

The Visitors' Bill of Rights

A list of important human needs, seen from the visitors' point of view

by Judy Rand

- **Comfort**
"Meet my basic needs."
Visitors need fast, easy, obvious access to clean, safe, barrier-free restrooms, fountains, food, baby-changing tables and plenty of seating. They also need full access to exhibits.
- **Orientation**
"Make it easy for me to find my way around."
Visitors need to make sense of their surroundings. Clear signs and well-planned spaces help them know what to expect, where to go, how to get there and what it's about.
- **Welcome/belonging**
"Make me feel welcome."
Friendly, helpful staff ease visitors' anxieties. If they see themselves represented in exhibits and programs and on the staff, they'll feel more like they belong.
- **Enjoyment**
"I want to have fun!"
Visitors want to have a good time. If they run into barriers (like broken exhibits, activities they can't relate to, intimidating labels) they can get frustrated, bored, confused.
- **Socializing**
"I came to spend time with my family and friends."
Visitors come for a social outing with family or friends (or to connect with society at large). They expect to talk, interact and share the experience; exhibits can set the stage for this.
- **Respect**
"Accept me for who I am and what I know."
Visitors want to be accepted at their own level of knowledge and interest. They don't want exhibits, labels or staff to exclude them, patronize them or make them feel dumb.
- **Communication**
"Help me understand, and let me talk, too."
Visitors need accuracy, honesty and clear communication from labels, programs and docents. They want to ask questions, and hear and express differing points of view.
- **Learning**
"I want to learn something new."
Visitors come (and bring the kids) "to learn something new," but they learn in different ways. It's important to know how visitors learn, and assess their knowledge and interests. Controlling distractions (like crowds, noise and information overload) helps them, too.
- **Choice and control**
"Let me choose; give me some control."
Visitors need some autonomy: freedom to choose, and exert some control, touching and getting close to whatever they can. They need to use their bodies and move around freely.
- **Challenge and confidence**
"Give me a challenge I know I can handle."
Visitors want to succeed. A task that's too easy bores them; too hard makes them anxious. Providing a wide variety of experiences will match their wide range of skills.
- **Revitalization**
"Help me leave refreshed, restored."
When visitors are focused, fully engaged, and enjoying themselves, time stands still and they feel refreshed: a "flow" experience that exhibits can aim to create.