

## Editor's Note

In the early stages of compiling material for this issue, I learned that Hand-to-Hand, the quarterly publication of the Association of Youth Museums was planning to focus on the same topic, in approximately the same time frame. Because the format of the two publications is so different, it has been possible to coordinate efforts to present two very different views of evaluation and research in children's museums. That these two publications have been unable to accommodate all the material submitted is testimony that children's museums do, indeed, recognize the value of evaluation and research. The number of museums who actually engage in evaluation and research, however, is much smaller.

Many of the museums that were asked to submit material for this issue responded that they were too small or too new to engage in evaluation. Consequently, one goal in putting together this issue has been to demonstrate the importance of evaluation to the success of "museums in the making" as well as to demonstrate the place of evaluation in day-to-day operations.

Accordingly, an outline for conducting a market study and development plan (page 4, "Market Study and Development Plan...") and an example of the use of audience research in planning and designing an actual museum (pages 5-6, "Audience Research...") are included, as well as information about how design issues influence visitor attitudes and behavior (pages 6-7, "A Synopsis of Cohen & McMurtry..."). Use of this evaluation information will have an impact on visitor behavior, before the first child sets foot through the door.

In response to the complaint that a museum is too small to conduct evaluation, an example of a series of "quick and dirty" studies done using small sample sizes is presented (pages 7-8, "Notes from Quick and Dirty Studies") as well as information about a computer program which can reduce the amount of staff time needed to compile and analyze visitor tracking data (pages 9-10, "Looking Closely..."). Examples of "In-house" evaluation to assess the safety of exhibits and to find out how well individual exhibit elements convey information, demonstrate how such studies provide specific information staff can apply to improve future work (pages 10-12, "Using Children in Exhibit Evaluation" and "Hands-On Safety").

And finally, because "Out-of-house" research conducted by consultants also provides valuable contributions, this Special Issue of Visitor Behavior closes with examples of how staff used such a project to question the validity of their assumptions about visitor behavior (pages 13-14, "An Evaluation of Play..." and "Exhibit Evaluation from Start to Finish"..., p. 16).

Although most of the studies presented here were site specific, one of the benefits of publishing such material is that it often serves to reinforce observations about visitor behavior in other museums. When enough site specific evaluation results are published, commonalities may begin to emerge across museums. Staff will then be able to use such knowledge to help strengthen or call into question the assumptions they use in planning visitor experiences.

[Linda A. (Nikki) Black, Guest Editor]

### INFORMATION ON THE ASSOCIATION OF YOUTH MUSEUMS AND HAND-TO-HAND

Hand-to-Hand is published quarterly by the Association of Youth Museums. For information on how to join the Association or how to obtain a copy of the special issue of Hand-to-Hand on evaluation contact:

Linda R. Edeiken  
Children's Museum Network, Inc.  
70 P St.  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84103  
(801) 359-4350

Articles from the Special Issue of Hand-to-Hand include:

Learning About Learning in Museums, by George Hein  
The Nature of Research and Evaluation in Children's Museums: Some Recommendations for Determining Generalizability, by Barbara Wolf  
Museum Evaluation - A Case Study for a Young Museum, by Mary Ellen Voden  
The Brooklyn Children's Museum Using Evaluation to "Do It Right", by Stephanie Ratcliffe  
Mysteries in History: Insiders Look at Evaluation, by Linda A. Black  
I'd Rather Do it Myself... Or Would I, by Jeff Hayward  
Who Should Do Evaluation, by Mary Worthington