

# Visitor Belonging in Museums: A Museum Professional Reflective Guide

Imagine you walk through the doors of a museum for a visit. Maybe you’ve never been there before, maybe it’s an institution you hold dear – what do you see, hear, and feel that shows that you belong?

*Sense of belonging* among visitors to museums is a strongly-felt, deeply personal aspect of the visitor experience. Museums play an important role in inviting, welcoming, and supporting visitors throughout their visit; visitors respond based on the experiences, expectations, and needs they bring with them and develop their sense of belonging over the course of their visit. By paying attention to how our offerings impact visitor belonging, we can do a better job of forging deeper connections between the museum and the public-at-large. The purpose of this guide is to equip museum professionals with a tool to support reflection on and discussion about the aspects of a museum experience that may impact a visitor’s sense of belonging, and ultimately influence visitation patterns over time.

Research tells us that where visitors and potential visitors feel a museum space is ‘not for them’ they are less likely to seek out the experience. Everyone working in or with museums has a stake in this work – and has the power to create spaces where visitors feel that they rightfully belong. Whether on the museum floor or behind the scenes, this guide provides resources for you or your team to look at your space through a lens of belonging as a first step towards better understanding visitor perspectives.

## How to Use This Guide



*What you should know about belonging*.....2  
 The core concepts in a model of visitor belonging that will inform your reflections

*How to reflect on belonging*.....4  
 Guidance around the importance of doing observations of and reflecting on belonging in the museum space

*Insights from visitors*.....6  
 Examples of moments that matter to visitor sense of belonging from a variety of museum spaces or functional areas that serve as inspiration for observations

*Tools for observations and reflecting on change*.....18  
 Worksheets that will help with the documentation of observations and reflections

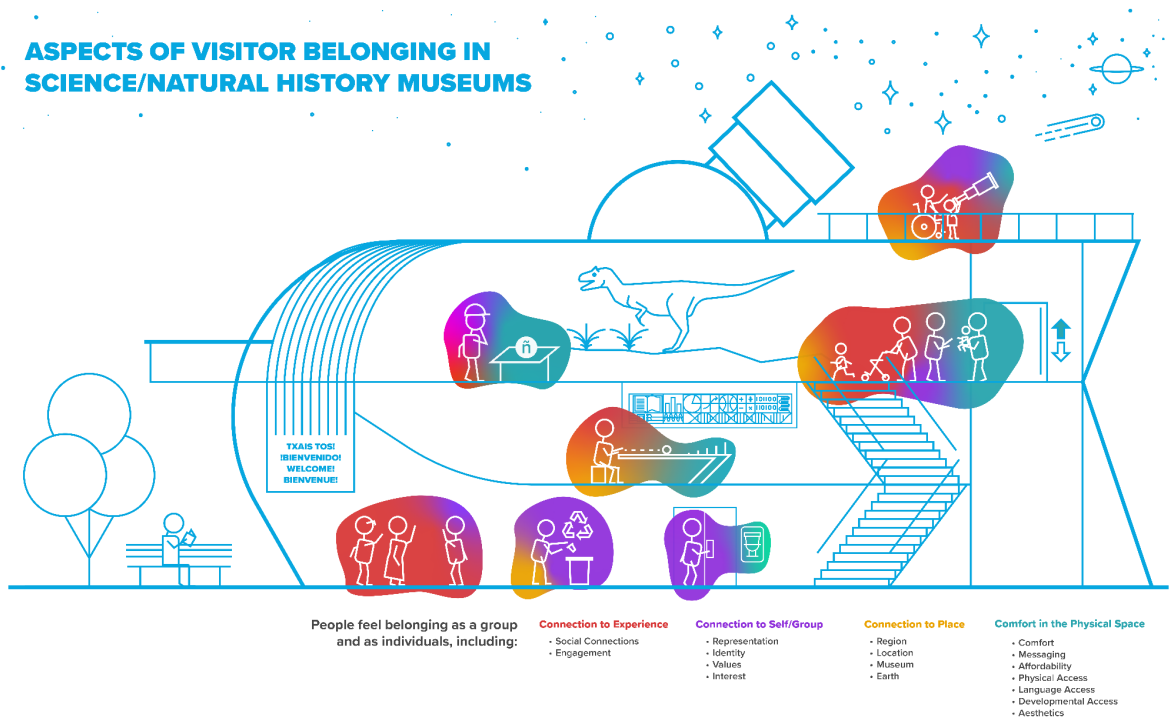
**Recommended Citation:** Christian Ronning, E., Lukowski, S., Grack Nelson, A., and Bequette, M.(2023). Visitor Belonging in Museums: A Museum Professional Reflective Guide. Science Museum of Minnesota.



