show food, allowing guest[s] to savor and enjoy different culture thru [sic] food.

The whole evening was lovely, but I especially liked being able to taste authentic food. That, along with the tea and the live music, really set a "mood" before watching the film.

I was pleasantly surprised that refreshments were free because I expected a bazaar where things were for sale! And everything was delicious.

The food/music was a surprise and a treat - I was not expecting it.

It allowed all guests to enjoy and interact with the exhibition/screening. Great conversation opener,..food/music/film. Ahh, that was great. What a nice reward for coming out on a rainy night.

I would prefer if the Museum had many more such free programs that featured food, drink and music and that provided us with exposure to many more cultures around the world.

It was an outstanding film! Making it available, free to members and providing wonderful, free food made the event a wonderful privilege and reward for those of us who have been faithful members for many years. A wonderful evening! Let's have more of them!

Others liked watching the movie, in general, learning the history behind the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, the festival environment, the speaker's expertise, the music, and the IMAX theater. The following are some examples of participants' favorite aspects of the experience:

I like programming that affords non-Muslims an opportunity to understand Islam on non-biased non-political terms so they can judge it for themselves in a neutral context.

The movie was awesome. It provided historical depth to information and photos generally available of the pilgrimage today. The film helped me realize the effort it took in the past to make this pilgrimage. The local color romanticized the journey.

It was full of determination. Never heard of anyone being so adamant to get to a place for the sake of God.

I am intrigued by the pilgrimage and the continuous journey of being a devout Muslim, as my husband is. Nothing is more spine tingling than watching when they make their pilgrimage.

This was truly memorable. The culinary experience prior to the film and presentation really made this quite special. The program was intimate enough that we got to talk with the speaker after the film and ask questions. I was with my friends and our two daughters (age 10), and we all benefited greatly from the experience. Good show!

Overall opinion was that the event was well-executed. All online respondents (n=30) rated their satisfaction with the experience, as well as its educational value between a 7 and a 10 (with 1 being low and 10 being high). Most people stated that they would recommend this series to their friends. Many rated the experience as good or better than other AMNH and outside museum offerings.

Several attendees had suggestions for ways to improve the experience. Many expressed confusion about getting tickets and felt that the event had been under-advertised:

We had a really tough time obtaining information regarding the availability of space for the event the day of. We almost gave up, but finally got some relevant info just before the museum closed, stuck around, and loved the event. Everything was great, except folks' knowledge of the event itself, and the availability of tickets.

A few felt that the content of the film could have gone more in-depth. Others had difficulty hearing the movie or seeing the screen. One respondent felt that the introduction to the film had been too long. Another would have liked to learn more about current trips to Mecca. In addition, one attendee wanted the market and music to be available after the

film, as well as before, to provide participants with an opportunity to discuss the film with one another.

Global Kitchen: Silk Road and Tea

In this program, a history professor discussed various teas of the Silk Road era, the history of the tea trade, and beliefs in the medical and religious value of tea. A tea tasting was also part of the event.

No paper surveys were collected at this event. One online respondent attended the program. This individual attended the event alone due to interest in the topic. His favorite thing about the program was tasting the different teas:

When I was in China, I visited a tea plantation, and had some really good compressed tea. I was hoping that I could experience that tea again.

He felt that the program had been better than other AMNH and outside museum offerings.

Global Kitchen: Wines to Complement Spicy Foods

This event allowed participants to try various spicy food and wine pairings. Forty-one attendees took the paper survey. Overall, the majority of attendees (27%) were between the ages of 23-30, and 17% were between the ages of 47-54. The majority of participants were female (68%) and non-members (66%). There was an even balance of people who had attended a previous museum event/program and those who had not. Those who had previously attended museum events had mostly attended food tastings, culture and film events, and science/nature events and lectures. There was a large range of occupations within the attendees' group, though the majority of people were either retired, teachers, or students. Several attendees explained that they had purchased tickets in advance online, by telephone, and on-site.

The attendees spoke highly of the event, though they also made several recommendations. Firstly, the speakers should be more engaging and concise. Second, the event should be better organized and have a better coordination of services (to reduce lag time in-between food service and lecture). Third, the events should charge more, serve larger portions of food and wine, and offer more vegetarian food options. Finally, attendees would like to be able to take home the recipes and have the option of purchasing bottles of wine that were provided during the event.

Global Kitchen: A Persian Celebration

A Persian cook and author discussed her book, *Silk Road Cooking: A Vegetarian Journey*. Tastings were included.

Seventeen attendees took the paper survey. Overall, the majority of attendees (24%) were between the ages of 30-40 and 18% were between the ages of 63-73. The majority of participants were female (76%) and non-members (82%). Fifty-nine percent of attendees stated that they had attended a previous museum event/program. There was a large range of occupations within the group, though the majority of people were either retired, physicians, or students. Several attendees came to the event by themselves, with friends, with their spouses, or with their children.

Many heard about the program by word of mouth or through cultural organizations, Time Out Magazine NYC, and from friends. A majority of the attendees explained that they purchased tickets in advance online, and in advance via telephone. Many attendees stated that they attended the event because of the topic or since a friend was attending. A few also indicated that the advertising had appealed to them, they had heard good things about the exhibition, and that they wanted to extend their museum experience.

