

FIELD WORK: POETRY AND SCIENCE

TIP SHEET FOR CREATING A POETRY PATH

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1. DEFINING GOALS

Convene leaders and implementors from partner institutions to clarify project goals and begin team building with an eye to cross-disciplinary collaboration.

For “Field Work” our goals were two-fold: to explore how the literary arts can enhance STEM learning and to foster collaboration between museums and libraries.

Large group planning activity: bring together leaders, educators, public relations staff, and event planners from both institutions to brainstorm tactics, potential audiences, and desired outcomes.

Presentation by poet-in-residence to joint meeting of project teams to clarify goals and create context; e.g. “New Relationships Between Poetry and Science in the Era of Climate Change.” Think of this as a visioning session.

2. TEAM BUILDING

Convene strategy conversations with smaller groups across partnering institutions to pool knowledge and resources and work together to refine goals, audience, and programs.

Develop menu of programs to help launch and promote the path (e.g., public launch event, writing workshops, poetry readings, contests for kids and youth, poet/scientist conversations, scavenger hunt, mapping exercise, field notebook exercises). How can the Poetry Path be promoted through existing programs?

Assess strengths of each partner for implementation. One may have better design capability; one more versed at outreach. Identify team leader for each institution to coordinate scheduling and details, and sort tasks for maximum efficiency.

3. POETRY PATH SELECTIONS

Poet-in-residence selects initial 100 poetry excerpts for consideration. Things to consider:

- Choose excerpts that are brief enough for viewers to take in as they walk along the path (1-4 lines).
- Seek cultural range with consideration of the major demographic groups and original inhabitants of the area.
- Engage all age groups.
- Select lines that offer sensory images and encourage reflection, complementing exhibits, rather than informing or explaining.

- Consider locations such as gardens, parks, walkways, or benches as places of rest where encountering a poem will have impact.

Invite input and conversation from partnering institution staff to help winnow down the list. The more people on the larger team who buy in during the early stages, the more commitment the partners will have to realizing the project.

The poet-in-residence should have final say in approving selections, but should remain open to fruitful surprises of beloved poems that the team may offer.

Consider science/poetry pairings. Poems can stand alone or be combined on signage with science facts. Science museum curators and researchers review the short-list of potential selections to suggest which ones would best pair with science messages.

Keep good records (title, publisher, copyright, edition, and page number) as these are needed for permissions.

4. PERMISSIONS

Allow **at least** two months for getting permissions from authors and/or publishers.

Have alternative selections lined up, in the event that permissions are denied.

Identify any take-aways that will use poem excerpts (t-shirts, mugs, maps, etc.), as these will need to be included in permissions request.

5. DESIGN AND FABRICATION

Depending on the site selected, permitting issues can cause unexpected delays. Factor this into schedule!

Poetry makes an aesthetic statement, so it's great if the signage itself is beautiful or clever or playful or eye-catching. If budget allows for getting competing bids from vendors, that's ideal. If in-house design teams will manage, consider a broad range of materials and design concepts. Weigh considerations of materials' cost, impact, and resilience. Select materials appropriate to the site.

Poems must be clear and readable. Poet's name (and translator's for poems in translation) printed. Line breaks, punctuation, capitalization all must be as in the original. The poet must have final proofreading review.

Develop support materials: a link to full poems from which the excerpts have been taken; event schedule, map, promotional flyers and website, banners as portable versions of path elements that can be used for offsite outreach, poetry exercises. . . etc.

6. CELEBRATE THE LAUNCH WITH A PUBLIC EVENT!