The *Museums and Inclusion* research study including the production of this practitioner guide were supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. 2005773. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed are the presenters and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.

# What You Should Know About Belonging in Museums

The model of visitor belonging (below) that informs this guide comes from the *Museums and Inclusion* study, which uplifts the voices of the over 260 visitors who shared their perspectives on belonging in science and natural history museums.



**Visitors defined belonging in four core ways:**

**Connection to experience**, **Connection to self/group**, **Connection to place**, and **Comfort in the physical space**.

As illustrated above, each of these four categories are depicted by a unique color and can be further described by subcategories. (See the Insights section of this document for more details and examples of how the categories and subcategories that define visitor belonging might look and sound in museums).

Some additional context that is helpful to understanding how belonging functions in museums:

**Visitors develop and adjust their sense of belonging across the entire visit:** The model shows scenes of visitors throughout the space; moments that matter to visitor sense of belonging occur in the lobby, exhibits, restrooms, elevators, during wayfinding, in looking for seating, in cafes and gift shops, theater experiences, and staff demonstrations. The majority of these moments occur in exhibition spaces; however they intersect with moments from across the visit. So a positive moment of belonging in one space might combine with a negative moment in another to create visitors' overall sense of belonging in the museum.

**Visitors feel belonging as groups and individuals:** In the model, groups of varying size include different kinds of individuals - each of whom feel their own sense of belonging. However, our study shows that when the museum falls short in supporting belonging for one group member, that diminished sense of belonging is felt by the full group. This is particularly strong in adults who monitor the belonging of a group that includes children, in reporting on their sense of belonging, but is also true for adults who visit in adult-only groups.

**Belonging is shaped by the context of the museum that day:** The model depicts overlapping color schemes of the categories of belonging felt by each group, indicating that belonging emerges from the

interactions happening within the social context of the space (for example, interactions within a group, with other visitors, with staff/volunteers), the physical context of the space (for example, interactions with the content, how the space is set up and accessible), and the connections that visitors make throughout their visit – to themselves, their daily life, and beyond. The spectrum of overlapping responses around the visiting groups in the model speaks to the complexity of belonging in a museum space. Museums can build spaces to foster belonging, and visitors play an active role in making meaning of their experiences and building connections across their visit.

Understanding visitor belonging is a natural extension of museums' equity work. The visitor experience -- from arrival to departure -- can create a sense of belonging, changing the relationship between visitors and the museum. The study that informs this guide reveals that belonging can be an essential tool in improving museums to ensure equitable access for all. The goal in designing museum experiences for belonging is that the museum becomes a welcoming space for most visitors because it is apparent how these experiences align with museums' values concerning diversity, equity, access, and inclusion.

### **More on the research that informs this guide**

The *Museums and Inclusion* study worked with 72 visitor groups (263 individuals) at four science/natural history museums. The individuals who visited brought a spectrum of identities and experiences, including participants from historically marginalized groups, particularly participants that identified as BIPOC, women, LGBTQ+, and people with disabilities. The study also included groups that contained individuals with these identities *and* who were recent visitors to and/or members of the museum, as well as those who may not routinely visit museums. We centered visitor voices by asking them to take photos throughout their visit and discuss the most important aspects of the experience, which allowed visitors agency to identify where they felt belonging. Taking such a justice-informed approach to defining what belonging means for visitors in the museum context, helps us to focus on improving the museum experience, particularly for museum visitors who may not typically experience belonging in a science/natural history museum.

# How to Reflect on Belonging

## Why reflect on belonging in your space(s)?

Reflections are a great tool for influencing concrete changes towards improving visitor sense of belonging at your museum. They can help you do some preliminary work around belonging grounded in the visitor experience and help you understand other visitor data you may have. They can generate excitement across staff about new ideas and directions in exhibit/experience development. Use your reflective observations to support immediate, impactful improvements to your museum experience in terms of visitor belonging.

## Prepare to observe

Choose a space/area of focus: What area(s) of your museum are you curious about how they might impact visitor belonging? Are there changes under consideration that might benefit from reflections on visitor belonging in those spaces? Choose the area(s) that will be the focus of your observations and reflections. Consider areas where there are existing challenges for visitors, areas that are under consideration for change, and/or areas that you can reasonably propose recommendations for change.

Build your team: Assemble a team to take part in this reflective exercise. Consider multiple staff from different positionalities/perspectives in order to add greater insights. Before beginning your observations, prepare by looking at any data sources on how visitors have experienced the focus area of the museum. Review the *Insights* pages for this area to get some ideas about what to look for, using visitor photos of their experiences in these types of functional areas in museums. Consider how the experience in that space connects with the whole museum experience.