The attendees spoke highly of the event, with several rating their satisfaction with the program between an 8 and a 10 (with 1 being low and 10 being high). Most also thought that the program had high educational value. When we asked online respondents what their favorite thing about the event had been, they responded that learning about Persian cooking, sampling the food, the speaker's expertise, and the opportunity to socialize and meet new people had been the most enjoyable aspects of the program:

I love cooking with spices and I loved the simple, yet enticing, way it was presented, and I love this culture and the geography associated with it and the customs. Also, these foods really interest me. The sample was delicious and elegantly prepared. The tea was exquisite. The film about Rose Attar was wonderful

[I] love travel photography and enjoy learning about other cultures, and I also enjoyed the tastes and smells of the food sampling.

Almost all (6 out of 7) online survey respondents thought that the program had been as good or better than other programs at the museum. All five respondents, who answered the question, felt that the program was better than programming offered at other museums. One respondent encouraged the museum to "keep up these type of programs". The majority of people wanted to receive more information about future programs like this.

Several attendees made recommendations of ways to improve the event. Firstly, more food should be provided with additional tasting dishes. An individual also expressed the need for the servers to pass cups by holding the bottom and not the rim in order not to spread germs. Another attendee wanted to see some food preparation accompanied by lecture.

Global Weekends: Living in America-Voices of the Silk Road

Local New York City metro communities that have strong roots along the Silk Road were brought in to share their contemporary folk arts with visitors, including Tibetan folk singing, Arab storytelling, performances and face painting by Chinese Theatre Works.

Ninety attendees took the paper survey. Overall, Living In America attracted a huge age range, from 5-79 years old. The majority of the people were between the ages of 25 and 44 years old. The attendance consisted of mostly females (64%) and non-members (74%). The majority of attendees (61%) had not attended previous museum events. There was a lot of diversity in the occupations of attendees, but overall there were a majority of teachers and students.

The majority of people attended the event because they were in the museum and stopped in. However, a lot of people also seemed to be attracted because it was a free event. One online respondent liked the dance performances because of their "vivid imagery and exciting music." This respondent felt that the event was a little better than other AMNH and outside museum programming.

All paper survey respondents said that they would come again. Overall, people commented that they greatly enjoyed the event. One online respondent called the program “fun and smart.” However, one attendee said that Ms. Narine was not very open and gave short answers to questions. Several people suggested that there be more information at the door. All attendees felt that the time chosen for the program was convenient.

Global Weekends: The Message Behind the Music

Performers at this event included IMPACT Repertory Theatre, spoken word artists who presented contemporary expressions of social change, local choirs performed spirituals and the music of the Civil Rights Movement.

A paper survey was not given at this event. Three online respondents attended this program. They came with spouses and other relatives. These visitors attended the event because of an interest in the topic, the appealing advertising, they had heard good things about the exhibition, and they wanted to extend their museum experience. All three participants rated their level of satisfaction very highly (i.e. 9's and 10's, on a scale with 1 being low and 10 being high). They also rated the educational value of the experience as extremely high (all 10's).

Participants' favorite thing about the experience was the speakers' expertise and learning about different cultural influences on music. One respondent felt it was important to “remember and understand.” Another mentioned that it had been wonderful to speak with the artists after the program. These attendees felt that the event had been better than other AMNH offerings. They also thought that the program was as good or better than programming at other museums.

Global Weekends: The Immigrant Experience: From the Motherlands to El Barrio – New York's Latino Experience

This program focused on Latino communities in New York City, and drew parallels between immigrant experiences around the world.

A paper survey was not administered at this event. Two online respondents attended this program. One respondent attended the event alone and the other with grandchildren. They went to this program because they were interested in the topic, the advertising appealed to them, they had heard good things about the exhibition, and because they wanted to extend their museum experience.

Both respondents indicated that their favorite thing about the program had been learning about Latino communities in New York City. One respondent wanted her grandchildren to “learn more about their culture.” Another respondent thought that it had been a “valuable and relevant presentation.”

Global Weekends: Bollywood & Anime in America

This program examined how social media sites like YouTube and Facebook are driving modern cultural exchange along the contemporary equivalent to the Silk Road—the Internet. Films from India and Japan were also shown.

A paper survey was not given at this event. One attendee answered the online survey. This attendee visited the event with his grandson. He attended the event because he was interested in the topic, had heard good things about the exhibition, and wanted to extend his museum experience. This attendee listed his level of satisfaction with the program at an 8 (with 1 being low and 10 being high). He thought that the educational value of the program was at a 7, on a similar scale of 1-10. This attendee’s favorite thing about the program was learning about Bollywood films:

The movie was interesting and well made. I could relate to the characters. The anime portion of the program was really not appealing, although my grandson enjoyed it.... It seems childish, pretentious, noisy and silly.

This individual felt that the program was on par with other AMNH offerings and the programming in other museums.

