

# Interpretive Planning

## Contemporary Practices

Maria Piacente, Vice President



### MANUAL OF MUSEUM EXHIBITIONS

SECOND EDITION

EDITED BY  
BARRY LORD AND MARIA PIACENTE

**Lord**  
Cultural Resources

# What is Interpretive Planning?

## Interpretive Planning is...

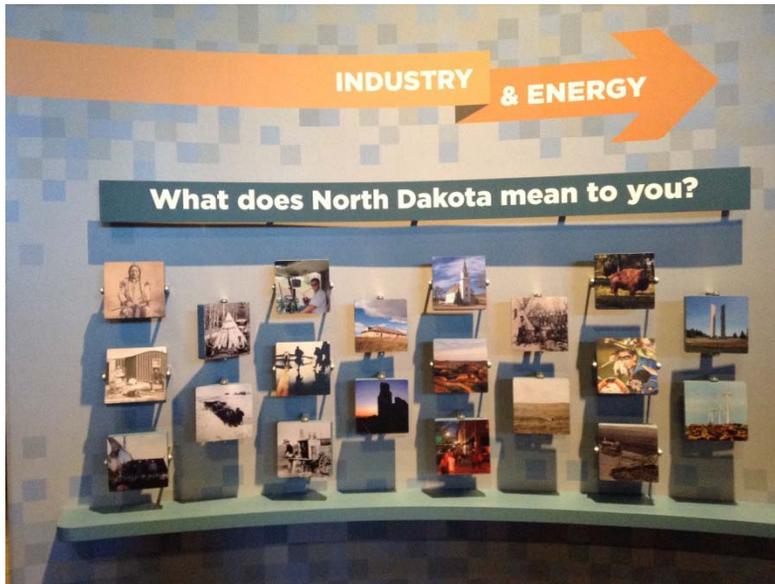
“a communication process that forges intellectual and emotional connections between the interests of the visitor and the meanings inherent in the resource.”

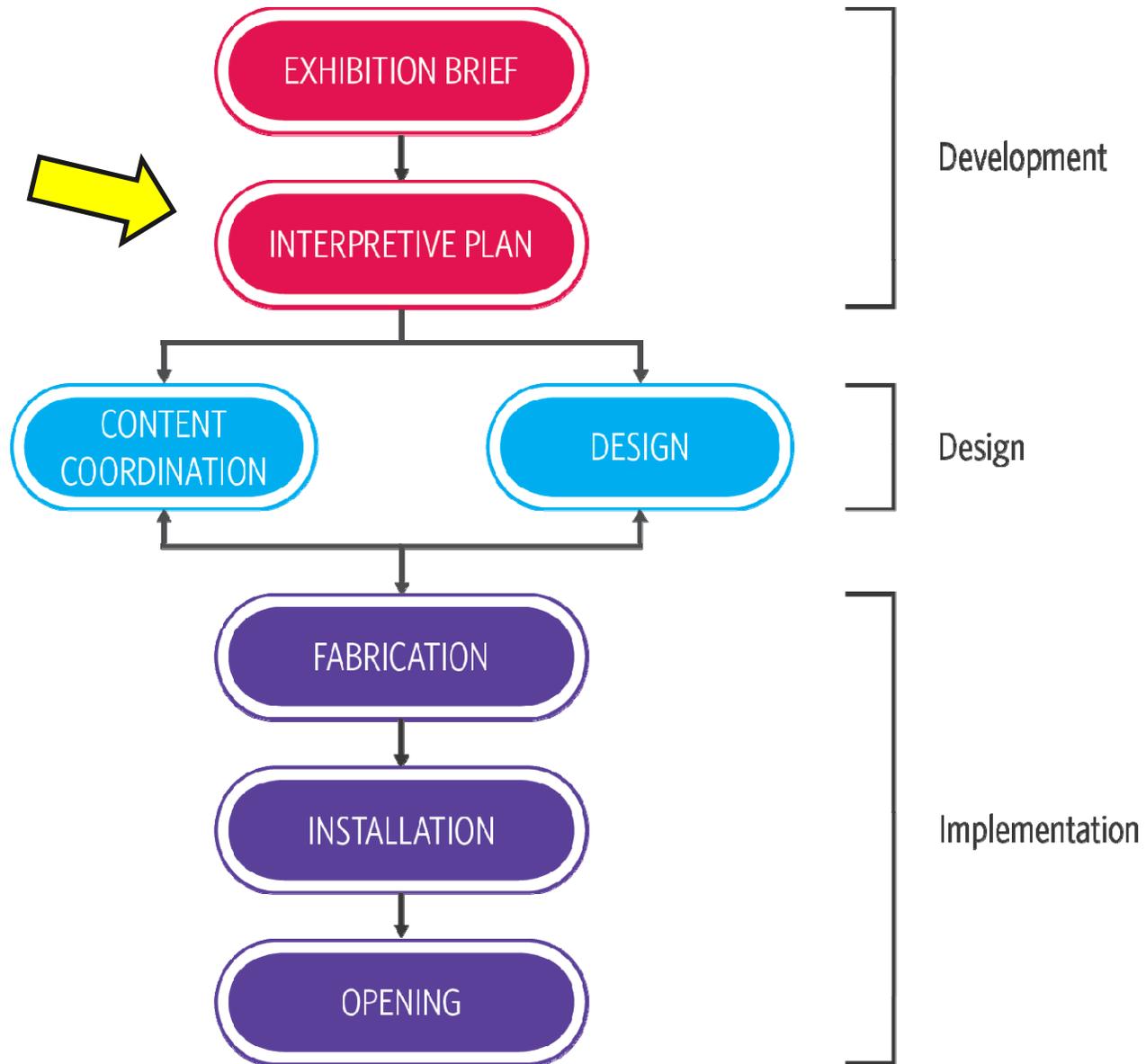
Since exhibitions are essentially “affective” learning environments...

- What meanings do we need to communicate?
- To whom do we wish to communicate ?
- What are the appropriate means of communicating ideas to people?

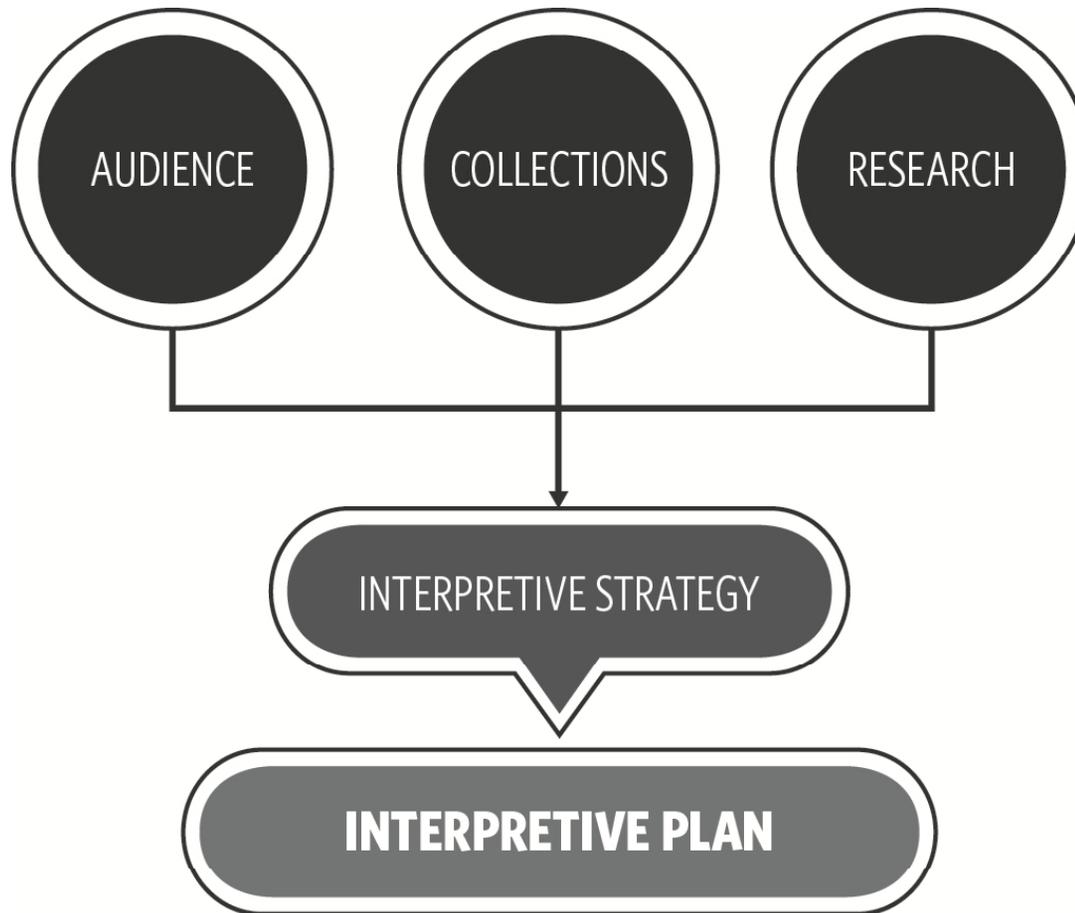
# Why do we care?