Print and prepare materials: Plan for about an hour in the space to do the observation. Individuals in teams should complete the observation worksheet independently; they can do their observations at different times as needed. For each team member, make 2-3 copies of the blank *Observation Worksheet*, one copy of the *Planning for Change Worksheet*, one copy of the *Insights* pages to use before and during the observation for reference, and each individual conducting observations should have their observation worksheets on a clipboard or portable hard surface, a pen or pencil, and some form of museum staff identification displayed visibly.

## Conducting the observation

Recognize that you have familiarity with and a certain amount of comfort in the space, and consciously attempt to decenter your perspective and instead center the visitor perspective.

Notice what you see, hear, and feel through a lens of belonging. You can use the *Insights* guide as a starting place for thinking more deeply about visitor-described moments of belonging. Describe the details of what you're experiencing, trying to stick to observable facts, in the first column of the *Observation Worksheet*. For each row, select one aspect of the exhibit or experience under consideration; there may be multiple aspects of one experience you wish to describe.

In the second column of the worksheet, reflect on both potential positive and negative impacts on belonging in what you have observed. Use the *Insights* guide to help you think of ways that specific audience groups might experience the area differently.

Take care to notice the impact your observations may be having on visitors in the area. If visitors seem to be aware of your activities, or are visibly distancing themselves from you, be prepared to stop the observations until the visitors have left the area.

If you have decided to focus on a group that doesn't hold your identity, think about what you can reasonably infer and be critical about where you might be going too far. For instance, if you are trying to uncover how representative the space is of a variety of cultural and racial identities, look for visual cues that evidence multiple perspectives (for example, images representing a variety of people, signage in multiple languages,

content that speaks to an array of backgrounds and life experiences) rather than imagining how the space might feel if you were a person with an identity different from your own.

At the end of your observational period, review your observations and check the box for the key priority areas for improvement, from your perspective.

### **Debriefing the observations**

Reassemble your team to debrief your observations and make a plan for next steps. Plan for a one-and-a-half to two-hour meeting to allow for all individuals to share out and have space to discuss priority areas for change. Assign a dedicated notetaker to document the ideas generated from the discussion.

Begin by identifying the aspects of the space observed. Go through each aspect of the space and elicit reflections from individual team members. Use the following reflection questions to guide your discussion:

- From a lens of belonging, what aspects of the area caught your attention, and why?
- Were there any notable interactions or visitor behavior/comments that you observed that felt like meaningful moments of belonging (or lack thereof)?
- How do you think visitors might experience this area through a lens of belonging?
- How did you feel about the area that might be similar to/different from the focal audience groups?
- How did the space we observed align/didn't align with the *Insights* data?
- Is this a key area for improvement of this space, from your perspective? Why or why not?

After discussing each aspect of the space observed, make a list of the key areas for improvement. Copy this list to the first column of the *Planning for Change Worksheet*. As a group, discuss and fill in 2-3 ideas about how each particular aspect of the area could be changed to impact visitor belonging positively. Lastly, discuss 2-3 action items or next steps for each of key areas identified as a priority. In order to move the work forward, individuals could take on the responsibility of starting one or more of the action items (e.g. sharing the team reflections and recommendations for change with a larger group at the museum).

# Insights On Visitor Belonging Across a Museum Visit

The insights shared here came from the research study *Museums and Inclusion*, and provide examples of how belonging shows up in some of the common areas (e.g., lobby, exhibits, theaters) in science and natural history museums.

Visitors suggested four key themes that define moments of belonging:

**Connection to Experience**, **Connection to Place**, **Connection to Self/Group**, **Comfort in the Physical Space**

The pages that follow contain visitor-generated pictures demonstrating what belonging looks like in museum spaces. There are also photo captions and direct quotations derived from the visitors who participated in the research study. While the themes listed here don't capture all of the ways that visitors described belonging in these spaces, they suggest some of the key ways that museum professionals can think about belonging.

Prior to doing observations, review the page(s) for the area(s) you intend to examine in order to orient yourself to key aspects of the experience, with visual references of what this looks like to visitors. After your observations you may also refer to these pages to consider what you noticed through a lens of belonging.

