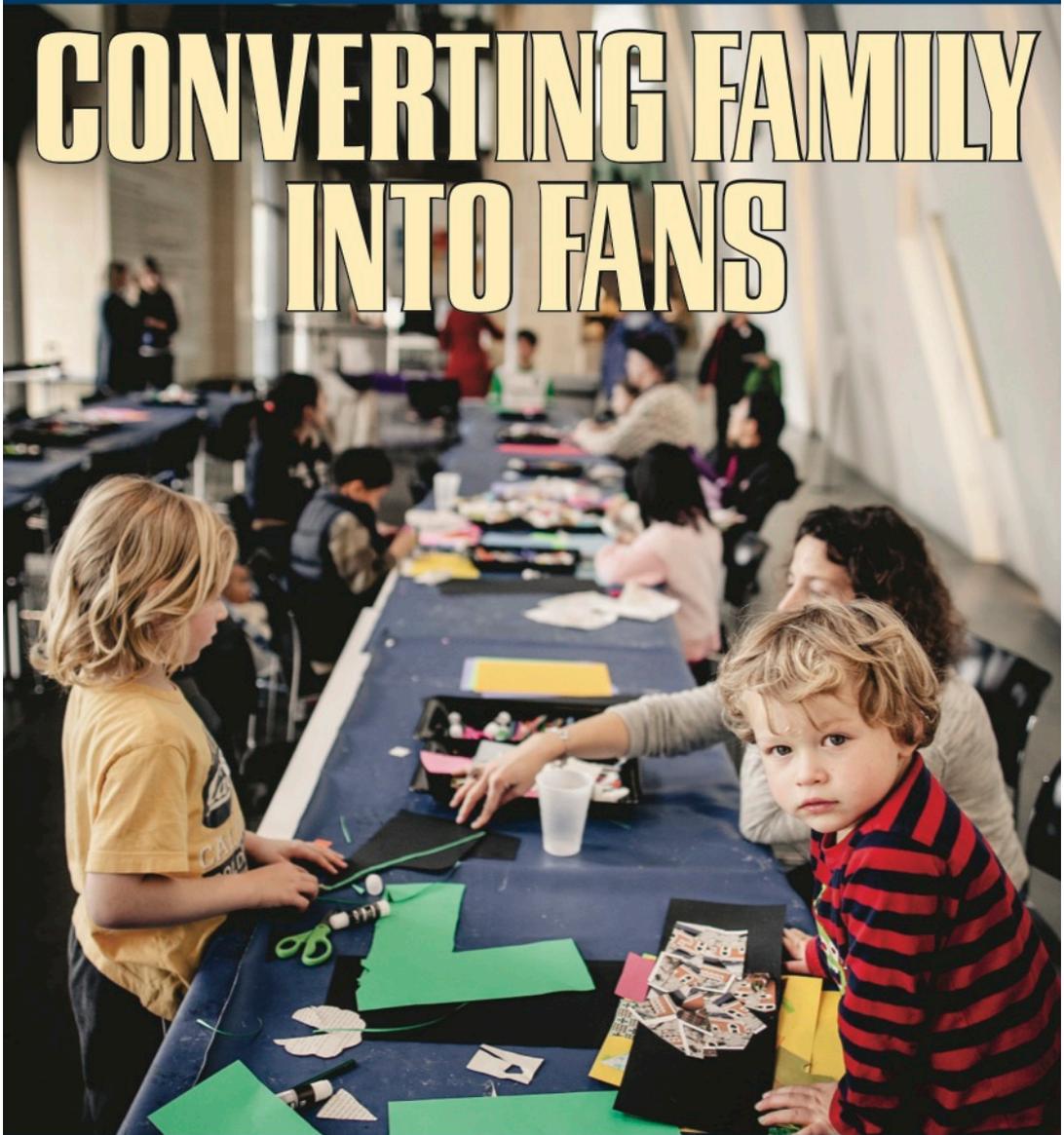


# CONVERTING FAMILY INTO FANS



**HOW THE CONTEMPORARY JEWISH MUSEUM  
EXPANDED ITS REACH**

**Bob Harlow and Cindy Cox Roman**

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# *Wallace Studies in Building Arts Audiences*

