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OF NATURAL HISTORY



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February 12, 1990

Mr. Tomas Ybarra-Frausto
Associate Director
Arts and Humanities Program
The Rockefeller Foundation
1133 Avenue of the Americas
New York, New York

RE: RF 87060: January 1, 1988 - December 31,
1989 "Africa Project Planning Grant"
Michael Spock, Program Director

Dear Mr. Ybarra-Frausto:

We are pleased to submit our final report on the Africa Project Planning Grant, so generously funded by The Rockefeller Foundation in December 1987. Field Museum has made significant strides in planning for this inclusive, multidisciplinary exhibit. The project team working on this exhibit reflects the diversity of our varied audiences. Because of the wonderful interest and support shown by The Rockefeller Foundation for this planning program, we feel assured that we will be able to present the story of the variety of African cultures from a perspective indigenous to the continent.

We deeply appreciate the \$150,000 grant which launched this great undertaking. Again, we thank you again for all you do for Field Museum.

Cordially,

Willard E. White
Vice President for Development
and External Affairs

cc: Ms. Ellen Buchwalter

1) How in RF to be
recognized in Japan?

REPORT TO THE ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION
"AFRICA PROJECT PLANNING GRANT"

From Field Museum of Natural History
February 1990

Background

In December 1987, the Rockefeller Foundation awarded Field Museum a \$150,000 two-year planning grant to develop a comprehensive multidisciplinary exhibit on Africa. Field Museum has allocated an additional \$258,000 toward work on the Africa Project. Many exhibits about non-Western cultures, such as Africa, have been developed by specialists whose cultural roots are European in origin. The generous grant from The Rockefeller Foundation allowed the Museum to plan this exhibit from the perspective of Africans and people of African descent, thereby avoiding many European biases which have shown up inadvertently in other exhibits.

The Africa Planning Project has made significant strides in meeting the goals stated in the grant proposal. These goals included:

- o focusing the critical early planning for the African exhibit in a way that would set the tone and shape of the project and increase our chances of successfully achieving our goals,

- o bearing the added cost of including and organizing the work of a more broadly representative group of people than would typically be involved in a project of this kind; and
- o documenting the process of the project in a way to help Field Museum and other institutions learn from our successes and mistakes.

The Museum proposed to organize an effort during the first two years of a five and one-half year African exhibit project that would allow it to:

- o search out and build a culturally diverse exhibit development team composed of black and non-black, African and American staff and advisors;
- o research the field, search out collections, interview the Museum audience and develop a preliminary conceptual outline for the exhibit;
- o conduct a series of community planning sessions designed to open up the exhibit development process to the broadest possible cross section of the people of Chicago -- thereby enhancing content and presentation, and increasing a sense of participation in and

ownership of the exhibit;

- o include at least one African-American and two African museums along with their directors in the planning process; and support the development of proposals for small, separately funded collaborative projects to help us to share staff, collections, exhibits, educational materials and programs with each other;
- o document the process through written and audio and video means in order to analyze what facilitates and what hampers the project.

In addition to these tangible outcomes, the Rockefeller Planning grant should help to:

- o lead to an exhibit which works with diverse multicultural audiences;
- o strengthen Field Museum's ties to the black community which may increase their use of the Museum, and further help to integrate a variety of departments and auxiliary committees of the museum; and
- o stimulate change in the broader museum community.

Before commencement of the project, Field Museum hired two

co-developers, Karen Hutt and Fath Ruffins. With a background in anthropology and archaeology, Karen has worked race relations and has designed and implemented innovative social studies and science curricula for urban and suburban youth. She taught Environmental Science in New England in outdoor education programs, and her curriculum development materials have been published and institutionalized in school systems.

Fath Ruffins divides her time between her position as a historian at the National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution and the Field Museum. Fath has a strong background in exhibit development, and produced major exhibits which include "After the Revolution" and "From Victory to Freedom" at the National Afro-American Museum in Wilberforce, Ohio.

Public Outreach

The Africa Planning Project is unique in the history of exhibit development at Field Museum because of the strong commitment made to involve the community. We used four methods to engage local interest and support: public forums, focus groups, selected media exposure to the ongoing school program and networking within the community. In the past 15 months, we accomplished many important aspects to this project.