Because exhibits were raised by visitors so frequently as relating to belonging we have a section on each core theme:

<b>EXHIBITS</b>  <b>Connection to Experience</b>  page 7	<b>EXHIBITS</b>  <b>Connection to Place</b>  page 8	<b>EXHIBITS</b>  <b>Connection to Self/Group</b>  page 9	<b>EXHIBITS:</b>  <b>Comfort in the Physical Space</b>  page 10
--	---	--	---

However, moments of belonging happen over an entire visit; therefore to consider belonging across an institution you might also observe these spaces:

<b>LOBBY</b>  page 11	<b>THEATER</b>  page 12	<b>CAFE</b>  page 13	<b>RESTROOMS</b>  page 14
-----------------------------	-------------------------------	----------------------------	---------------------------------

There are also some elements that are not confined to single space:

<b>STAFF INTERACTIONS</b>  page 15	<b>SEATING</b>  page 16	<b>OTHER CONSIDERATIONS</b>  page 17
--	-------------------------------	--

You might select one specific page to get started on to begin your journey of understanding belonging more deeply in a particular space or function of your museum. Looking across multiple spaces will support a more holistic approach of belonging across the visit. Use the photos and stories of visitors shared here to inspire and guide your own reflection of how belonging might look, sound, and feel in your spaces.

# If you're in an **EXHIBIT** & focusing on **Connections to Experience...**

What do you see, hear, and feel through a lens of belonging? Put yourself in a space where you can hear people's questions or conversations as they interact with the exhibit. Notice the challenges groups and individuals encounter, notice where groups are engaged: what does the experience feel like?


Here are common themes of belonging that you may notice:

<b>Connection to Experience: Engagement</b>	<b>Connection to Experience: Social Interactions in Group</b>	<b>Connection to Experience: Social Interactions w/Others</b>
<b>What Belonging Might Look Like</b>		
 <p data-bbox="134 879 535 947">Got lost in it – design that feels immersive to the visitor</p>	 <p data-bbox="612 896 1011 963">Fun for the whole family – everyone can engage together</p>	 <p data-bbox="1070 884 1507 951">Meaningful interactions – positive interactions with other visitors</p>
 <p data-bbox="120 1289 548 1455">Fun, interactive, engaging – when a visitor is deeply engaged it may feel like the experience was designed with them in mind, that they belong there</p>	 <p data-bbox="597 1304 1024 1404">Spurs conversations within group – this is somewhere we could learn together</p>	 <p data-bbox="1073 1318 1507 1451">I can make an impact on the visit experience of others – here by inviting others to interact with this exhibit</p>
<b>When belonging flourishes in exhibits it sounds like:</b>		
<p data-bbox="120 1549 548 1715">“They were all sitting there touching it, looking at it, drawn to it, and that’s the first thing that popped in my head was, ‘Oh, belonging.’...”</p>	<p data-bbox="618 1583 1003 1684">“It makes me happy when we can all participate in something as a family”</p>	<p data-bbox="1073 1566 1507 1698">“It was a cool way for guests to interact and it created a very fun, playful, and welcoming atmosphere”</p>
<b>When exhibits fall short supporting belonging you might see:</b>		
<p data-bbox="120 1810 548 1942">Groups felt disengaged, lacked curiosity, pulled out of the experience, wasn’t made for people like them</p>	<p data-bbox="651 1827 980 1927">Groups could not interact with each other in the ways they wanted</p>	<p data-bbox="1081 1841 1498 1908">Other visitors or staff/volunteers were disrespectful</p>

# If you're in an **EXHIBIT** & focusing on **Connections to Place...**

What do you see, hear, and feel – how do these map onto feelings of belonging as connected to place? Are there elements where connections to place might thrive? Or need more support?

Here are common themes of belonging that you may notice:







Connection to Place: Museum	Connection to Place: Region	Connection to Place: Earth & Universe
<b>What Belonging Might Look Like</b>		
 <p>Memorable experiences at the museum – these act as signposts of the growing connection between museum and visitors that fosters belonging. It might be a place school groups typically visit so people “grow up with it” or somewhere groups “always” take a photo that connects them to the space. Over time, frequent visitors make their own connections that lead to their own set of experiences that foster belonging for their group at the museum. These vary by institution.</p>	 <p>This map shared indigenous place names for the region – but failed to place it in the history of colonization and STEM</p>	 <p>Seeing the Earth fostered broader feelings of belonging</p>
	 <p>A group looks to find their hometown in a display</p>	 <p>Creatures from the past – where we belong in universal history</p>
<b>When belonging flourishes in exhibits it sounds like:</b>		
<p>“That [exhibit element] has been there since before I was probably [a kid], in the same spot... and it just is very welcoming...”</p>	<p>Exhibits that make clear regional connections of the content.</p>	<p>“Seeing how everything, it's all interconnected. ... We're all in this together. Yeah.”</p>
<b>When exhibits fall short on supporting belonging:</b>		
<p>Visitors don't feel connected to the museum spaces, or lack markers that connect them to the space.</p>	<p>References to locations or histories of the region are not contextualized or fail to recognize historical systems of oppression: “Words like pioneer have a really positive historical representation in a white dominated system. It's now maybe less exciting to see things like that”</p>	<p>Doesn't support feelings of interconnectedness</p>



# If you're in an **EXHIBIT** & focusing on **Connections to Self/Group...**

What do you see, hear, and feel through a lens of belonging? How is a diversity of visitors represented (or not!) in the exhibit? What are the challenges, where are new ideas coming to life?



