

# *Mexican Heritage Consortium*

## Museum Exhibition Concept

The consortium was originally conceived as a network of authors whose books about Mexican history or culture would be displayed in museum bookstores and gift shops. For example, instead of paying the \$50,000 fee charged by the Smithsonian for a traveling exhibit, the recipient museum would pay only for basic insurance, transportation and crating costs. Before and after the exhibit is actually on display, the host museum would also have the option of providing – or paying for – assembly and appropriate storage under its supervision until the exhibits are to be rotated among the participants in the program.

We have now expanded the concept to include libraries, schools, colleges and other institutions wishing to participate. In effect, we would have a “museum without walls” available to our members who wish to host or sponsor such displays.

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For planning and discussion purposes, here’s what some of the larger exhibits might look like:

- Part “A” for each exhibit would be a “core” combination of standardized frames, showcases, pedestals, pillars, DVD players and other hardware – some with flat screens, others with projectors and still others with “video game” technology – for visitor interaction as needed. These could be arranged in various configurations, such as towers, overhead arches, island or table displays, wall displays, etc. – much like a set of “Lego” building blocks. These components would not be “rotated” among participating museums or members, saving transportation and installation costs. They would simply be rearranged on-site for each newly-arriving exhibition. This will allow museum personnel to become familiar with their assembly and operational procedures. Training will only be necessary upon the first installation.
- Part ”B” would be a set of rotating “scenarios,” not tied to any particular historical event, but providing an attractive colonial or 1800’s setting which invites visitor interaction. They would be of “modular” construction, using a “snap-beads” or “Lego” type assembly, and would be rotated among the participating museums or members at least once every 90 days once we have at least four of them up and running. For example:
  - A “mural” backdrop of an 1860’s kitchen in Puebla, with lots of faux “tile,” cooking utensils, stacked firewood, etc. Iconic figures might include someone who is “cooking,” and a child nearby playing with a primitive straw “doll.” (The doll and some of the utensils can also be available in the gift shop.)
  - A “park” setting, with benches, a fountain, a bandstand, “shrubbery” sculptured into various shapes still seen in rural Mexican villages, such as a rooster, a giraffe, a burro, a pitcher, etc. Iconic figures might include mariachis, balloon vendors and children playing with toys of the 1700’s or 1800’s. (The toys might be for sale in the gift shop.) Local dancers or mariachi groups may want to perform.
  - Colonial arches with sidewalk cafés and mariachis or marimba players.

*Museum Exhibits, continued*

- Bullfight ring, with matadors and other players in parade formation. Little pre-teen girls would be riding in horse-drawn carriages or wagons as “*reinitas*,” or “little queens,” (a custom still followed – on car rooftops – to this day.) Upscale dolls, dressed in the same costumes as the “*reinitas*,” would be available in the gift shop, along with matador capes or some appropriate toys or artifacts for boys.
- Cathedrals or colonial buildings, with interior courtyards, fountains, “*bougainvillea*,” singing birds, etc., or exterior features such as bell towers and heavy, carved wooden doors. Iconic figures could include nuns, priests, beggars, etc. Students and instructors majoring in religion – or adult “continuing education” classes – could use the setting to teach about the vestments, liturgy, etc.
- A dining room of Mexico in the 1800’s, with appropriate candelabras, chandeliers, “antique” furniture, accessories and place settings. Iconic figures could include costumed “*hacendados*” (wealthy land-owners) and their guests dining, with some servants waiting upon them.
- Vestibules, entry halls, fireplaces, stairways, patios, etc., with appropriate iconic furniture, decorations, accessories and costumed characters. Visitors to such an exhibit may enjoy having their picture taken with an iconic figure like Benito Juarez, General Zaragoza, or other historical figure appropriate to the setting.
- A pottery-making facility, with the various tools, ovens, and personnel. This would also lend itself to “live” pottery-making exhibitions or lessons. The exhibitors could be from Mexico, and Spanish classes from high schools and colleges could be scheduled for field trips where they’d find out if they can follow directions. Lessons could also be conducted in English, with art instructors from area colleges or from outfits like Michael’s art stores.
- A Mexican coastal scene, with a faux “beach,” fishnets, boats, etc. Iconic figures could include pelicans eagerly waiting for scraps as fishermen clean their catch or “*Jarocho*” musicians, who actually bring harps to the beach and play on their tiny ukelele-like guitars with tunes like “*La Bamba*.” Also, children at play, perhaps in the act of running out of the fiberglass “waves.”
- A banana and coffee plantation, with iconic workers, burros, thatched-roof adobe huts, tropical birds singing, etc.
- A Spanish colonial fort, such as those at Vera Cruz and Campeche. Iconic figures could include soldiers in guard towers, water and charcoal vendors selling their wares, Indian women selling fruits and vegetables from their dockside canoes.
- Posada figures for pre-Christmas displays. Residents of a Mexican village in a procession along a cobblestone street, carrying candles and singing as they are led by locals portraying Mary and Joseph. Mary sits atop a burro (because this is “Mexico,”) as the crowd stops outside the door of the first house along the procession route and sings to those inside. (CD’s in gift shop.) A local ballet school or Mexican folkloric dancing school could provide “live” components in costume. The posada can be re-enacted on the museum’s stage.