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*Hands-On Participation Brings a New Audience to The Clay Studio*

## CONVERTING FAMILY INTO FANS

*How The Contemporary Jewish Museum Expanded Its Reach*

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## PREFACE

**T**his case study describes how The Contemporary Jewish Museum (“The CJM”) built a deep understanding of a new audience—families—and how to serve it with new programs that attracted tens of thousands to the museum. It is part of a larger set of 10 case studies commissioned by The Wallace Foundation to explore arts organizations’ efforts to reach new audiences and deepen relationships with their existing audiences. These in-depth reports lay out how the efforts were created and run, describe the results in detail, identify what helped them become successful, and show what got in the way of success. They add to a growing body of field-based research, providing specific examples of individual organizations’ responses to unique circumstances. At the same time, each aspires to capture more-broadly applicable lessons about what works and what does not—and why—in building arts audiences.

The individual case studies are the products of multiple interviews with key staff and analysis of program elements, budgets, and planning documents. Unlike similar efforts, however, each draws from a multifaceted base of data and evidence collected over a period of several years, including ticket purchases, online activity, and participation in a broad array of programming, as well as qualitative and quantitative research undertaken by independent consultants and the organizations themselves to inform program development and to evaluate results. That research was integral to each program, and of such

importance that in 2015 The Wallace Foundation published a companion guide on using research to support audience building that draws from practices and examples employed across the 10 organizations, called *Taking Out the Guesswork*.

Each case study in this series begins with a brief executive summary and a “scene-setter” describing an actual component of the program. That is followed by an overview of the environment within which the organization was operating, its audience-building challenges, and the program it built to address those challenges. Detail follows about strategy and tactics, and key decisions and adjustments made as the organization developed its approach and refined it in response to new information. Additional specifics are provided on how progress was measured and what results occurred, and an analysis highlighting elements that led to success follows.

The Contemporary Jewish Museum is part of a second round of case studies. The first round included four organizations, and this second round contains six. The 10 arts groups encompass variety in size, geography, and art form. Perhaps more importantly, each organization’s strategy and set of tactics are different, providing planning details and considerations across diverse programs and circumstances.

The experiences of the organizations as a whole reveal several recurring themes. When the first four case studies were published in 2012, we highlighted five general principles:

1. Market research can sharpen engagement-strategy development and execution.
2. Audiences are open to engaging in the arts in new and different ways.
3. Audience building is an ongoing endeavor, not a one-time initiative.

4. Audience-building efforts should be fully integrated into every element of an organization’s operations, not approached as a separate initiative or program.
5. Programs that emerge from a clear and well-supported organizational mission develop in environments in which they can thrive.

These themes are reinforced in the experiences of the six organizations in the second group of case studies and were more fully developed (alongside additional effective practices) in a recent Wallace Foundation publication, *The Road to Results: Effective Practices for Building Arts Audiences* (that report and other audience-building resources are available at <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/audience-development-for-the-arts/Pages/default.aspx>).

While the individual reports provide details of particular strategies, the collective experience across the organizations also suggests that there is no one winning tactic, no killer promotion, no social media strategy that alone will help organizations build audiences in a sustainable way. Instead, successful audience building is an integrated and coordinated effort with several parts of an organization working together over several years’ time, more often than not in the face of very slow progress or setbacks. The reason is simple: It takes time for an organization to learn how to connect with a new audience, and once that public begins to respond, it takes time to develop a steady following. But, while organizations may have to operate differently to connect with new audiences, that does not mean they need to change who they are or what they produce. In fact, such a strategy may backfire, because an audience engagement initiative that departs from an organization’s mission or core values likely will not receive the broad and ongoing support needed to maintain it.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**A** great many individuals and organizations assisted us in our research, and we want to express our heartfelt appreciation. First, this work would not have been possible without the generous support of The Wallace Foundation. We would also like to express our appreciation for their guidance and support to The Wallace Foundation staff members Lucas Held, Ed Pauly, Jessica Schwartz, Daniel Windham, Will Miller, and Christine Yoon. Ann Stone of The Wallace Foundation was an important strategic advisor from the project's beginnings to its conclusions. As editor, Pat Wechsler ensured that the narrative for the museum's complex and multifaceted initiative had a clear throughline for the reader, and editorial counsel from Sarosh Syed and Pamela Mendels of The Wallace Foundation helped us present the material as coherently and clearly as possible.