1. Relevant, Meaningful and Relatable
2. Visitor Centred (Audience)
3. Decision Making and Monitoring





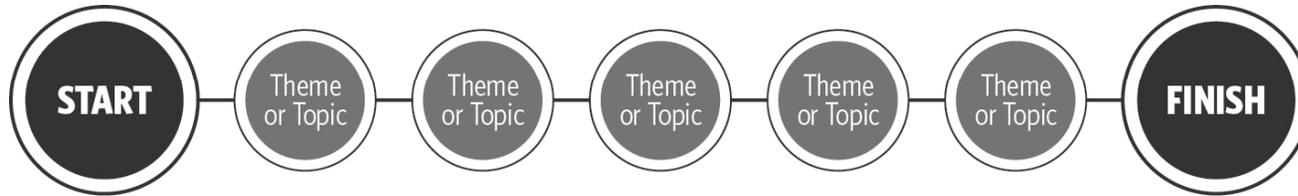
# ■ Interpretive Planning Process



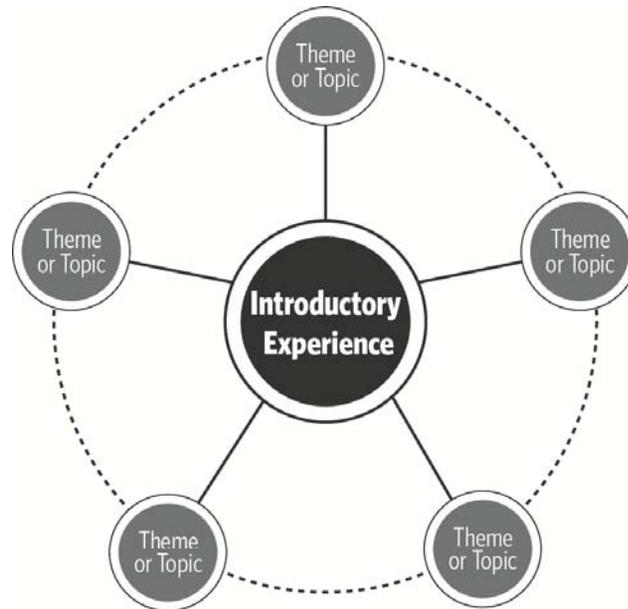
# Interpretive Strategy

- Organizing Frameworks
  - Linear versus Non-Linear
- Communication Objectives
  - Mission relevant
  - Overall message
  - Objectives/Outcomes per theme (intellectual, emotional)

# Interpretive Strategy

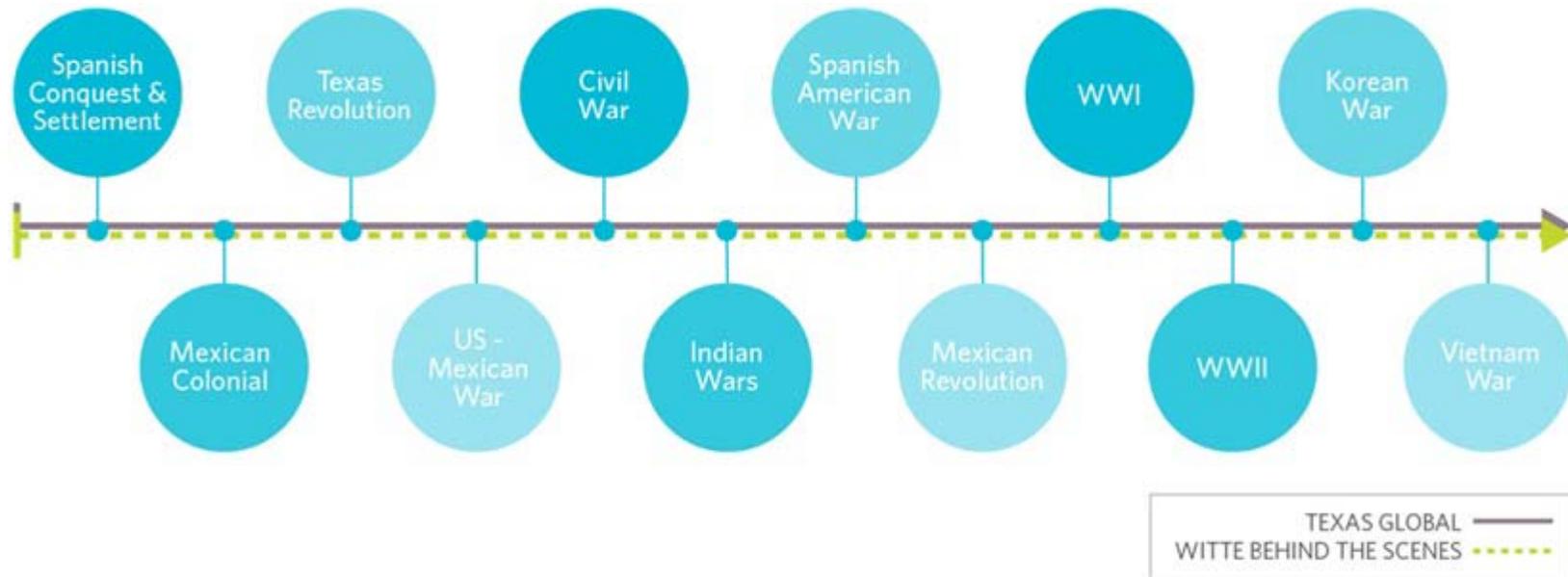


Linear



Non-Linear

# Interpretive Strategy



# Interpretive Strategy



# Interpretive Plan

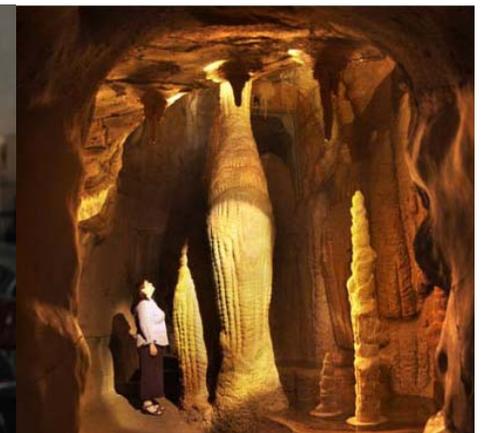
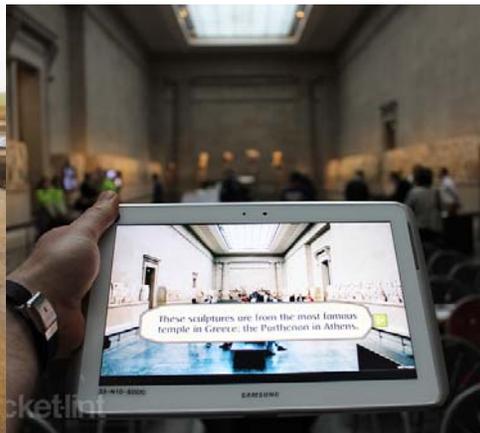
## Means of Expression

Didactic

Hands-On/Minds-On

Multimedia

Integrated Environment



# Ingredients of a Great Interpretive Plan

- Responsive
- Creative
- Deep
- Layered
- Responsible
- Multiple Voices
- Consultation



# CANADA: DAY 1

Canadian Museum of Immigration  
at Pier 21

Katherine Molineux

# A New National Museum

- From “Pier 21” to the “Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21”
- Mandate is “to explore the theme of immigration to Canada in order to enhance public understanding of the experiences of immigrants as they arrived in Canada, of the vital role immigration has played in the building of Canada, and of the contributions of immigrants to Canada’s culture, economy, and way of life”