Here are common themes of belonging that you may notice:

Connection to Self/Group: Representation	Connection to Self/Group: Values & Personal Connections	Connection to Self/Group: Interest
<b>What Belonging Might Look Like</b>		
 <p>Seeing your (or a group member's) gender represented</p>	 <p>Seeing your values represented (e.g., museum advocates for LGBTQ+ communities)</p>	 <p>Existing interests – this is where museums often thrive by having entry points that appeal to a wide variety of interests</p>
 <p>Seeing your (or a group member's) race/ethnicity represented</p>	 <p>Relevance can feel like belonging - this musically inclined family was drawn into exploration of a musical exhibit</p>	 <p>A new interest - visitors can feel belonging when the museum sparks curiosity in something new</p>
<b>When belonging flourishes in exhibits it sounds like:</b>		
<p>“Any representation of different cultures and beliefs makes me feel like I belong or I want to be there.”</p>	<p>“It's important... for other people to see that the science museum is trying to be inclusive with their exhibits.”</p>	<p>Particularly important to children, finding something that you are interested in means you belong.</p>
<b>When an exhibit fall short in supporting belonging it sounds and feels like:</b>		
<p>“I feel like representation is, for me, is a sense of belonging. So, if I'm not represented, if I'm in a room just full of white faces, then I don't belong here.”</p>	<p>A lack of relevance to the personal lives of visitors, feeling like their experience differs substantially from those that are centered in an exhibit</p>	<p>“I just get bored, so I kind of noticed myself rushing through those kind of things.”</p>

# If you're in an **EXHIBIT** & focusing on **Comfort in the Physical Space...**

What do you see, hear, and feel through a lens of belonging? Where does the space fall short in meeting visitors' needs? Consider access: for people with disabilities, for all ages, for people who utilize a diversity of languages. Does the overall aesthetic welcome visitors and provide comfort?

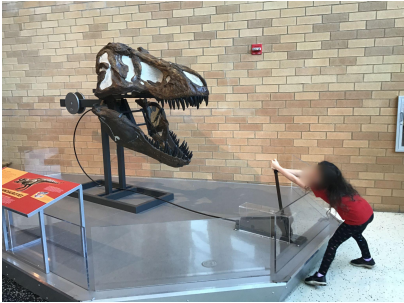
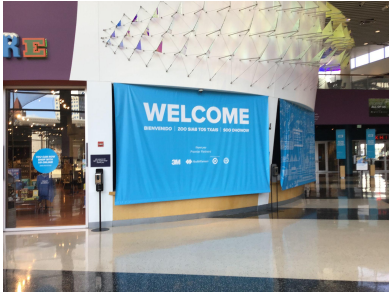




Here are common themes of belonging that you may notice:

Physical Space: Access of all kinds	Physical Space: Aesthetics & Messaging	Physical Space: Comfort
<b>What Belonging Might Look Like</b>		
 <p data-bbox="212 877 453 915">Language access</p>	 <p data-bbox="618 829 1005 930">Open, good sightlines, or "airy" environments fostered feelings of belonging</p>	 <p data-bbox="1198 877 1378 915">Places to rest</p>
 <p data-bbox="115 1316 553 1486">Access for people with disabilities and people of all ages (in this picture, diminished belonging through lack of access to this exhibit component)</p>	 <p data-bbox="586 1304 1037 1440">Messages of welcome, and that represent a diversity of visitors are an aspect of comfort in the physical space</p>	 <p data-bbox="1065 1308 1516 1478">Visitors react to environments that comfort them – some seek out calm, peaceful experiences; whereas seek out exciting, engaging atmospheres</p>
<b>When the physical space supports belonging it looks and sounds like:</b>		
<p data-bbox="115 1591 553 1728">Something that everyone can "get their hands on"; all parts of the exhibit are accessible and visitors can choose how to interact</p>	<p data-bbox="594 1577 1029 1745">"Something that's more [open, colorful] inviting and like there's a stronger sense of belonging than like the concrete [gray, more enclosed] areas."</p>	<p data-bbox="1073 1591 1508 1728">"I would use inclusive, like feeling comfortable...just [my child with autism] feeling like welcome and interactive in his own way."</p>
<b>When an exhibit falls short, you might see, hear or feel:</b>		
<p data-bbox="131 1839 537 1938">Barriers to access in the space (based on age, disability, language, and more)</p>	<p data-bbox="634 1854 992 1923">Poor sight lines, long waits, enclosed spaces</p>	<p data-bbox="1081 1839 1500 1938">Short stay times due to lack of comfort, some groups can't participate in the way they want</p>

# If you're in the LOBBY...

What do you see, hear, and feel that impacts belonging in the lobby? Put yourself in a space where you can hear people's questions or conversations as they enter the museum. Move about the lobby; notice the challenges groups may be having, notice where groups engage; notice the aesthetics of the space.

