Smithsonian Institution
Office of Policy and Analysis

Memo

Date: July 8, 2008

To: SI Connections Committee

From: Carole M. P. Neves, Director

Subject **Summary of Work Completed by OP&A in Support of the SI Connections Project**

The attached memos summarize OP&A's work interviewing bus tour operators and visitors to SI Museums, along with data collected from SI museums and non-SI museums about their efforts to facilitate visitors' trips to their individual museums.

1. Bus Tours to the Smithsonian

Introduction. This summary is based primarily on a review of open-ended phone conversations with 40+ tour operators, either identified by VIARC or randomly selected on the Internet. In view of the over 8,000 companies bringing visitors to Washington, DC this is certainly not a large sampling. Not all the respondents were asked – or answered – exactly the same questions and the conversations varied from 5 to 25 minutes. Thus, it is not possible to quantify the results. In general, 'most' means that about three out of four mentioned this point, 'some' means that in about every third or fourth conversation this came up, and a 'few' refers to something that came up infrequently.

A major industry segment includes Washington, DC in its itineraries.
   Most include the Smithsonian as part of a Washington tour
   Some include the Smithsonian as part of a broader area visit (e.g., including
     Williamsburg)
   Some do not enter buildings on short tours; just drive by exteriors and monuments.

Time is limited.
   Some give only 4 hours to Smithsonian museums on a 3-day tour
   All have non-SI museums on their agenda, especially monuments and federal
     buildings (e.g. Capitol)

Tour composition varies
   Some book individual families; others book organizations, lodges, etc.
   Some focus on specific age groups (e.g., seniors)
   Some serve only student groups
   Some offer student tours based on state curricula and standards.

Groups have preferences.
   Some companies canvass participants before booking and agree on what to do in DC
   Most offer a choice of packages
   Some let participants present precise itineraries (e.g., teachers)
   The exact plan is generally negotiated before arrival in Washington, DC

Guides have preferences
   Local guides frequently meet groups with agendas and narratives they have
     developed themselves
   Preferences include teacher-led or unescorted student tours in SI buildings
   Guides prefer to stay with senior groups, so as to maintain schedule control

Almost all of the tour companies view the Smithsonian within the context of a trip to Washington and tailor the contents to the participants. Many operators commented that participants have become much more sophisticated, and often have identified interests on the internet prior to coming and want to be left to wander or to spend specific periods of time. All commented on SI parking problems.

SI Connections

Across museums
   Major disadvantages named by most operators are distances that are too far to walk
      and SI parking problems that the limit number of places they can visit
   Some saw the proposed materials as being useful for training non-local guides

Content
   Those who said their clientele might enjoy <u>highlight</u> tours saw them as handouts to
      give out when leaving clients at a specific museum.
   Those who said their clientele might enjoy <u>celebrities</u> tours suggested mass media,
      Hollywood, and political personalities as having real attraction.
   Almost none felt that <u>concept-based</u> tours would have a strong appeal to their clientele
      unless they were based in a specific museum.
   A few saw <u>concept-based</u> tours as being of use to them in promoting tours to specific
      affinity tours.

Medium
   Operators who control the experience preferred to have printed materials. They could
      pick and choose and give the materials to clients as souvenirs.
   Those who saw some possibility of broadcasting in a bus or using the materials as
      guide-training materials preferred audio materials.

Methods
   Tour operators have experience with all types of methods: tape, podcast, cellphone.
   Some saw tape/PDA as possible, but were concerned about the cost of the device
      and pickup/return issues.
   Podcasts were generally frowned upon as requiring too much advance planning and
      being disruptive to a group
   Some stated that many people, especially seniors, are not familiar with podcast
      technology
   Cellphone tours were least familiar to operators, but the issue of paying for time
      charges was raised.

Discussion

As is clear from the above summary, there is a great deal of variety in the type and
structure of bus tours to Washington, DC and the place of the Smithsonian within that
framework. It shows, however, that some of the tours being considered would be of
potential interest to someone in the industry.

In some conversations, operators wanted to know if and when samples or prototypes of
such tours would be available, if the Smithsonian would charge for using audio
materials, and – most importantly – if they could specify the museum(s) of interest, the
celebrity, or the affinity group of interest. Given the competitive nature of the industry, a
few saw these tours as a way to help them promote their offerings.

As with other new tools, some in this industry would be interested in trying prototypes.

2. Visitors to the Smithsonian

Introduction. The following overview is derived from 59 interviews conducted with Smithsonian visitors in March and April, 2008. Visitors were interviewed in seven Smithsonian museums: NASM, NMAI, HMSG, SI Castle, NMNH, DWRC, and NZP. Although interviewees varied widely in age (from 10 to 85), in visit group (from alone to school groups), and in levels of engagement (from dropping off visitors to spending all day in one museum), they were not selected systematically and are not a representative sample in any way. In addition, visitors were not questioned systematically. Thus, no quantitative conclusions can be drawn from this data. There were, however, a limited number of patterns that were striking across this set of interviews, and these are noted below through the use of the terms "few," "many," "most," or "all."

SI is huge.
  A few arrive with no idea that SI includes multiple museums or are aware of only some
  A few know about all SI museums; some include the Holocaust Museum and National
    Gallery in the Smithsonian
  All soon realize that SI is huge.

Time is limited.
  Some only have a brief period of time free to visit
  Some have non-SI sites/museums on their agenda

Groups have preferences.
  Some agree completely on what they most want to do at SI
  Some have different interests
  The exact plan is negotiated among group members

Individuals have content preferences.
  Preferences include art, history, nature, Indians, air and space, etc.
  Some are interested in a combination of these and that is reflected in their visit plan

Individuals have visit styles
  Some prefer to explore and discover – they want no maps, guides, lists, etc.
  Some are amenable to being guided
    Among those willing to be guided
        Some prefer passive materials, such as maps and lists or printed tours
        Some prefer audio tours that will engage them
            Some want these tours to be adjustable to their visit plan
            Some want these tours to provide additional info, e.g., personal histories
  Some prefer to be guided, the more strictly the better
    Among these who want strict guiding
        Some prefer in-person tour guides; others want step-by-step audio

All these visitors tended to view their tour experience within the context of individual museums, even if the tour would include multiple museums, i.e., they would select the segments that interest them based on the museums and the tour contents. They think primarily in terms of museums as separate units.

SI Connections

Across museums
> Advantages: they would learn what's in other museums, follow up on interests
> Disadvantages: other museums might be too far to walk to; there might not be enough time; they might not know how to get there

Content
> Those who prefer <u>highlight</u> tours tend to want them because of limited time or knowledge of SI. They want to choose what would work for them within their constraints.
> Those who prefer <u>celebrities</u> are strongly attracted to certain famous personalities with whom they feel a bond, e.g., Tony Hawk, Brad Pitt, Julia Roberts, James Earl Jones, etc.
> Those who prefer <u>concepts</u> have a strong attraction to a specific content dimension of SI, such as history or art. The ideas they suggest as interesting are very general, e.g., American history in the time of the revolution.

Medium
> Those who want more control over the experience prefer printed materials. They can see exactly what is planned and choose accordingly.
> Those who want a higher level of engagement than paper (which some say they never look at during the visit) prefer audio delivery.

Method
> All visitors are aware of at least one of the three methods from prior experience: brochure, tape, podcast, cellphone. Most felt that the kiosk was a good idea.
> Each method is seen as having advantages and disadvantages:

	Advantage	**Disadvantage**
Tape/PDA:	familiarity	the device has to be rented and returned to the same place
Podcast	• personal device • can keep(save) the contents after visiting	▪ those who don't visit an SI website won't download it ▪ those who have ipods/mp3 players might not be carrying them ▪ downloading in the museum may cause difficulties with ipods ▪ multiple group members can't use the same device ▪ some people are not familiar with this technology
Cell phone	• familiarity and ubiquity, • speaker-phone is available for groups	some must pay time charges

Text messaging (suggested by a visitor)	very popular with young visitors, feels personal	some people are not familiar with this technology
Kiosk:	• no advance preparation needed • responds to individual requests	none mentioned
Paper (Brochure)	Share among multiple group members	some people think reading is harder than listening

Delivery
  Internet
    Some visitors research their SI visit on the internet at non-SI sites
    Some visit one or more SI site
    Many do not use the internet at all prior to a visit
  Printed
    Some rely on guidebooks for information
    Many use *Go Smithsonian* guides to help plan their visit
    One visitor kept old *Go Smithsonian* guides for future reference
  Word of mouth
    Some rely on the advice and recommendations of friends/family to shape the visit
    Some just show up and look around

Discussion
As is evident from the range of variables identified up to this point, there is an extraordinary diversity among Smithsonian visitors in the ways that they plan their visits, go about their visits, and in what they might consider useful.

Knowing that some topic or objects of interest can be found in an unexpected museum would lead some to visit museums they had not intended to include in their trip. This would be an important benefit of either kiosks or printed self-guided tours. Even if self-guided tours were across museums, however, some visitors would pick and choose portions of the tours according to their larger plan for the visit and the museums they want to focus on.

While additional analysis of the entire dataset of interviews would add richness to this picture, the current overview suggests that the best way to gauge the actual demand for such self-guided tours would be through pilot projects that are formally evaluated. Even some visitors who claimed that they would like a particular type of tour became considerably more hesitant when interviewers raised some of the practical issues involved (such as the availability of equipment, time, distance between museums, etc.). Only real visitors offered a choice of real tours during real visits would reveal how these ideas might actually play out in practice.

Introduction. The following information highlights the electronic visitor tour services that are available at the Smithsonian museums and the National Zoo. Services such as brochures, museum maps, building and/or exhibition tours in pamphlet form, docent/volunteer or other types of guided tours are available at every facility. The information was collected by means of systematic phone calls and emails.

In the chart below, the following definitions are used:

Current: services that are presently available to visitors

Experimentation: services that are currently being designed and/or tested for future use

Discontinued: services that that have been tried and tested, but were deemed unsuccessful

Discussion: services that are under discussion, but are not being formally tested

Not Considered (NC): services that are neither being discussed nor pursued

No Information (NI) response from museum not received in time for inclusion

Inspection of the chart shows that

- Podcasts and webcasts are common in almost all the museums
- Audio guides get a mixed reception. While they are current in some facilities and being considered in others, some museums have discontinued them.
- Cell phone tours rate high in popularity, with nearly universal discussion or experimentation.

In addition, our interviews elicited some museum-specific information:

Cooper-Hewitt Museum

- Depending on the exhibition, podcasts may include information on designers and curators providing lectures
- Depending on exhibitions and funding, there are antenna audios

HMSG

- Podcasts available on website

	Podcasts/Webcasts	Audio Guides	Cell Phone Tours
African Art (NMAfA)	Current	Discussion	Discussion
Air and Space (NASM-DC)	Current	Discontinued	Experimentation
NASM- Hazy	N C	Discontinued	Discussion
American Art Museum (SAAM)	Current	Discussion	Discussion
Renwick Gallery	Current	Experimentation	Experimentation
American History (NMAH)	Discussion	Discussion	Discussion
American Indian (NMAI)	Current	Discussion	Discussion
Cooper-Hewitt	Current	Current	N C
Freer-Sackler Gallery (FSG)	Current	Current	Discussion
Hirshhorn (HMSG)	Current	Discussion	Discussion
National Zoo (NZP)	Current	Current	Current
Natural History (NMNH)	N C	Discontinued	Experimentation
Portrait Gallery (NPG)	Current	Discussion	Discussion
Postal Museum (NPM)	N C	Discontinued	Discussion

FSG

- Offered an audio tour only for the *Bible* show and will be offering one again for an upcoming exhibition in the fall of 2008

NASM

- Has received approval to develop cell phone tour for *Explore the Universe*
- Webcasts of main lecture programs are available online
- Producing podcasts for release very soon
- Developing "Welcome to the Smithsonian" DVDs for visitors

NMAH

- Before closing, self-guided tours for families were available as online PDFs to print prior to museum visit
- After re-opening, two large LCD screens will advertise different programs and tours and will direct visitors to services and amenities
- Orientation pre-visit DVDs for school audiences will eventually be available to order online

NPG

- Plasma screens in the lobby inform visitors about times of tours
- Webcasts are available; though not podcasts

NPM

- Self-guided tour with one side fashioned for children and the other side fashioned for adults are available online as PDF and at museum
- Biggest impediment to development of cell phone tours is poor reception

NZP

- Provides downloadable audio tour of *Asia Trail* and *Amazonia*
- Provides podcast on migratory birds
- Offers cell phone audio guide to support *Elephant Trails* construction; offers cell phone guides that can be called from nine different stations
- Provides webcast on cheetahs
- Provides audio guides online of features from bimonthly magazine
- Occasionally posts online the interviews that members of the media have conducted with zoo staff

SAAM

- Will be developing audio and cell phone tours
- Developed one cell phone tour for *William Wegman* exhibition (2006)

4. SI Connections: A Sampler of Things Non-SI Museums Are Doing

Introduction. Below are examples of how non-SI museums are using digital technology to support the visitor experience in their institutions**.** Without doubt, new users and applications appear daily.

In Advance of Visiting the Museum

- Flickr- Many museums like the Brooklyn Museum, the Library of Congress, and the Power House Museum are using Flickr, a website that helps people (and museums) upload images to the web and allows them to share them with others. Specifically, museums are posting images on a part of the Flickr website called "The Commons." The Commons allows museums to display portions of their collections online that they are not able to put on display. In general, the goal of The Commons is to share the museums' hidden treasures in a public photography archive that is available worldwide.
  http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/

- Podcasts- Many museums are now using podcasts, or downloadable information, to provide information to visitors about the museum, its exhibits, interviews with artists and curators. Podcasts can provide ~~or~~ virtual tours of the museum before the visitors ever set foot inside the physical museum. Museums such as MoMA (The Museum of Modern Art) in New York, Mystic Seaport: Museum of America and the Sea, and The Peary-MacMillan Artic Museum at Bowdoin College use podcasts.
  http://www.museumpods.com/id31.html

  http://www.bowdoin.edu/arctic-museum/

  http://moma.org/visit_moma/audio.html

- Use of "Second Life" virtual world – The Tech Museum of Innovation in San Jose is the first Museum to use the virtual world of Second Life® in conjunction with their exhibits and website. The Tech Virtual Test Zone is a new area of the museum showcasing the world's first hands-on, interactive exhibits that have been conceptualized and developed in the virtual world of Second Life®. The Tech Virtual Test Zone is a prototype exhibit area that will consistently feature virtual-world-to-real-world exhibits on specific themes. The first theme featured in the Test Zone is **"Art, Film & Music,"** which is also the theme of a new permanent gallery that The Tech Museum plans to launch by 2010. The

museum will feature the people and innovations of Silicon Valley that have contributed significantly to the technology field.
http://www.thetech.org/zestzone/

At the Museum

- Cell Phone Guided Tours- Many museums are using cell phone guided tours. Museums such as the Contemporary Museum of Modern Art in Los Angeles, the Asia Society, the Japanese American National Museum, and the Getty use the cell phone technology to provide visitors with guided tours. With cell phone guided tours, visitors can choose which pieces they want to hear about and in what order (unlike some previously recorded hand-held audio guide systems which take visitors on a specified route). However, the old audio system guides can still be used in conjunction with a phone guided tour since not all visitors will have cell phones or will want to use their minutes on a guided museum tour. http://www.guidebycell.com/gbc/tour.jsp

  http://www.janm.org/

- Churchill Museum - - (interactive table) The **Lifeline**, a fifteen meter long interactive table, takes up most of the Churchill Museum space. By using a touch-strip, visitors can access information from a computerized "filing cabinet" of Churchill's life that is divided into years, months, weeks and days. The **Lifeline** also has major national and world events paralleling Churchill's life in order to give the visitor a sense of the times in which he lived**.** http://cwr.iwm.org.uk/server/show/nav.223

After the Museum Visit

- Online Games, Information, and News- Many museums are putting an extraordinary amount of effort into making their online website user friendly and accessible. The Science Museum in the UK has done an especially good job of making their website easily usable. The site has games, including "Launch Ball," and museum updates and news. http://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/onlinestuff/games.aspx

- Tech Tags – The Tech Museum of Innovation in San Jose has RFID embedded bracelets that personalize a visitor's experience. The bracelet also captures

exhibit interactions on a website, which is accessible to visitors from their homes after visiting the museum.
http://www.thetech.org/exhibits/

Before and After the Visit

- Facebook, Youtube, and MySpace – "Websites like Facebook, Youtube, and MySpace have rapidly become some of the most popular destinations on the web. Many museums are using these popular websites as a marketing tool, reaching out to the young people who use them in search of the next generation of museum visitors. The next generation of museum visitors are no longer happy simply to consume content put on display for them by experts; they want a museum experience that is relevant to their interests…"
http://www.museumbrandingblog.co.uk/?cat=7