# It Started With an Idea...

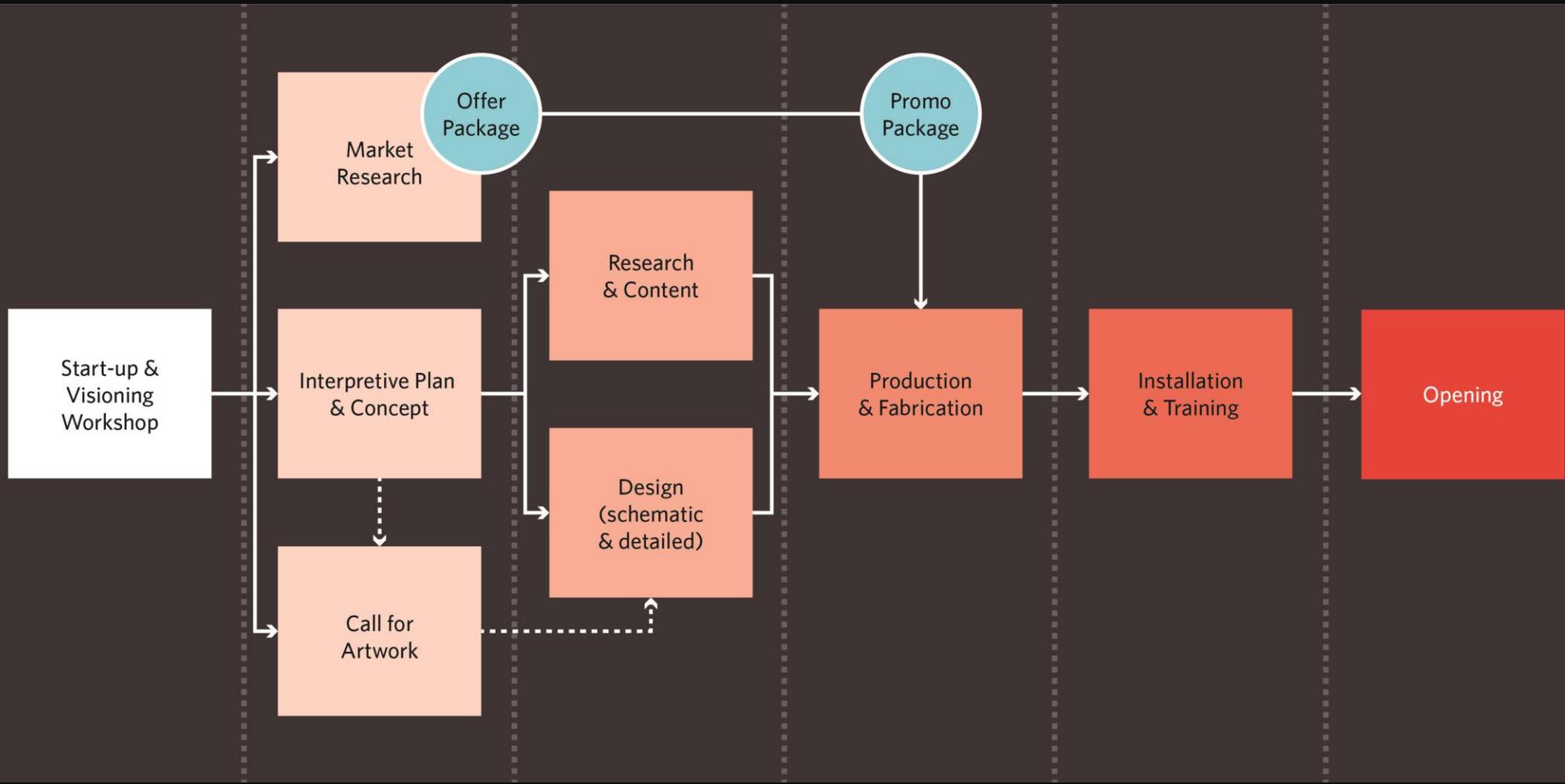
## The Premise:

- Canada: Day 1 will reach general audiences across Canada
- Share the experiences and impressions of immigrants and refugees on their first day in Canada from Confederation to present day
- Utilize history and art to tell the story

# And Some Goals...

- To build awareness and raise the profile of the Museum and its national mandate
- 1500 sq.ft. (140 sq.m.) exhibition travelling across Canada - 2013 to 2017 - Canada's 150<sup>th</sup>
- To collect stories and build digital/intangible collections
- To build relationships and establish partnerships
- To give visitors an opportunity to contribute to the new permanent exhibition

# Exhibition Development Process



# Premise & Key Conversations

'Day 1' is the first day of physical arrival to Canada.  
'Day 1' is a symbolic, personal and official milestone in the process of becoming Canadian.

- What are the commonalities and differences amongst 'Day 1' experiences?
- What is significant about these commonalities and differences?
- Why do commonalities and differences in 'Day 1' experiences exist?
- What factors impact the 'Day 1' experience?