Here are common themes of belonging that you may notice:

<p><b>Connection to Experience: Feeling Engaged</b></p>	<p><b>Comfort in the Physical Space: Aesthetics &amp; Messaging</b></p>	<p><b>Connections to Place: Connection to Museum</b></p>
<p><b>What Belonging Might Look Like</b></p>		
 <p>Interactive elements – this museum has something for me as soon as I arrive</p>	 <p>Welcome messages and signage that represents a diversity of visitors</p>	 <p>Iconic experiences – when I see this, I know I'm at the museum</p>
 <p>Pop-up activities – museum staff welcomed and engaged us from the start of our visit</p>	 <p>Open spaces; clear sightlines (here with a scenic natural feature) build growing anticipation for the visit ahead</p>	 <p>Iconic interactives – we always have to go here before we start the rest of our visit, or we always see it before we leave</p>
<p><b>What belonging might sound like in the lobby:</b></p>		
<p>“...you see everything and you go ‘Oooh, so much to do!’...”</p>	<p>“It welcomes all people”</p>	<p>“A museum visit tradition”</p>
<p><b>When a museum fall short in the lobby:</b></p>		
<p>“I think when you first walk in, it's huge and can maybe be a little intimidating.” (on why a welcome desk was important at this museum)</p>	<p>The space lacks representation of a diversity of visitors or is aesthetically unpleasing</p>	<p>Iconic exhibits or interactives are broken, moved, or crowded</p>

# If you're in the CAFE...

What do you see, hear, and feel? If there is a queue; what are people saying as they wait? Are there groups considering the food selections that don't make a purchase? Can people find a place to sit and eat? How does the cafe experience feel?


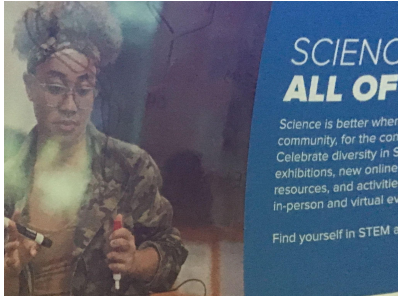




Here are common themes of belonging that you may notice:

<b>Connection to Experience: Supportive Social Interactions</b>	<b>Comfort in the Physical Space: Affordability and Aesthetics</b>	<b>Connections to Self/Group: Representation</b>
<b>What Belonging Might Look Like</b>		
 <p>Taking the time to sit and eat a meal together and finding options that everyone in your group will enjoy</p>	 <p>A range of price points communicates that visitors of differing incomes are expected, and that everyone can find a snack at their preferred price point</p>	 <p>Food options that are culturally relevant and show that a range of cultural experiences are expected in the space</p>
 <p>A moment of respite and togetherness – seating for your group is easy to find</p>	 <p>No crowding, open, airy, natural light</p>	 <p>Food options that meet a variety of dietary needs</p>
<b>What support for belonging might sound like</b>		
<p>“Eating a meal together, you know, it means a lot”</p>	<p>“It’s a beautiful space to gather with others”</p>	<p>“Seeing [food] you’re familiar with, that’s comforting”</p>
<b>What a lack of belonging might look or sound like</b>		
<p>Hard to enjoy the experience; often because of difficulty finding food options or necessary seating for everyone in your group</p>	<p>“..all the times we came to the museum growing up we never ate in the cafeteria. We would bring our own food because it’s too expensive.”</p>	<p>Limited vegetarian, vegan, gluten free options</p>

# If you're in a THEATER EXPERIENCE...

What do you see, hear, and feel? If there is a queue; what are people saying as they wait or as they exit the theater? How does content, advertisements, and signage layer into belonging in a theater experience?