Impact of Museum Programming

In September we reached out to participants who had completed paper surveys following one of the public programs and asked if they would be willing to take a short online survey that asked them to reflect on their experience. Seventy-four public program participants ultimately responded to our request and completed the online survey. Among respondents, we found that most had also visited the Silk Road exhibition or gone onto the exhibition website before attending a related program (see Table below).

Table 8: Program Attendees Activities Before Going To Event

| Actions Before Attending the Program | Number of Respondents |
|--|------------------------------|
| Visited the Silk Road exhibition | 53 |
| Attended another Silk Road program or lecture | 16 |
| Looked at the AMNH Silk Road website | 41 |
| Sought out information about the Silk Road through books, magazines, and other media | 26 |

Note: Respondents who attended more than one program answered this question multiple times.

After attending the program, many participants talked with friends and family about the experience (see Table 9). However, only one-fifth of program participants visited the exhibit afterward, viewed the website, or attended another event.

Table 9: Program Attendees Activities After Going To Event

| Actions After Attending the Program | Number of Respondents |
|---|-----------------------|
| Visited the Silk Road exhibition | 15 |
| Attended another Silk Road program or lecture | 15 |
| Looked at the AMNH Silk Road website | 15 |
| Talked to my friends or family about the program I attended | 48 |
| Sought out more information about the Silk Road through books, magazines, and other media | 19 |
| Contacted the program presenter | 1 |

Note: Respondents who attended more than one program answered this question multiple times.

Looking across programs, we also wanted to determine how participants rated their overall satisfaction with Silk Road programming and its perceived educational value (see Table 10). The majority of participants indicated a high level of satisfaction with the Silk Road programming. They also felt that the programming had a high educational value.

Table 10: Comparison of Silk Road Programs to Other Programming

| Silk Road Program Rating | 1 (low) | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 (high) |
|---|---------|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|-----------|
| Your level of satisfaction with the program | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 11 | 15 | 20 | 27 |
| The educational value of the program | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 13 | 16 | 17 | 29 |

Note: Respondents who attended more than one program answered this question multiple times.

In addition, we asked participants to compare their experience with the Silk Road programs to their experiences with other AMNH offerings and public programming at other museums (see Table 11). Most participants felt that the Silk Road programming had been better than other AMNH programming. Slightly more participants indicated that the Silk Road programming was better than other museum’s offerings.

Table 11: Comparison of Silk Road Programs to Other Programming

| Program Comparison | Not as good | A little less | About the same | A little better | Much better |
|--|-------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Compared to other programs at this museum, this program was: | 2 | 2 | 22 | 24 | 20 |
| Compared to programming at other museums, this program was: | 3 | 0 | 19 | 20 | 27 |

Note: Respondents who attended more than one program answered this question multiple times.

Recommendations

Overall, it must be said that the Silk Road exhibition was largely successful and well received by AMNH visitors. Rather than being critical, it is the intent of this chapter to present a brief summary of the recommendations from visitors, staff and volunteers that could make the educational experiences associated with the exhibition even stronger.

Educators' Suggestions

Educators had several suggestions for how to make the Silk Road exhibition an even better educational experience:

- Compile hands-on kits with spices, fragrances, and silkworm cocoons for schools to rent
- Have fresh silkworm silk available for students to touch
- Modify curricular materials for younger grades
- Modify materials to include more interdisciplinary opportunities
- Provide educators with more materials about how to use the exhibit
- Include more artifacts in the exhibition
- Include a detailed narrative at each display
- Place staff in the exhibition to answer students' questions
- Increase the exhibit lighting
- Preview new exhibits sooner so that educators have time to develop curriculum around it
- Give educators more time to explore the exhibit
- Invite guest speakers from the region to talk about their culture
- Make a virtual version of the exhibition available
- Target exhibit advertising to administrators and charter schools
- Offer a discount to school groups on for field trips

Suggestions for Music Performances

The majority of visitors (78%) who viewed the musical performances indicated that they were “somewhat” to “very likely” to seek out similar performances in the future. Several visitors had suggestions for ways to make the experience even more enjoyable. These suggestions included placing more chairs in the performance space for visitors to sit down, making the performances more relevant to the topic of the exhibition, and advertising the performances more so that the public was aware that they were taking place.

The musicians also had a variety of suggestions to improve their performances. These included offering music workshops to deepen visitor engagement with the instruments and content, gearing performances towards specific audiences (e.g., children), building more time into the end of the performance for musician-audience interactions, encouraging the musicians to compose interactive works as part of the exhibit experience, placing the musicians in a connected, but separate, space so visitors do not have to go through entire exhibit to access the music.

Suggestions for Other Programs

Participants were generally pleased with the variety of related programs and the quality of those programs. Suggestions for improvement were usually focused on logistical elements such as providing additional food for tasting events, and providing additional handouts or literature.

Logistical Suggestions

Crowding issues and disruptions were especially prominent in instances where camp or school groups were coming through the exhibit. One visitor noted that children's use of signage as writing surfaces to jot answers to questions given on worksheets could prevent other visitors from being able to read the signage. Long queues for the passport stations and other disruptions from youth groups were frequently cited by visitors and observed. If possible, setting aside specific times for larger groups, especially large groups of children, would help to ensure the best possible visit experience for other visitors.