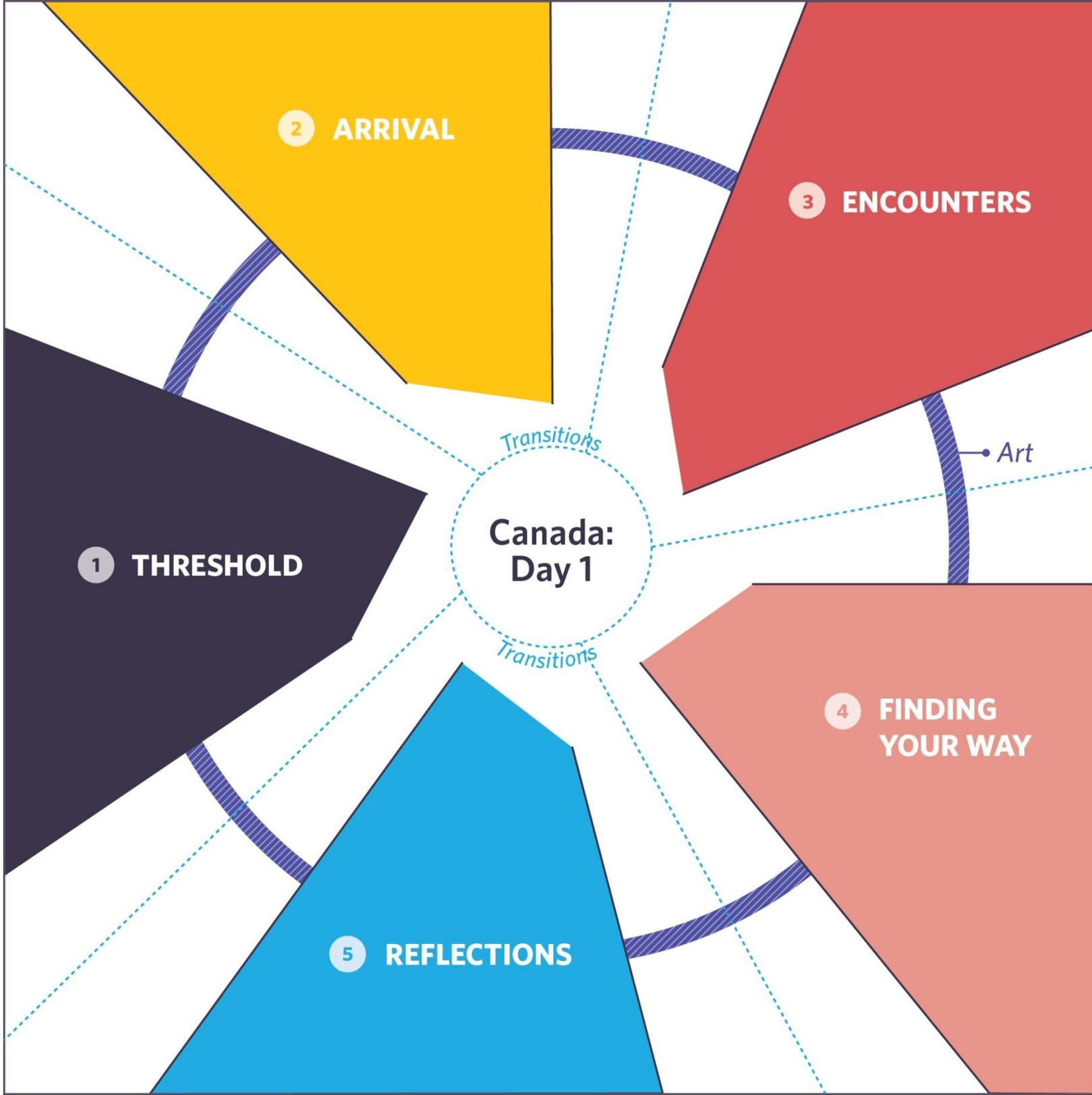
# Telling the Story

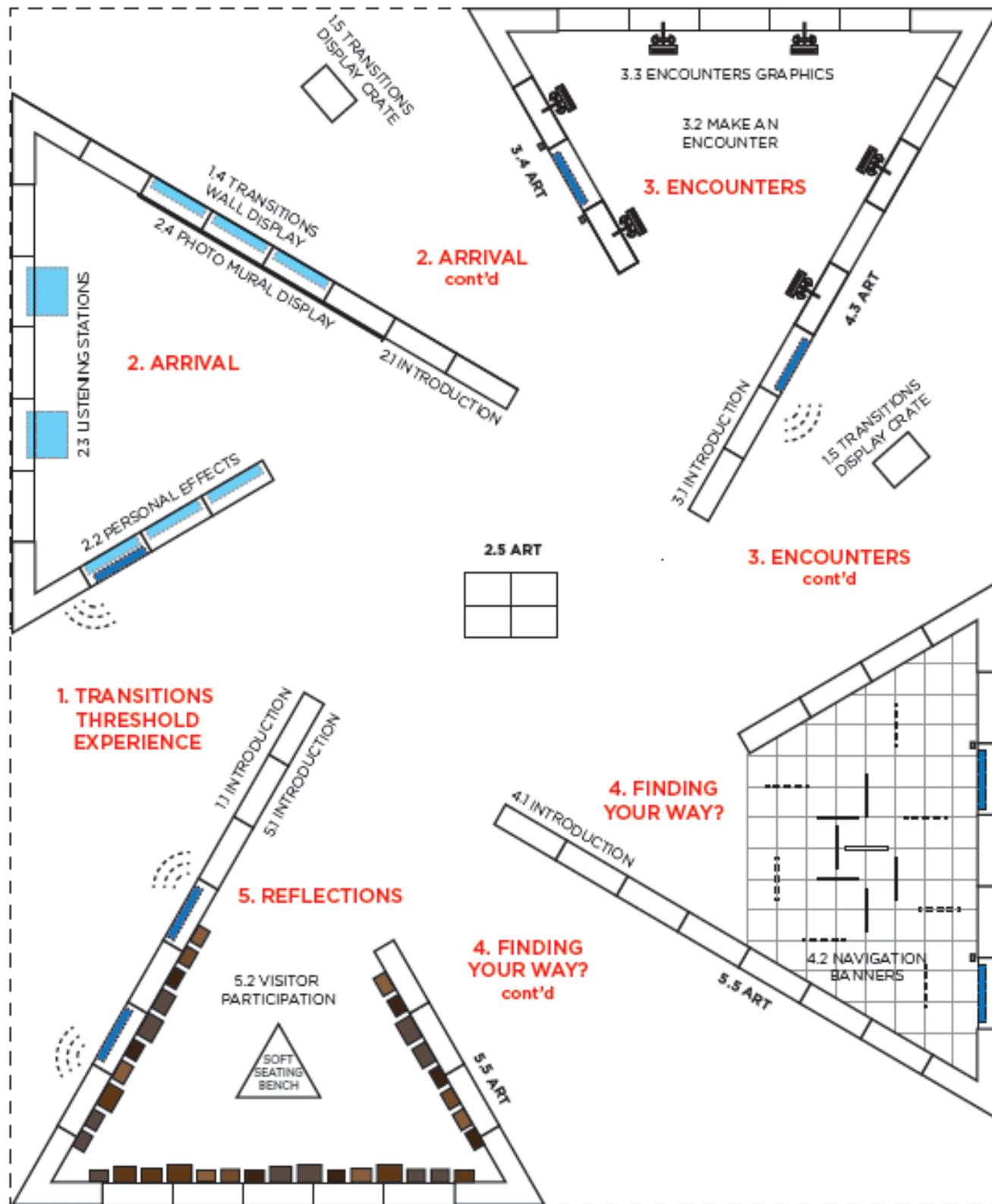
## Content Organization:

- 5 Main Themes, Subthemes, and a Linking Theme

## Told Through:

- Thematic introductions
- First-person narratives and People profiles
- Mixed Media — Minds-On Questions, Images, Objects, Multimedia, Art, Participatory experiences





*"My first day in Canada started at Toronto [Pearson] airport. I will never forget that day...There were so many people with different faces, skin colour, hair, clothes and languages."*

- Jayavathana Kuganesan,  
arrived from Sri Lanka, 2000.

*"After a most unpleasant trip, my husband and I felt very happy to again stand on solid ground. Just looking at the large sign on the wall, which said WELCOME in many languages, made us feel warm."*

-Elizabeth Anasiropoulos, arrived  
via Switzerland, March 6, 1952.

# CALL FOR ARTWORK

- Artists had to provide an artistic statement introducing the personal context for their art
- The work was to reflect one or more of the exhibition themes



# ARRIVAL

## Subthemes:

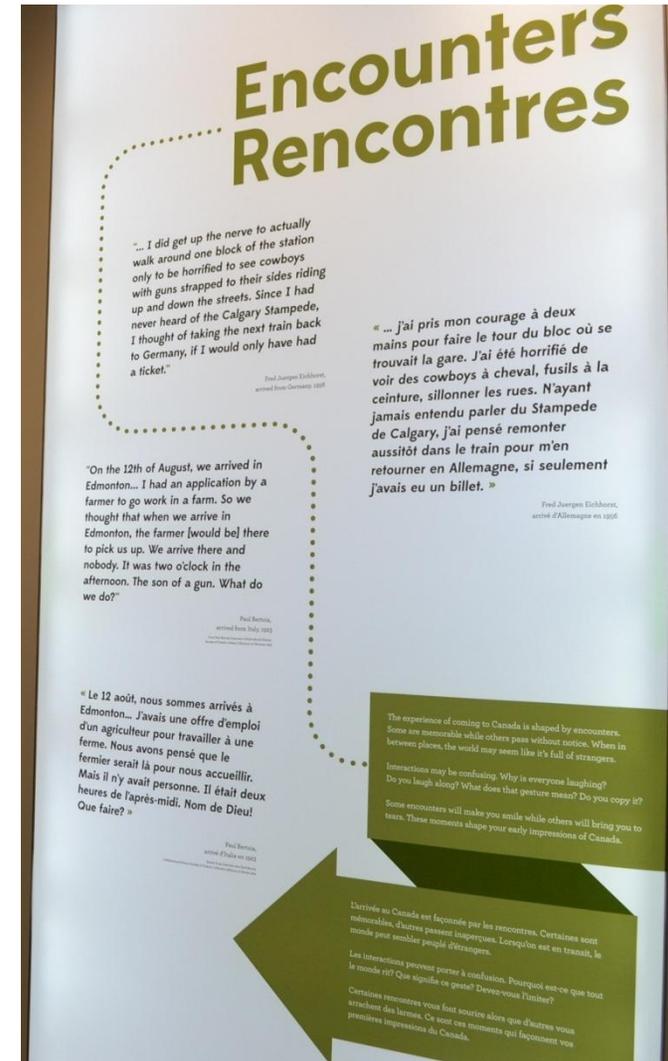
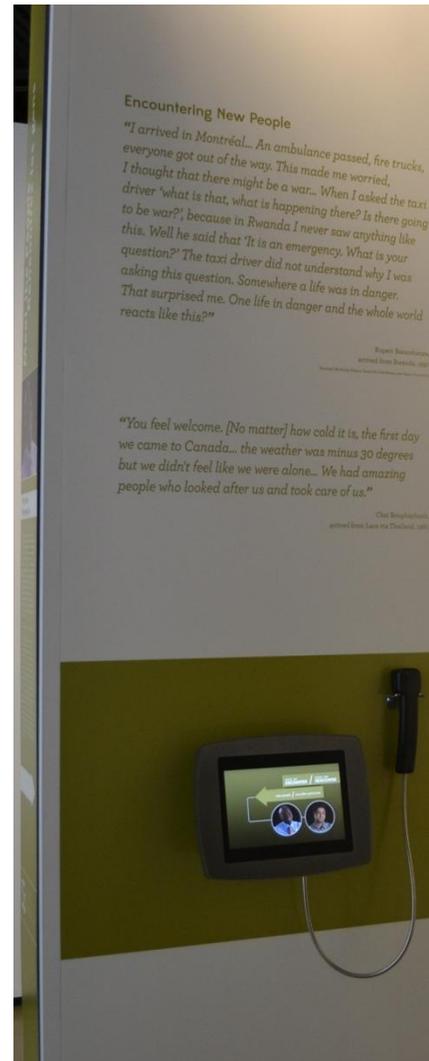
- What was Brought/Left Behind
- Advice and Expectations



# ENCOUNTERS

## Subthemes:

- Encountering New People
- Encountering Authority
- Encountering New Landscapes



# FINDING YOUR WAY?

## Subthemes:

- What will I eat?
- Where will I live?
- Where will I work?
- Who can I trust?
- How will I adjust?
- How will I communicate?
- What will I adjust?
- What does the future hold?