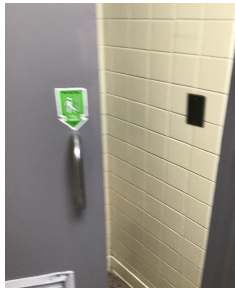
Here are common themes of belonging that you may notice:

Connections to Experience: Social Engagement for Group	Connections to Self/Group: Representation and Interest	Comfort in the Physical Space: Access
<b>What Belonging Might Look Like</b>		
 <p>Fun and comfortable for your whole group, something everyone in your group can do together</p>	 <p>Content before and during the show represents you or your interests</p>	 <p>Access for your whole group; for example signage that guides visitors in wheelchairs to theater entrances</p>
 <p>Big screen films supported deep engagement and were awe-inspiring. This deep engagement also sparked a sense of belonging.</p>	 <p>The show connects to an existing interest, or sparks a new interest</p>	 <p>Accommodations, such as closed captioning, are easy to access and use</p>
<b>A theater experience steeped in belonging sounds like:</b>		
<p>"We're all here as a family and just having fun"</p>	<p>"To be honest with you, I didn't expect to love it, but it was very inspirational"</p>	<p>"It's always pleasant and clean. We're comfortable"</p>
<b>When the theater experience presents a challenge to belonging it may look or sound like:</b>		
<p>Visitors leave early, are disengaged, or feel like it won't work for their group</p>	<p>"I wish there would have been a little more conservation message" – visitors want to see content that connects to their values</p>	<p>Visitors, particularly those that need an accommodation, may feel unsure if the experience works for them or their group</p>

# If you're considering the **RESTROOMS...**

Look at the outside of the restrooms and wayfinding support – how is the signage? Do amenities change across restrooms? Are they easy to find? Consider what is available inside bathrooms – do they meet a variety of needs? Where might the restrooms fall short in supporting visitors?

Here are common themes of belonging that you may notice:

Comfort in the Physical Space: Access	Connection to Self/Group: Representation and Values	Connections to Experience: Support for Groups and Others
<b>What Belonging Might Look Like</b>		
 <p>Physical access – sinks and toilets for example need to work for visitors of all abilities; when these are inconsistent across facilities inside a museum it can lead to diminished belonging</p>	 <p>Signage – recognizes a diversity of gendered experiences; gender neutral locations are as easy to find as restrooms that conform to a gender binary</p>	 <p>The restrooms support your group and anticipate your group's needs, for example through changing stations in all bathrooms.</p>
 <p>Access for all ages - facilities work for children and adults</p>	 <p>Amenities show care and concern for visitors, for example complimentary menstrual products</p>	 <p>When other visitors treat you respectfully at the restroom, visitors may feel belonging.</p>
<b>What support for belonging might sound like:</b>		
<p>“Here, they have thought of everything for the little children”</p>	<p>“You rarely see free tampons anymore. So it just felt really different, unique, and caring, like I belonged”</p>	<p>“If you want people to be comfortable and feel like they belong, you got to help them in all different ways.”</p>
<b>When museums fall short in their support of belonging in restrooms:</b>		
<p>“How is somebody supposed to get in there if they can't pull open the door?”</p>	<p>Difficult to find gender neutral restrooms, or other aspects important to you or your group</p>	<p>Long waits, it's not predictable if the restroom will meet your needs, you spend a lot of time helping your group use the space</p>

# If you're thinking about **STAFF INTERACTIONS...**

What do you see, hear, and feel through a lens of belonging? Visitors don't make distinctions between staff and volunteers; so this may be a staff or volunteer interaction. Move about your museum to observe staff (volunteer) interactions with visitors; where do they most often occur? If there is a queue for staff-led activity what are people saying as they wait, during the activity, or as they walk out of the activity?

Here are common themes of belonging that you may notice:

<b>Connection to Experience: Supportive Social Interactions</b>	<b>Connection to Self/Group: Representation and Interest</b>	<b>Connections to Place: Connection to Museum</b>
---	--	---

## ***What Belonging Might Look Like***



Positive interactions with staff



I see staff, volunteers, and visitors interacting that look like me and my community



It's fun to grow up with this staff-led experience (here, an electricity show; this varies by institution)



Staff helped my group learn, it was a personalized touch that made me feel like I belong



Staff sparked my interest – here in a demonstration



We stop and ask staff for their fun tips every visit

## ***What support for belonging might sound like:***

"Staff interacted with us so well"	"[They] pull you in and teach you that little added thing"	"We engage with them every single time"
------------------------------------	--	---







## ***When museums fall short, it may look or sound like:***

"We never were talked to or engaged with"	The activity didn't fit well for the ages of my group and staff didn't suggest something else	Lack of consistency on where visitors can expect to find staff or staff-led activities
---	---	--

# If you're considering SEATING...

Places to sit and rest occur across a museum space, and came up as frequently as restrooms in terms of visitor belonging. It positively impacts belonging when these places of rest are distributed across a visit, or they connect to or deepen the experience in some way (e.g. seating is themed for an exhibit hall) What does your seating convey? Where does it work and where could it be improved to impact visitor belonging?