- o We identified and met with approximately 30 influential community leaders who represent the diversity of Afrocentric activity in Chicago. Included in this group were community activists, artists, businessmen, students, community cultural leaders and the clergy. These initial conversations were instrumental in introducing Field Museum and the Africa Project to segments of the city that have never been asked to participate in a cultural exchange and dialogue -- and eliciting their support and involvement.
- o Since January 1989, the Africa Project Planning team has hosted six public forums attended by approximately 450 people. Held in a variety of Chicago neighborhoods, each forum had a specific theme with speakers and visuals. Posted around the rooms were a series of questions that the attendees were asked to address. Rather than providing audiences with pre-formulated ideas on which they could comment, the project team structured the forums in an open-ended fashion giving the community the opportunity to generate ideas which may be addressed through the exhibit.
- o Six focus groups were conducted composed of 60 long term and new members of Field Museum, urban

and suburban teachers, and former Peace Corp volunteers who served in Africa. Groups discussed questions which included "What have you learned about Africa at the Field Museum?," "What would you like to know about Africa?," "Can you recall what is on display about this continent now?," and "Does Chicago need an exhibit on Africa?" The project team members and an outside evaluator -- Jeff Hayward of People, Places and Design -- currently are analyzing these taped sessions.

- o Informal interviews with Museum visitors and people encountered on-the-street were conducted to establish a general sense about public knowledge, attitudes and perceptions about African peoples and environments.
- o We began the video documentation process with WTTW, Chicago's public television station. Thus far, they have filmed 50 hours of interviews, meetings and general background material. This station is exploring funding possibilities to support the cost of the final production. A 13.5 minute tape, which summarizes the community meeting process, was presented at the American Association of Museums (AAM) annual meeting in June 1989. The model we created for holding community meetings generated considerable interest. As a result, representatives from 10 museums across the country conferred with us on ways in which they might

replicate this model within their institution.

- o Karen Hutt, co-developer for the Africa Project, initiated a 13-series television show with a call-in format. Co-hosting the program with her is Musifiky Mwanasali, a Field Museum research assistant whose home is Zaire. The "Africable Television Show" will deal with a variety of topics related to contemporary Africa, and it will serve as a forum for exhibition ideas.
- o Through electronic media appearances, we were able to further inform the community of our progress, as well as solicit additional ideas, comments and suggestions. Radio programs, including top-rated WGCI, have provided a good opportunity for project staff to disseminate colorful information.
- o We developed and published four newsletters to help maintain relationships with all of the participants who either attended public meetings or focus groups, or others who have become involved in other ways in the project. Seven hundred fifty individuals currently are on our mailing list -- representing local, regional and national contacts.

School Program

The "Learning About People and Museums" school program is an additional important component of the museum's efforts to obtain community input, and to encourage community involvement in planning the new Africa exhibit. Now moving through its second year, the school program project brings 30 sixth graders to the Field Museum one day each month from September to June. These children attend public and private schools in city and suburban neighborhoods. During the time they spend in the Museum, the students are reorganized into four teams that bring together children from different schools and backgrounds. Team leaders consist of museum personnel, teachers and students from local universities.

In the first year of this project, students explored African culture and history and had the opportunity to meet several Africans from various countries. In addition to becoming familiar with the Museum's behind-the-scenes exhibit development process, the children had the opportunity to learn about each other. They also began to identify common stereotypes about Africa by interviewing Museum visitors. This exercise introduced the students to the concept of data collection and evaluation, and allowed them to observe the ways in which the Museum responds to its public.

This year each of the program teams are examining one of

the stereotypes they identified in the previous year, and will create a miniature exhibit or diorama that is designed to expose and dispel myths about Africa. For example, the team tackling the stereotype that all Africans live in huts in rural settings may choose to display models and photographs of both ancient and modern African cities, or may elect to celebrate the many varieties of traditional architecture which abound throughout the continent. The other stereotypes that the school program will address include:

- Africa has no history.
- Africa is one big jungle.
- Africans have no real religion.

When completed, these exhibits will go on display in May 1990 and remain throughout the summer.

The "Learning About People and Museums" school program is ambitious and innovative. It is successfully providing a group of students with positive cross-cultural experiences and integrated intra-museum experiences. Also these youngsters are given the opportunity to learn about a wide range of career opportunities. By encouraging the students and teachers involved to take these experiences and lessons back to their home schools, and by providing each of the host schools with slide sets which document the activities of the program, we ensure greater and continuing community involvement. The upcoming display of the

school program's exhibits is an affirmation of Field Museum's responsiveness to its public, and indicates its strong commitment to community involvement. Since school children form a large percentage of our visitorship during the school year, the involvement of these sixth graders is helpful to the project team to inform them of the types of ideas that are absolutely necessary to include in the exhibit, and provides ideas about how best to actively fascinate and excite children about Africa. When this exhibit is opened in 1992, these students will serve as docents or interpreters for school groups and the general public.

Wider Community

Other activities the project team was involved in which affect the broader community include:

- o established solid contacts with the staff and director of the DuSable Museum of Afro-American History in Chicago in an effort to work in future collaboration regarding the African Diaspora;
- o contacted 53 African Museums and several enthusiastic responses may lead to staff and object exchanges in the future;
- o participated in AAM/ICOM exchange with Ghana's Science

and Technology Museum; Karent Hutt spent six weeks in Ghana; Fath Ruffins' exchange partner is a biologist. Established museum contacts in Kenya, Zimbabwe and Tanzania;

- o networked extensively with staff of art, natural history, science and children's museums across the country to inform them of our process, elicit comments, and participate in roundtables and brainstorming sessions;
- o creation of Museum-wide multi-cultural task force to address a variety of issues including awareness and sensitivity, integrated school programming, utilization of the Museum by the community and affirmative action policy development;
- o participation by Africa project team members in the revision of African Heritage Day programming in the Museum's Department of Education. This also has paved the way for reevaluation and upgrading of Museum educational kits.

Research and Exhibit Development

Significant progress was made by the project team in our

research and exhibit development efforts:

- o developed the major parameters of the exhibit based on public input and new theoretical approaches in the study of African topics;
- o developed design and synchrony of exhibition based on a "cognitive map" scene;
- o developed the following as primary themes:
 - diversity of cultures, language, geology, national experiences, flora and fauna
 - sophisticated introduction of Africa and Africans' ecological consciousness
 - conservation/preservation of diversity
 - continuum of history (prehistoric to modern to ancient
 - complexity of experiences based upon human variables and biological forces

We intend to "historize" the exhibition by contextualizing objects and presenting multiple viewpoints.

- o completed a major survey and analysis of 16,500 artifacts in our African collection enabling the exhibit development team to clearly determine what

"stories" these objects are capable of telling about African cultures;

- o conducted five day-long scholarly roundtables with more than 30 professionals in fields which include botany, geology, geography, paleontology, biology, zoology, ecology, cultural anthropology, and art history. These professionals hold senior positions in major museums, universities and related institutions in the United States and abroad. Some of the individuals may serve as subject matter specialists for particular areas of the exhibition.
- o production of ethnological scrapbooks that focus on 10 different areas: Asante/Akan/Ghana, Benin City, Ovimbundu/Angola/Congo, East Africa, Islamic Africa, Cameroon, Southern Africa, Ancient/Medieval Africa, Madagascar and the African marketplace. Each of these scrapbooks represents an exhibit area and is separated into three sections -- political history, art and technology, and social history and daily life. These books represent a compilation of past and current research. They also are an attempt to synthesize a great deal of information and make necessary connections between the humanities and social sciences to create a full picture of the cultures and peoples who will be the subject of this

exhibit.

- o Extensive audience research and evaluation has begun and will continue throughout the exhibit development and design process, and will include interviews with visitors using concept boards, prototypes of interactive elements, labels and pilot programs before final fabrication. Since Field Museum is committed to reaching a large African American population who have not been a regular Museum users in the past, a portion of the evaluation process will include this group.

Field Museum is deeply grateful to The Rockefeller Foundation for its generous grant. With the generous support from The Rockefeller Foundation, Field Museum will be able to continue with its work to develop this comprehensive exhibit on the peoples, cultures and environs of Africa.

EXPENSES

Field Museum of Natural History account #746 Africa Project
Planning Grant -- Rockefeller Foundation #87060 expenditures for
period January 1988 to December 1989 (two years)

501	Salaries	\$ 65,000
505	Fringe Benefits	18,850
521	Office Expenses	500
522	Dues & Fees	650
524	Postage - Local	500
527	Travel (National/Africa)	10,000
528	Refreshments	1,500
513	Stipends to Student Interns	1,750
542	Professional Fees	
	-- Contracted Staffers	11,000
	-- Honorariums	3,000
	-- Evaluator	5,000
	-- Speakers	4,000
	-- Community Facilitators	5,000
	-- Museum Exchange Program	3,000
	-- Public Forums	2,000
	-- Documentation Team	15,000
544	Printing	750
552	Renewals	1,000
532	Publications	1,500

TOTAL

150,000