# REFLECTIONS

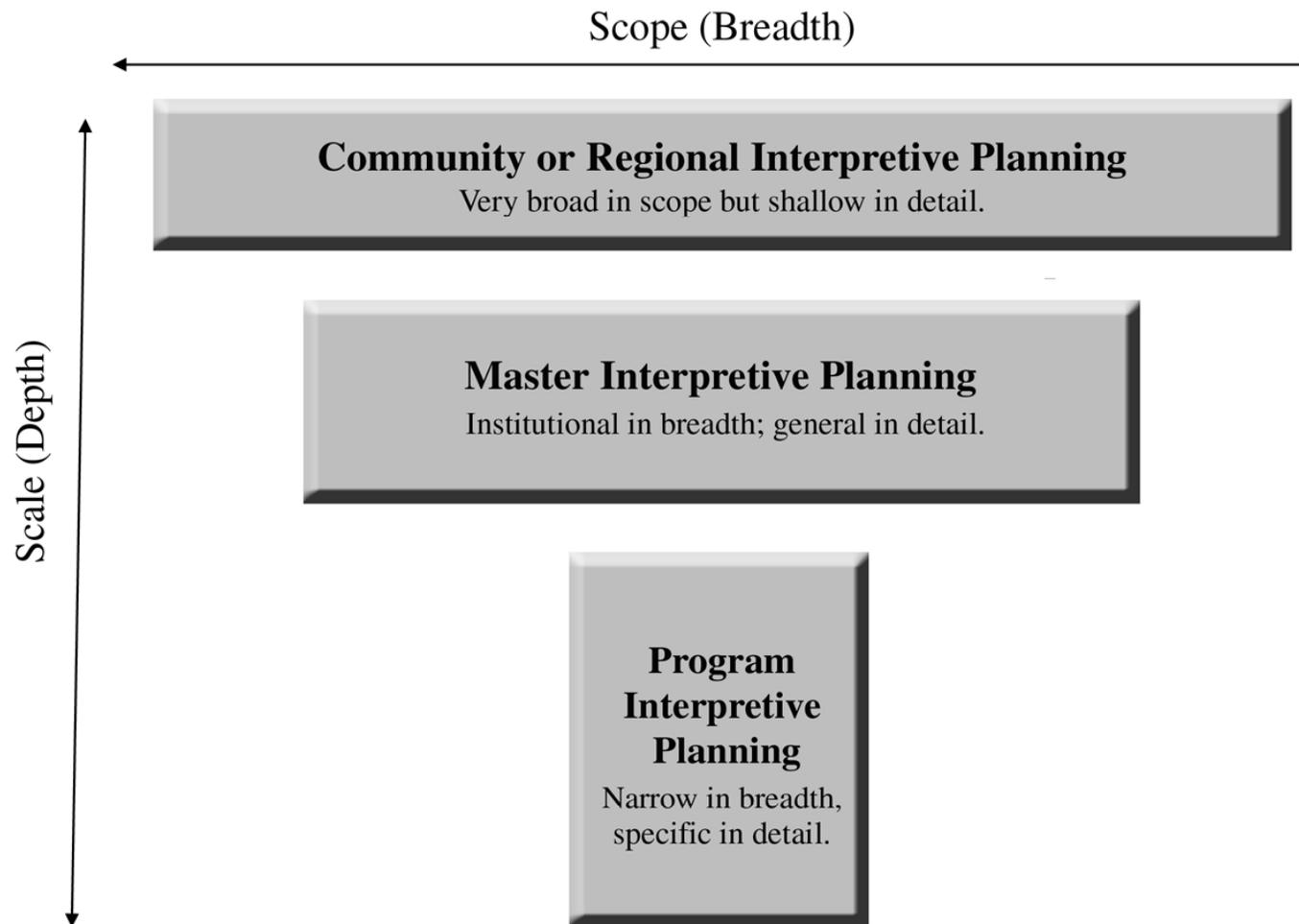


# Interpretive Planning

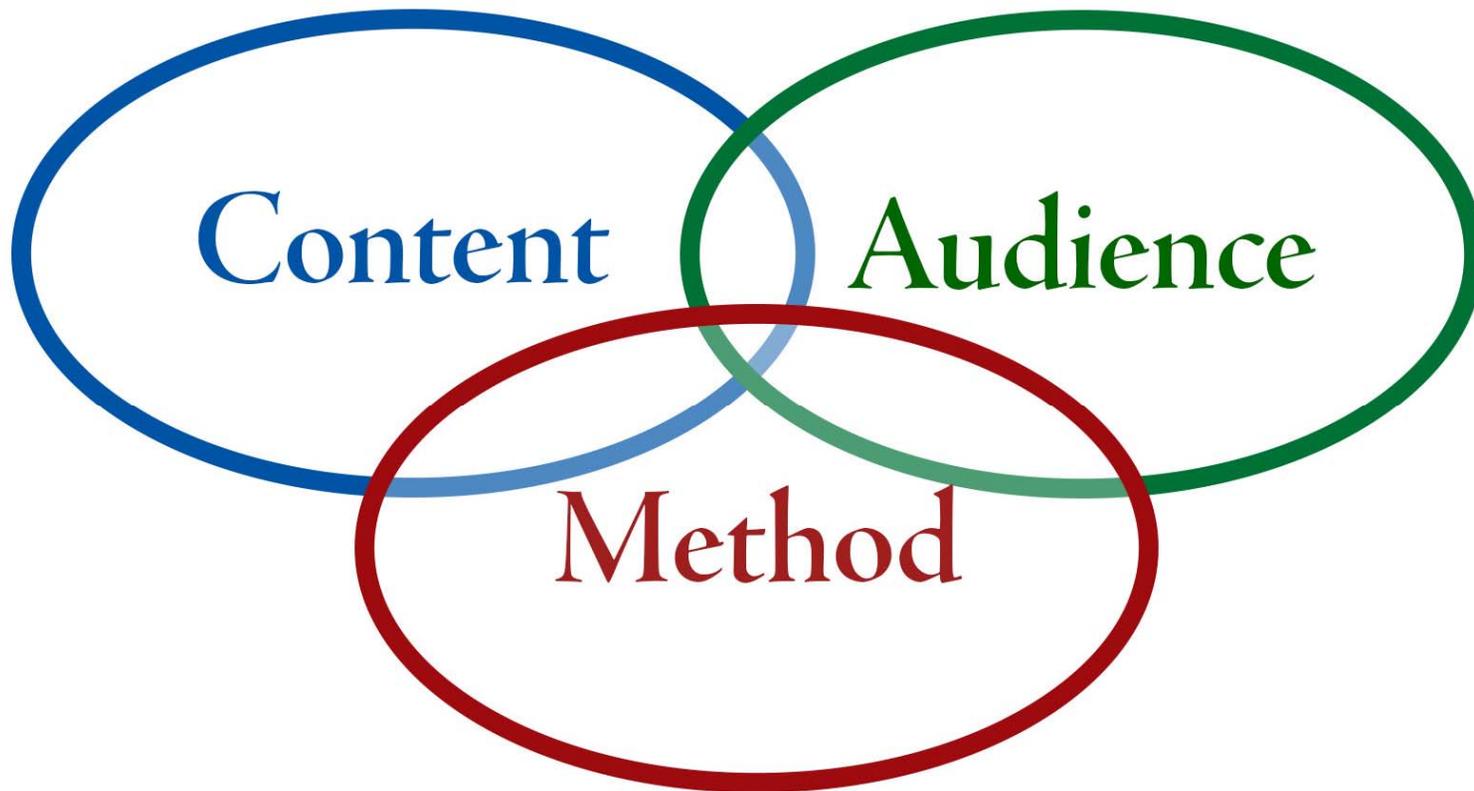
What Does Being a Visitor Advocate  
Really Mean?

Judy Koke, Chief Public Programming and Learning  
Art Gallery of Ontario

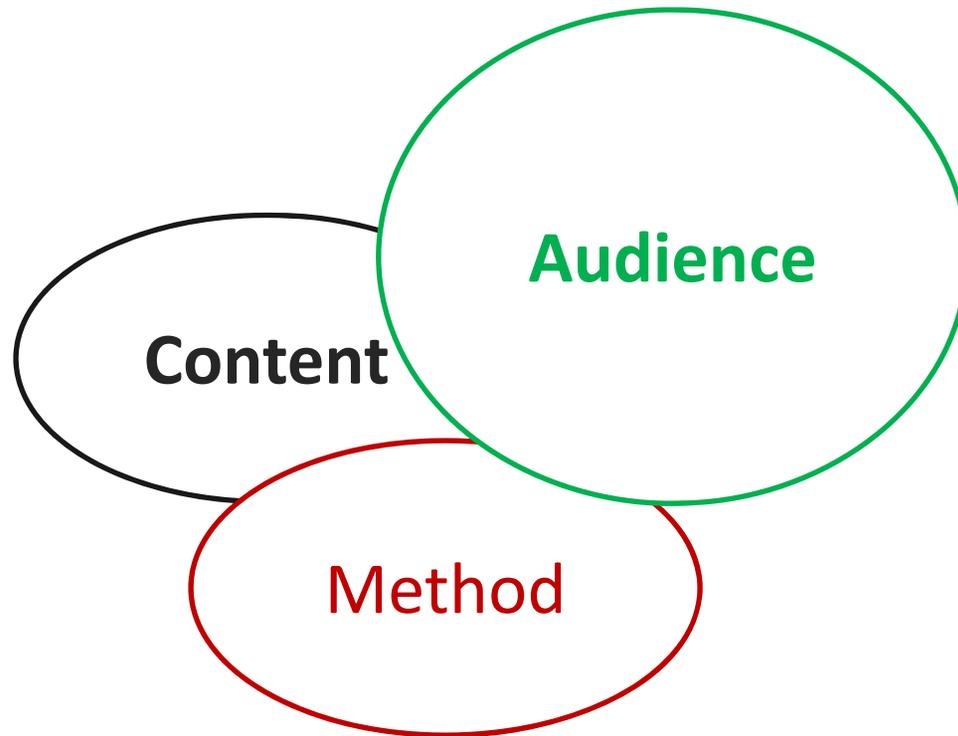
# ■ Interpretive Planning – Scope and Scale



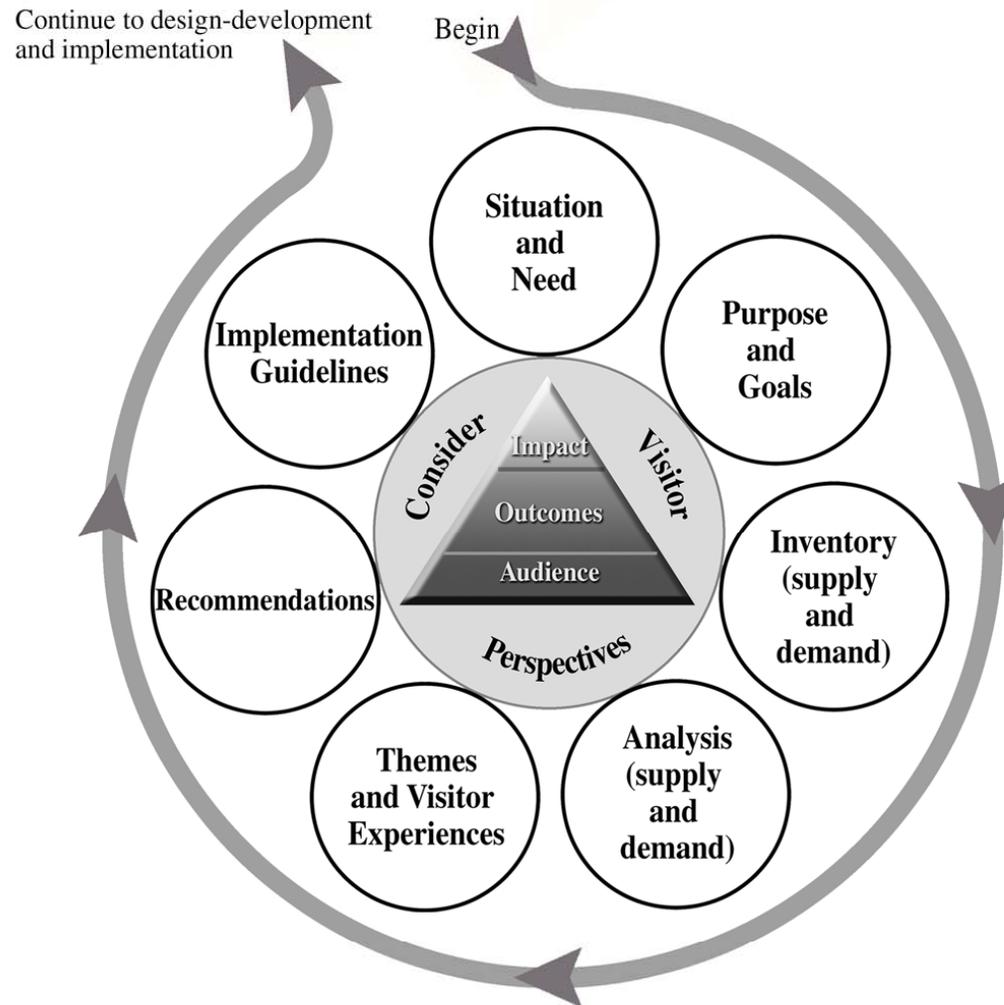
# ■ Interpretive Planning



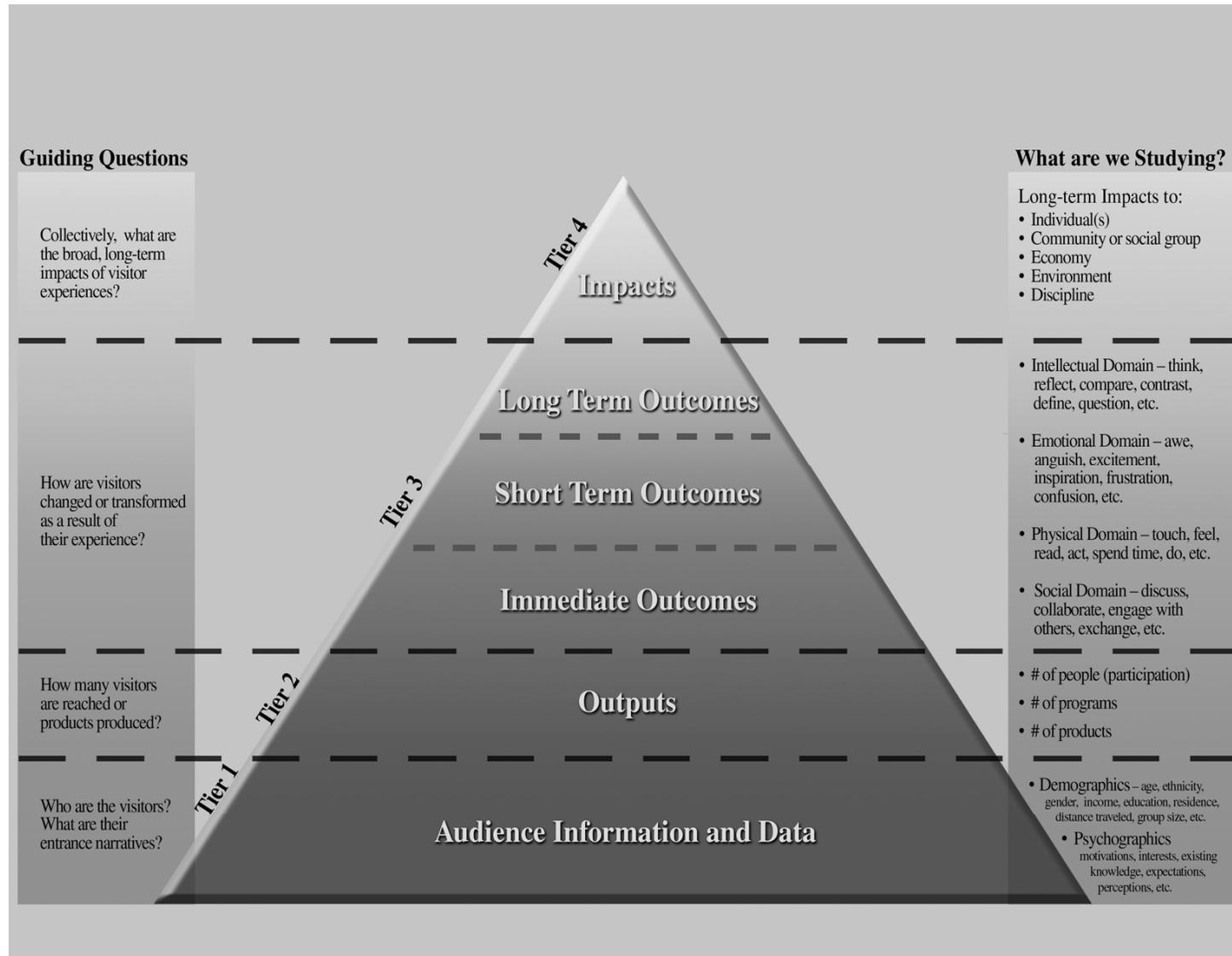
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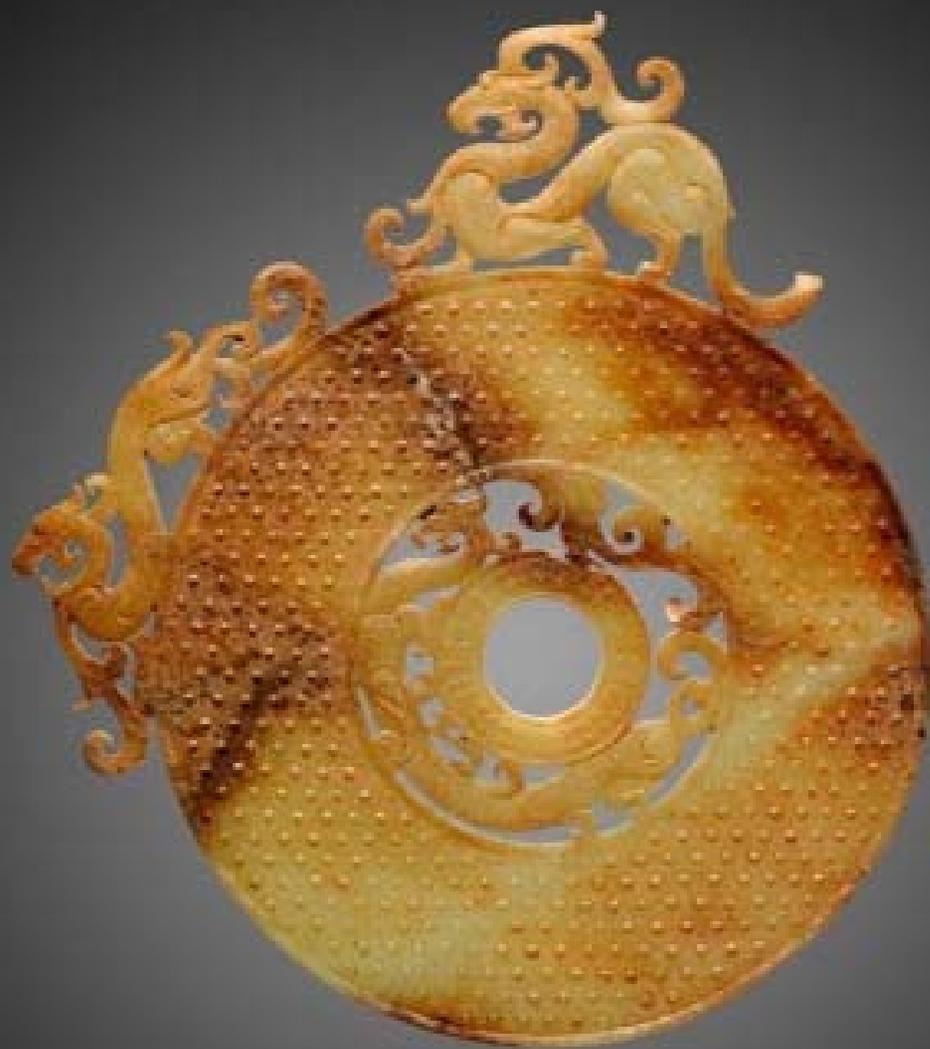


# Process



# Identifying Outcomes





# Front End Evaluation

## Learn

- Not interested in objects (or material) for intrinsic value
- Fascinated by relationship to jade = window into soul
- Overwhelming number of objects
- Personal connections

## Integrate

- Eliminate chronologic display
- Organize around universals
- 'Wow' experience with fewer objects
- Junk/fake jade next to master work

# History & Hope: Celebrating the Civil Rights Movement



"In 1952, I was home on leave from the Air Force and went to Kresge's in my uniform for lunch. I took a seat at the front of the lunch counter, and the young lady working there had to get permission from her boss to serve me."

- Chester Owens, Historian of Kansas City, KS

# Audience Voice





Interpreting

# **The Forbidden City: Inside the Court of China's Emperors**

@ the Royal Ontario Museum

Courtney Murfin

Interpretive Planner, ROM



# Creative Brief

**WHAT IS THE INFORMATION?**

**WHO IS IT FOR?**

**WHAT STORY CAN WE TELL?**

**HOW WILL WE TELL IT?**

# WHAT IS THE INFORMATION?

- Review artifact list with curators
- Research
  - Articles or books for reliable information
  - Videos and popular sources (like Wikipedia) to understand what information the public is already getting



# WHO IS IT FOR?

- Understand the ROM's audience(s)
  - Traditional visitors
  - Experience seekers
  - Families
- Determine who will be most interested in this information
- Make sure to include something for the other groups too

# WHAT STORY CAN WE TELL?

## Theme Structure

Thematic Threads	Main Themes	Sub-themes (more specific content that will be addressed within each theme)
PLACE	What is the Forbidden City?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Palace for 24 Emperors of the Ming and Qing Dynasties</li> <li>• Between Gates and Walls (layout)</li> <li>• 600 years of the Palace (history)</li> <li>• Heavenly Palace on Earth</li> </ul>
PEOPLE	Power and Privilege	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Auspicious Symbols</li> <li>• Imperial Presence to the World</li> <li>• Emperors on Horseback (military and hunting)</li> <li>• Ritual Ceremonies and Court Music</li> <li>• Cosmology and Costume</li> <li>• Becoming (a Great) Emperor</li> <li>• Governmental Affairs</li> </ul>
	Life in the Palace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women and Children</li> <li>• Fashions Led by the Court Ladies</li> <li>• Imperial Dress Code</li> <li>• Objects for Daily Use</li> <li>• Seasonal Activities and Entertainment</li> <li>• Imperial Household Department (running the palace)</li> </ul>
	Twilight of the Last Dynasty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Last Emperor and the End of the Empire</li> </ul>
THINGS	Study and Collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intellectual Cultivation</li> <li>• Collecting Treasures</li> <li>• Imperial Workshop</li> </ul>
	Imperial Fascination with Western Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technology and Art</li> </ul>
	The Palace Museum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protecting the Imperial Collection</li> </ul>

# WHAT STORY CAN WE TELL?

What it's about

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**Place** Emperors **Things**  
**People** **Stories** Power  
Imperialism **China**

# WHAT STORY CAN WE TELL?

Sensations

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Cultural Richness   Pride   **Forbidden**  
Drama   **Voyeurism**   Exclusivity  
Mystery   Grandeur   Privilege

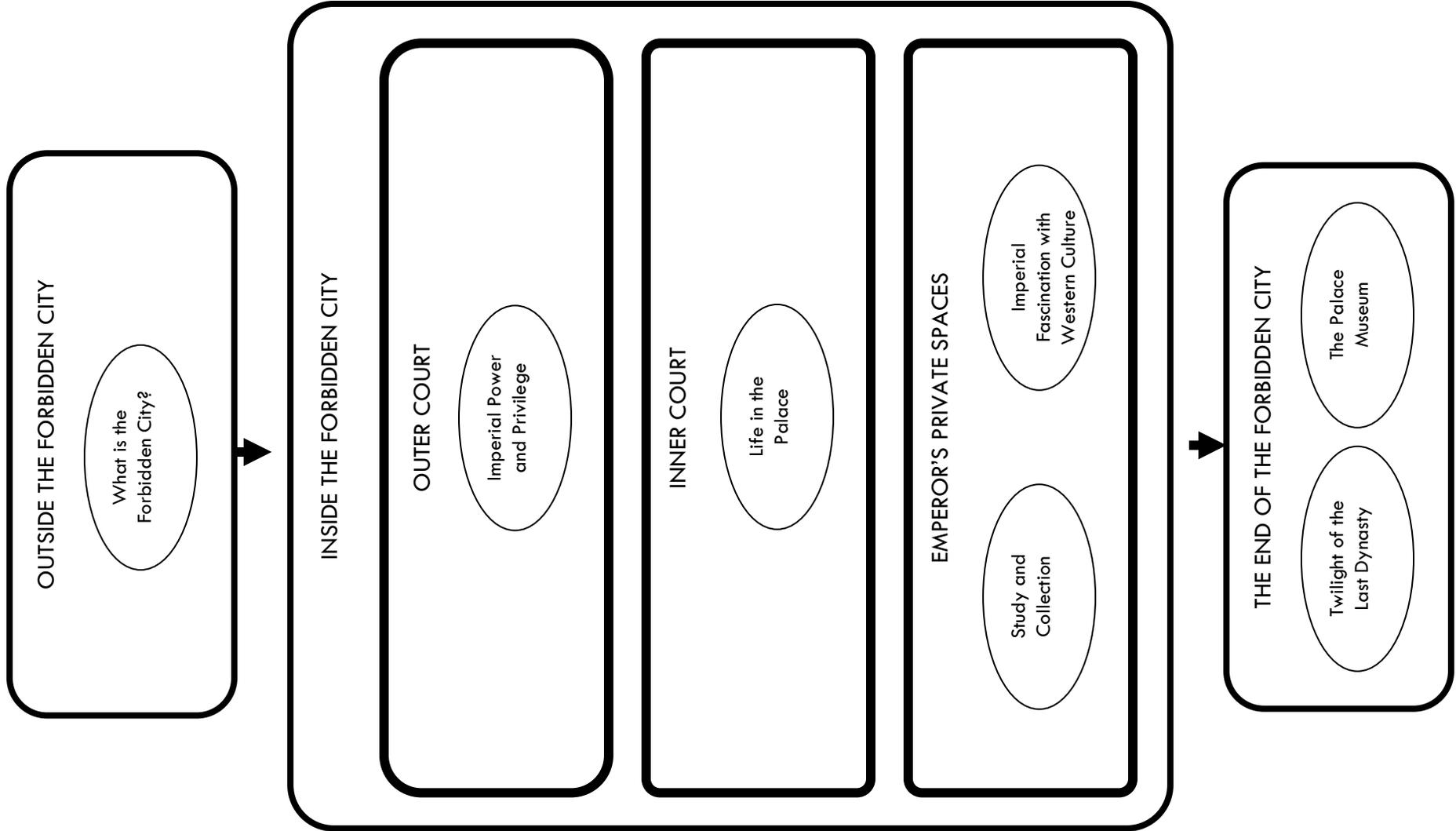
# HOW WILL WE TELL IT?

## Exhibition Structure



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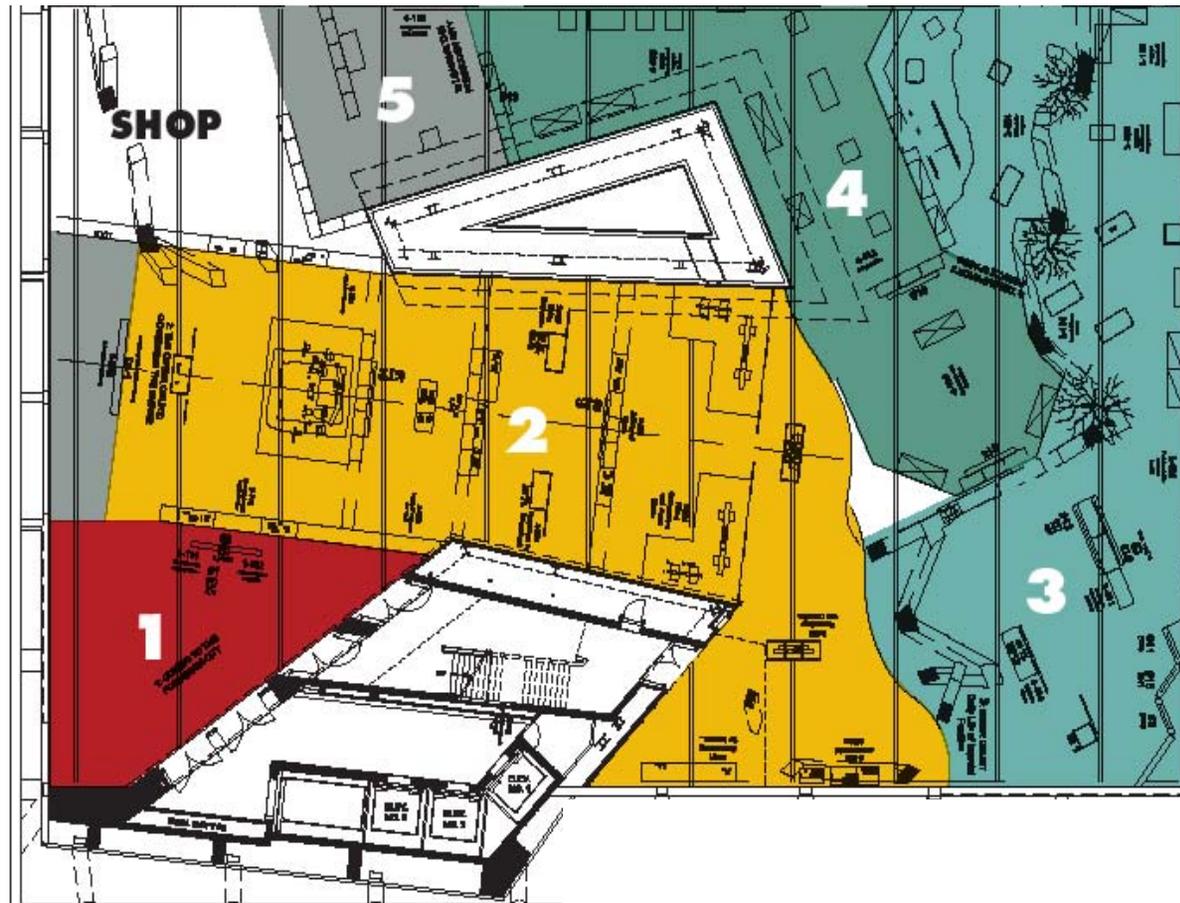
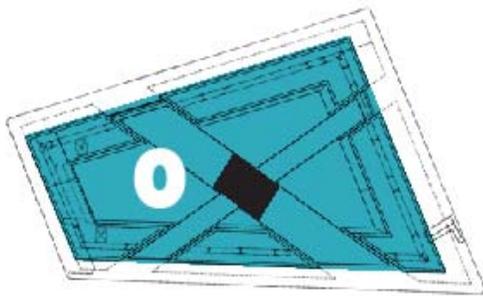


# HOW WILL WE TELL IT?

## Exhibition Overview

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- 0** Spirit House: Prologue
- 1** Outside the Forbidden City
- 2** The Outer Court: Governing the Empire
- 3** The Inner Court: Daily Life of Imperial Families
- 4** The Emperor's Private Spaces
- 5** Leaving the Forbidden City  
Epilogue



# HOW WILL WE TELL IT?

## Text Structure

- Exhibit Introduction
- Section Introductions
- Theme Overviews
- Sub-theme Overviews
  
- Object labels – categorized by theme

# HOW WILL WE TELL IT?

## Text Structure

### Section Introductions

**秦始皇陵**

**THE OUTER COURT**  
**THE OUTER COURT**

THE OFFICIAL SPACE OF THE FORBIDDEN CITY,  
 WHERE THE EMPEROR DISPLAYED HIS POWER  
 TO ONLY THOSE INVITED WITHIN ITS WALLS.

THE OFFICIAL SPACE OF THE FORBIDDEN CITY,  
 WHERE THE EMPEROR DISPLAYED HIS POWER  
 TO ONLY THOSE INVITED WITHIN ITS WALLS.

### Theme Introductions

**AFFAIRS OF STATE** **秦始皇陵** **AFFAIRS OF STATE**

Affairs of State

Affairs of State

### Sub-theme Introductions

Sub-theme Introduction

Sub-theme Introduction

### People Profiles

**EMPEROR QIANLONG**

Emperor Qianlong



# HOW WILL WE TELL IT?

## Section Introduction



# HOW WILL WE TELL IT?

## Theme Overview



# HOW WILL WE TELL IT?

## Object Labels

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# HOW WILL WE TELL IT?

## Interpretive Structure

<b>THINGS</b>	object labels
<b>PLACES</b>	place profiles
<b>PEOPLE</b>	character stories

# HOW WILL WE TELL IT?

## Place Profile



# HOW WILL WE TELL IT?

## Character Stories



# HOW WILL WE TELL IT?

## Content Structure

0

Prologue: Spirit House Installation

**THEME** What is the Forbidden City  
**SUB-THEME** The Palace of China's Emperors (list of emperors)  
**SUB-THEME** A Heavenly Palace on Earth  
*Place Profile: Meridian Gate*

1

Entrance: Outside the Forbidden City

**THEME** Exhibition Introduction  
**SUB-THEME** The Palace of China's Emperors (reprise)  
**SUB-THEME** 600 years of the Forbidden City (TIMELINE)

2

The Outer Court

*Place Profile: Outer Court*

**THEME** Power and Privilege  
**SUB-THEME** Auspicious Symbols  
**SUB-THEME** Building an Empire  
**SUB-THEME** Emperors on Horseback  
**Character Profile: Qianlong**  
**SUB-THEME** Rites and Ceremonies  
**SUB-THEME** Court Music  
*Place Profile: Hall of Supreme Harmony*  
**SUB-THEME** Imperial Dress Codes  
**SUB-THEME** The Business of Being Emperor  
*Place Profile: Hall of Mental Cultivation*  
**Character Profile: Official**  
**SUB-THEME** Becoming (a Great) Emperor  
**Character Profile: Yongzheng**

3

The Inner Court

*Place Profile: Inner Court*

**THEME** Life in the Palace  
**SUB-THEME** The Imperial Family  
*Place Profile: Women's Palaces*  
**Character Profile: Concubine**  
**Character Profile: Puyi**  
**SUB-THEME** Leisure Fashions  
**Character Profile: Cixi**  
**SUB-THEME** Everyday Objects  
**SUB-THEME** Imperial Pastimes  
*Place Profile: Imperial Garden*  
**SUB-THEME** Running the Forbidden City  
**Character Profile: Eunuch**

4

The Emperor's Personal Spaces

*Place Profile: Studio of Exhaustion from Diligent Service*

**THEME** Study and Collecting  
**SUB-THEME** The Cultivated Emperor  
**SUB-THEME** Collecting Treasures  
**SUB-THEME** Imperial Workshops  
**THEME** Fascination with the West  
**Character Profile: Western Missionary**  
*Place Profile: Summer Palace*

5

Twilight of the Last Dynasty

**SUB-THEME** Twilight of the Last Dynasty  
*Place Profile: Hall of Union*

**THEME** Epilogue: The Palace Museum