Here are common themes that you may notice:

Comfort in the Physical Space: Comfort	Comfort in the Physical Space: Access	Connections to Experience: Social Experience within Group
<b>What Belonging Might Look Like</b>		
 <p>Comfort - particularly when a group member can rest but observe others being engaged. They don't miss out by taking a break.</p>	 <p>Seating supports visitors of all ages</p>	 <p>Whimsical seating adds value and fun for your group, leading to feelings of belonging</p>
 <p>This visitor not only took a picture but edited it to highlight how finding a bench supported them and their sense of belonging</p>	 <p>Finding seating that works for your group, here in an area that accommodates parking a stroller nearby</p>	 <p>Places to rest or seating that supports your group engagement together</p>
<b>What support for belonging might sound like:</b>		
<p><i>"I was getting tired, just I know they're having fun, they're safe, they're happy."</i></p>	<p><i>"It makes me feel like, you know, families are expected to be here."</i></p>	<p><i>"Museums can feel austere and like very formal, [this seating] can help you be playful"</i></p>
<b>When seating in the museum falls short in supporting visitor belonging:</b>		
<p>It was hard to find somewhere to take a break</p>	<p>Group members can't access the seating options they want or need</p>	<p>Seating that doesn't allow for you to maintain engagement with your group.</p>



## If you're considering **your whole museum...**

There are a number of other areas that come up less frequently across the study but you should still consider if you are looking across your whole museum in addition to all the pages prior.

**Gift shop** – consider the placement and variety of items. If items are culturally significant are they treated respectfully? How does the affordability of different items (or lack thereof) communicate who is expected to be in the museum and making purchases?

**Wayfinding** – mostly came up in the study as a negative; if people cannot find their way, they feel out of place, as if they don't know enough to be part of the "in group" that can navigate the museum without assistance.

**Escalator/Elevators** – can both support and create barriers to access. If you have these in your space consider how they equally support visitors (or not). Is there adequate signage for and in the elevators? Are there easily accessible alternative routes if the museum is busy and there are lines for the elevators?

**Scenic Views** – if your museum is situated in a space where iconic nature- or city-scapes are within sight, access to these iconic views heightens belonging, especially in fostering a connection to place among visitors.

**Hallways or other Pass Through Areas** – Often museums place exhibit elements here, and visitors notice! Small (and sometimes large) pieces staged in pass through areas or hallway corridors came up similar to other exhibit elements in supporting or presenting a challenge to a sense of belonging.

Functional Area \_\_\_\_\_

Staff Observer \_\_\_\_\_

### Observation Worksheet

DESCRIBE what you see, hear and feel in the space through a lens of belonging	REFLECT on <u>both</u> positive and negative impacts on belonging in what you observe		KEY AREA to focus on?
	positive	negative	
			<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
			<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO

Functional Area \_\_\_\_\_

Staff Group Members \_\_\_\_\_

### Planning for Change Worksheet

<b>KEY AREA</b> that impacts visitor belonging in the space	<b>2-3 IDEAS FOR CHANGE</b> What are the improvements that might impact belonging?	<b>2-3 ACTION ITEMS</b> Who to talk to, what to do next

### Sample of Completed Observation Worksheets

DESCRIBE what you see, hear and feel in the space through a lens of belonging	REFLECT on <u>both</u> positive and negative impacts on belonging in what you observe		KEY AREA to focus on?
	positive	negative	
Text on exhibit signs is in English only	Text is clearly written and brief, which allows for a quick read.	For those who would prefer a language other than English, there is no other opportunity for interpretation. This would exclude those visitors from having the full experience in the exhibit.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
There are several areas where individuals can go underneath dinosaur replicas and look up, or look through cameras to see how different parts of the dinosaur skeleton would look with tissue and feathers or scales.	The ability to choose how they can see and interact with the dinosaur skeletons allows for more engagement - and for people to follow their interests.		<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO

### Sample of Completed Observation Worksheets

DESCRIBE what you see, hear and feel in the space through a lens of belonging	REFLECT on <u>both</u> positive and negative impacts on belonging in what you observe		KEY AREA to focus on?
	positive	negative	
Parent with two young kids walks by, the younger child stops and wants to use the cameras, but they are not at a physically accessible height for either child. The parent takes turns lifting the children up one at a time so they can interact with the cameras.		Because of the inaccessibility at the exhibit for young children, the parent doesn't seem to get a chance to potentially explore their interests, and must focus on those of their children. Additionally, the group can not engage together, but have to engage separately, in limited ways.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
			<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO