

# Developing Your Own Exhibits

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## Introduction

You can integrate government documents in an engaging exhibit, but you need to balance experience and information while engaging curiosity.

*What you need*

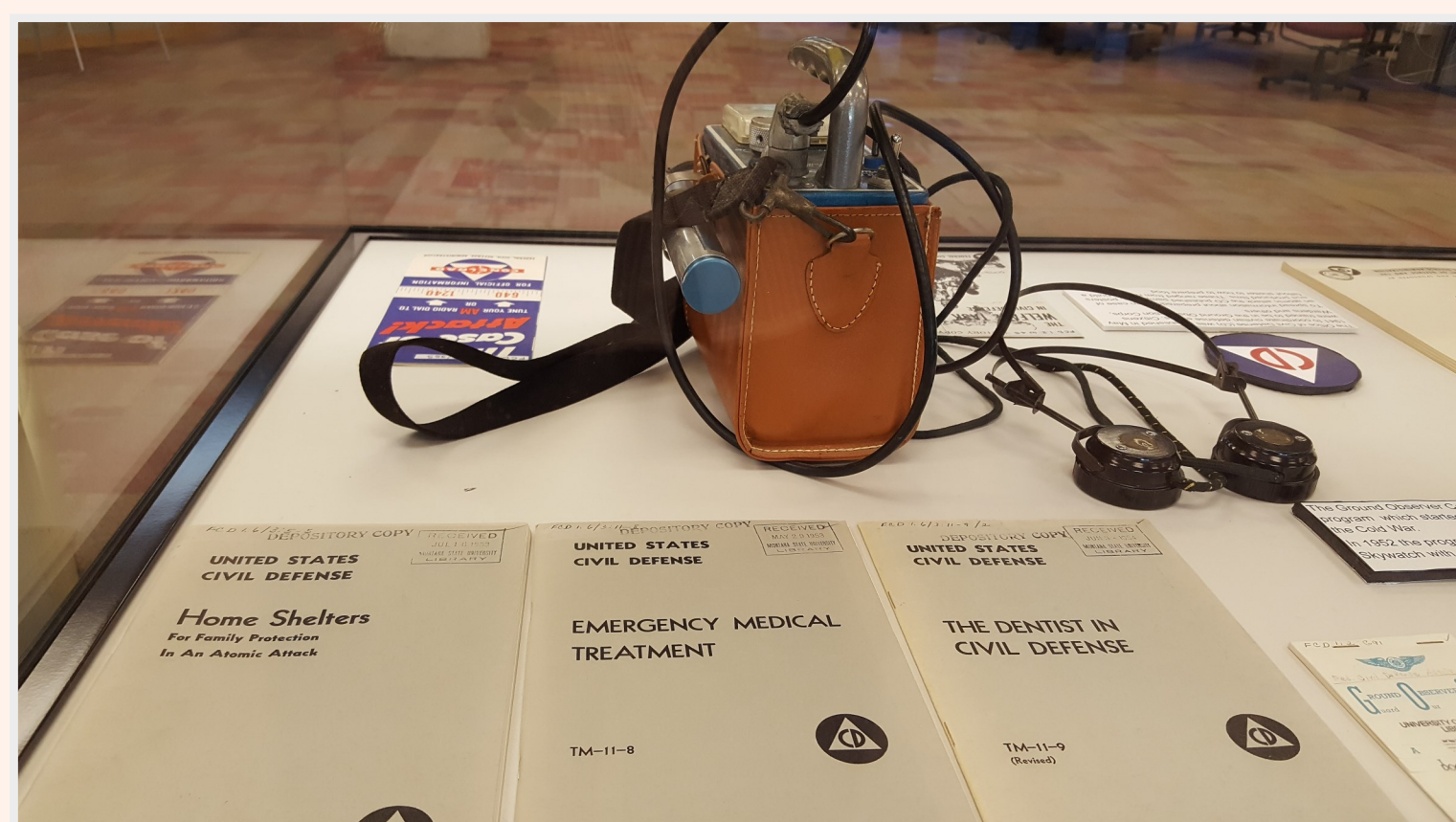
- Determine the purpose and goal
- Provide a focal point
- Provide interactive aspects
- Invite inquiry
- Provide opportunities for sharing
- Arrange events
- Promote



A large, bold exhibit incorporating material from the Smithsonian. The image in the back is 7' long.

## Purpose/Goal

Determine the purpose and goal of the exhibit. What do you want people to learn, and how should they interact with the material? If the purpose is to showcase specific government documents, celebrate an event or explore a timely concept, use that as the foundation of the exhibit.



**Purpose/goal:** The Duck and Cover exhibit was to highlight Civil Defense documents.

## Interactive

Have an aspect of the exhibit which is interactive. This could be an item the public is invited to touch, photograph, or watch. This is not possible when the item requires special treatment. Additional insurance, security or environmental conditions may be required. Consider including a surrogate item which can be handled.

**Invite inquiry:** A 3D print of an orchid from the Smithsonian. Go ahead and touch it!

## Focus

Use an object or objects of focus, and, when possible, provide interactive opportunities. Having a single object which is odd or unusual with a nostalgia value and wide appeal will attract attention within and without the library. This focal point can be an item from the library's collection or borrowed from another cultural institution. The item should be supported by additional materials from your collection.



**Focus:** This moon-rock drew the curious to the library. The exhibit was supported by a collection of NASA materials.

## Invite inquiry

Labels act as a source of information, a resource to encourage inquiry, and a method to ask the reader to construct their own meaning. The most direct method is through the inclusion of a question.



**Inviting Inquiry:** An exhibit focused on the Cold War and fallout shelters invites the viewer to consider what type of experience would await them during a nuclear attack.

## Provide opportunities for sharing

A good exhibit encourages and offers opportunities for viewer to share their stories and experiences. In addition to sending a description to local newspapers, TV, and radio stations provide a medium for sharing such as:

- Facebook page
- Video booth
- Whiteboard
- Webpage comment box
- Tangible comment box

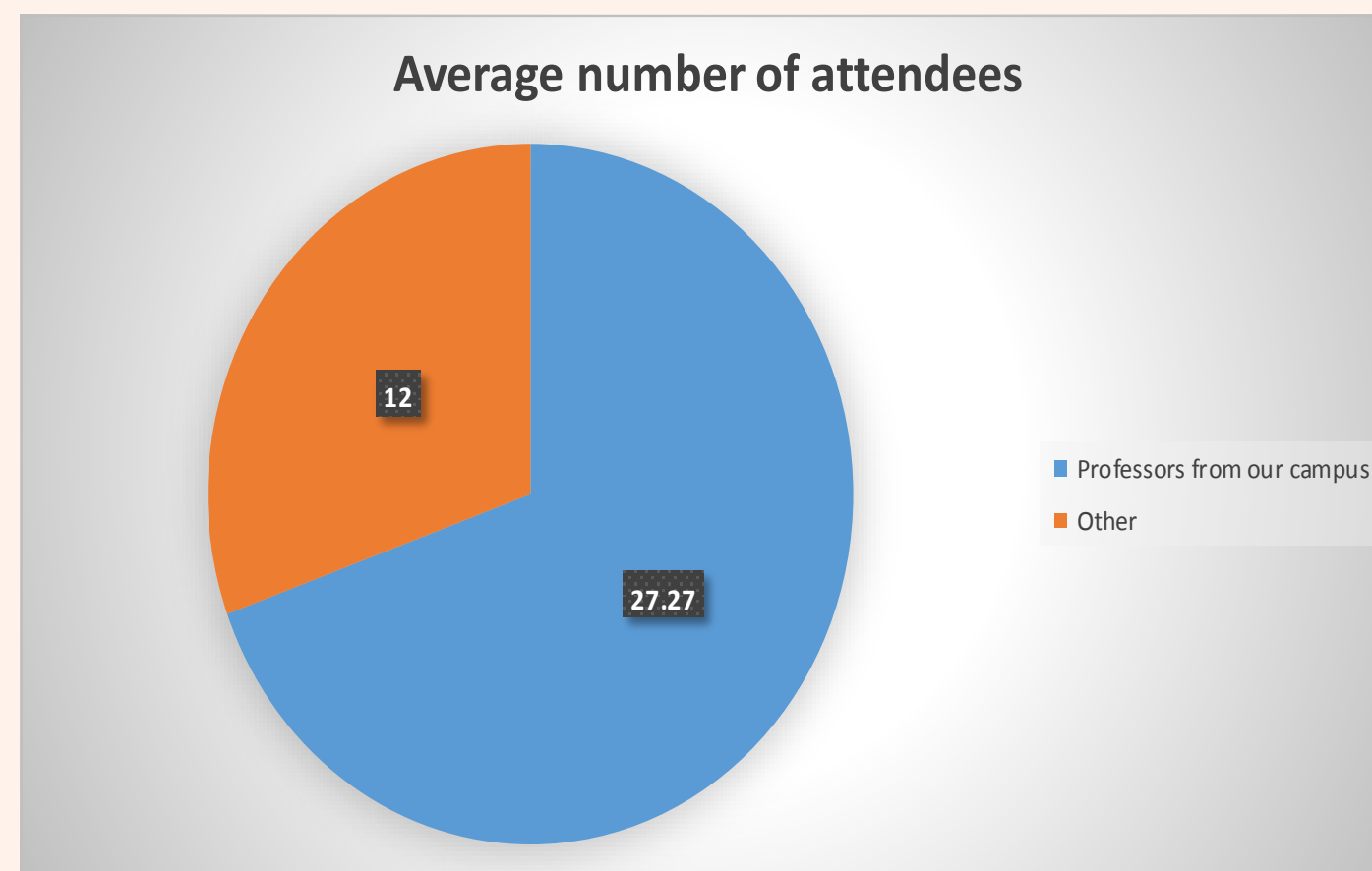
## Results

Through exhibits Mansfield Library has been able to attract a more diverse community to the library. With each event and display, government documents are included, not as a special collection but as an interesting resource incorporated with other materials. In doing so the documents are subtly introduced to a larger audience and the exhibits/events are eagerly anticipated.

## Events

Tying an event to your exhibit adds an experience to the assembly of books and objects. A lecture provides an opportunity for the community to learn more about the subject. Programming for children provides an opportunity for hands-on learning such as creating of Day of the Dead Masks. By providing different levels of events, you will draw a more diverse audience. Audiences to consider:

- Retirees
- Homeschool students
- High school students
- Elementary students
- College students



## Further information:

Anspacher, Ted. 2002. "On Making Exhibitions Engaging and Interesting." *Curator* 45, no. 3: 167-173.

Sikes, K. M. (2012). *Making your own meaning: Designing constructivist interactive history exhibits* (Order No. 1518234). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1039307475)

Visser, Michelle, 2004. "Considerations in the Preparation of Library Exhibits Featuring Rare Books and Manuscripts." *College & Undergraduate Libraries* 11, no.2: 51-62

Williams, Ray. (2010). "Honoring the Personal Response: A Strategy for Serving the Public Hunger for Connection." *The Journal of Museum Education* 35, no. 1: 93-102.