- A stagecoach loading up passengers and their baggage at a hotel, or freight wagons loading and unloading their goods at “*almacenes*” or warehouses, with the appropriate workers and clients as iconic figures.

Four of the “Part B” exhibits would be fabricated in the first year, to allow a quarterly rotation among four museums or members. If there were some economy in making two copies of each exhibit at a time, we could cluster two groups of museums together geographically, thus reducing time and effort – and possibly some expense – in transportation costs related to the rotation.

With a 13-week rotation, we might try to schedule four new “Part B” exhibits each year until we get to 12 or more exhibits. That way, the same scenario would not re-appear in a given museum or host member for at least three years. Nobody would be required to display the exhibit for the entire 90 days, but they’d have to store it. This will give them flexibility to display it for whatever time best suits their needs. A ten-week rotation would mean five new “Part B” exhibits a year, etc. Whatever the participants will back, within our ability.

- Part “C” would consist of scheduled, dated panels, software, maps, etc., tied to the particular historical or “theme” event which we are featuring during that quarter of the year. For example, all participating museums would get identical “Cinco de Mayo” materials during the weeks leading up to the beginning of May. All museums would get identical “Diez y Seis” materials in the weeks leading up to Mexican Independence Day on September 16<sup>th</sup>, and so on.

The identical materials would fit into the standardized frames, slots and structures already in place at each museum. For example, one location would get the Cinco de Mayo materials to fit into its “kitchen” exhibit, while another would fit the same materials into its “park” exhibit. A third location would fit the Cinco de Mayo materials into its “stagecoach” exhibit, while a fourth would fit them into its “pottery-making” exhibit.

In the long run, then, we achieve cost savings in several ways:

- Part “A” components do not have to be transported every time there’s a rotation. They remain in place year-round at each participating museum.
- Part “B” components can be used over and over again, and they will be “new” to each museum at which they arrive during rotation. For example, folks looking at a “Mexican Revolution” exhibit during the fall in El Paso are not likely to know that the “kitchen” setting was used the previous summer for an “Independence” exhibit in Austin and during the previous spring for a “Cinco de Mayo” exhibit in Dallas.
- Part “C” components can be made quickly and inexpensively in multiple copies. They can be hand-carried and installed by museum personnel, following printed connect-the-dots instructions. They’ll consist of mainly new DVD’s, video games, posters, power-point slide shows and small accessories which can be inserted within minutes into the “Part A” hardware or the “Part B” frames and slots already set up in the museums.

This is just an initial look at what we have in mind. We still must address such issues as fundraising, staffing, membership, grants, non-profit status, speakers and instructors, book and souvenir merchandising that will be acceptable to the museums, sponsors and hosts involved, etc.

Non-museum members of the consortium – such as a Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, for example – may see some opportunities to have at least a trimmed-down version of an exhibit delivered to a location of their choice. For example, a wall-sized mural of one of the “Part B” scenarios could be an excellent backdrop to hang in a school cafeteria, a library, book store, teacher workshop or some other venue where you can be a guest speaker. It could be anything from a PTA or Friends-of-the-Library fundraiser to an occasion where you’re selling your own books in the back of the room or getting a decent speaker’s fee whether you sell any books or not. We can work out the details as we go along.

In many towns, some museums are likely to specialize in other areas, such as baseball, fine art, Asian or African culture, etc. Some museums might have other commitments for their available space, and cannot accommodate “outside” requests. A local chamber or other Hispanic organization may be able to find a venue that’s more likely to reach an appreciative audience, such as a local high school or community college, or a Mexican American Cultural Center. The consortium will help in getting the exhibit placed where it can be most effectively presented.

Local Hispanic Chambers of Commerce or other Hispanic civic organizations can sponsor such exhibits in towns where there is no museum. They can be placed in the most suitable local institution, such as a public or school library. The chamber can arrange for volunteers to transport and install such exhibits in cases where the host institution can not maintain a staff to perform such tasks. The consortium could help to train the volunteers.

None of this is going to happen overnight. We’re still in the talking stage. We will confer with our members and prospective partners over the next few years as to what kinds of exhibits they would like to host or sponsor.