

Building a Website With and For Audiences

What is the project *Audience Embedded*?

The Historical Society of Pennsylvania and Taller Puertorriqueño are collaborating to engage audiences in a new and meaningful way by charging them with interpreting the history preserved in their collections and using this as inspiration for program development. The focus is collections that document the experiences of Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia through a thematic lens of neighborhoods. The group has chosen a website as its program, a format selected for versatility as the most comprehensive way to combine the various multimedia components, and its appeal to a broad audience.

Who is involved?

We are building the website with the PAZ (Program-Audience-Zoomers), a group of 18 people who were invited by the organizations based upon past program attendance. Half of the group came from the Latino community, with a strong representation of Puerto Ricans, and the others represented a diverse subsection of traditional HSP audiences.

Why are we doing it this way?

In previous work at HSP, we learned that audiences did not just want to respond to program planning (through formative evaluation) or results (summative evaluation) but to help in the initial creative stages by selecting subject matter and developing program format.

When did the audience do its work?

PAZ met 7 times in 2018, plus they went on three optional field trips and individually researched in the archival holdings of two institutions. At meetings, they learned the history of Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia and how to create public history programs. In 2019, they have met twice more about the website's structure and once with a larger group of general public for collaborative input. Some people continue to work independently on assignments to create content.

How did we work with audiences? (Or what we learned thus far)

- ❖ Determine where you need audience expertise the most - large picture issues (e.g. define the audience, what kinds of content do they want) and specific questions about audience needs (e.g. language, response to color themes), but don't ask for help on every decision, especially where the group cannot change the outcome.
- ❖ Prime efficiency comes from face-to-face meetings versus online discussion.
- ❖ Give lots of time for group decisions, and be clear on deadlines
- ❖ Focus - and refocus conversation. Don't expect the audience to carry project's mission in their minds
- ❖ Have collaborators or advisors who can review audience input with you to ensure that you heard the audience correctly.
- ❖ People need specific tasks and support to build their confidence to complete tasks, even when they volunteer to take on more work.
- ❖ Expect people to want to be hands-on - to want to be involved in actual program creation, not just conceptual development.
- ❖ Explain clearly the parameters of technology - what it can and cannot do to keep expectations in line.

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