We are also grateful to Fraidy Aber and the staff of The Contemporary Jewish Museum for their graciousness in providing time, insights, and candor. We were also fortunate to have received feedback on direction and an earlier draft of this work from Julie Crites of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Mary Sue Sweeney Price, and Sandra Bernhard. Of course, the final responsibility for the questions posed and conclusions drawn rests with us.

*Bob Harlow*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**T**he Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco embarked on a transformative adventure in 2008—moving from an institution that served between 10,000 and 13,000 visitors annually in a 2,500-square-foot gallery to one that hosted more than 100,000 visitors a year in a new 63,000-square-foot facility. As part of that expansion, families with children were targeted early on as a new audience that would not only help elevate attendance, but also infuse the organization with the vibrancy and curiosity of intergenerational conversation.

Since its founding in 1984, The CJM had been located in the lobby of an office building that was home to and named after another Jewish nonprofit organization. There, it mounted exhibitions that explored diverse aspects of Jewish culture, history, art, and ideas. Although its exhibitions were designed to have broad appeal, most of the museum's visitors during those years were Jewish. The museum's leadership wanted to magnify its reach and impact, promoting explorations of culture through art among a broader demographic audience. This desire led to the construction of a significantly larger museum in a more central location and more high-profile programs with more inclusive themes that would attract non-Jewish audiences.

Connie Wolf, director and CEO at the time, had witnessed earlier in her career the vitality that families with children could bring to museum spaces and wanted that energy in the new

facility. Yet attracting a sizable family audience presented significant hurdles. First, the museum had made very few overtures to that demographic in the past. Its exhibitions were designed for adult audiences, and the museum offered little in the way of regular family programming. What's more, The CJM was little known outside a relatively narrow segment of the Jewish community.

Guided by input from focus groups, the staff set out to raise the museum's profile among families and deliver a rich and satisfying experience once they visited. For starters, The CJM began presenting regularly scheduled exhibitions of popular Jewish authors/illustrators designed to appeal to both adults and children, which proved to be the most effective audience-building tool. The museum also created regularly available programming that offered families multiple ways in which to engage with exhibitions, including family-oriented tours, special gallery hours for preschoolers, weekly artist-led art making, and activity packs that families could use to explore the museum on their own. Finally, The CJM organized partnerships with local libraries, preschools, and elementary schools, which involved direct outreach to teachers, students, and parents in art workshops and special museum visits.

The CJM also employed several tactics to reduce financial obstacles to attendance, including free admission for all visitors under age 18 (a first for Bay Area museums), and free admission days with family activities that brought in thousands. Yet, any stand-alone efforts that offered only free admission, when not paired with specific family programming, proved less effective at luring families who were unfamiliar with the museum.

Beyond the programs themselves, museum staff members worked hard to create an environment that welcomed families, all the while finding ways to keep the experience positive

for adult visitors and avoid becoming a "children's museum." Instead, they transformed The CJM into a place where people of all ages would be drawn into exploring contemporary art and culture, through a prism of Jewish life.

Today, The CJM has solidified its status as a family destination. Beyond its expanded programming, it has built institutional knowledge on how to serve families, and relationships with other local organizations that serve them. The new museum has consistently welcomed more than 12,000 family visitors a year, with annual family attendance approaching or exceeding 20,000 in some years, compared with the 1,300 family visitors the institution attracted in its previous facility. Families have gone from 10 percent of all visitors to 15 percent—and even exceeded that figure in some years.

The specific tactics The CJM employed were designed to reach families, but the museum's broader approach of getting to know a new audience in-depth, developing programming and community relationships to serve that audience, and ensuring that the newcomers feel welcome, is applicable to any organization looking to engage new demographic groups.

*Museum galas are known for their displays of haute couture, not ice-skating. But this was no typical gala. On that first Saturday night in December 2012 at San Francisco's Contemporary Jewish Museum (The CJM), guests were lacing up to take a whirl around a makeshift ice rink that materialized in a hall normally reserved for lectures. Other visitors watched as a sculptor chipped away at a block of ice until a life-size image of a young boy playing in the snow with his dog emerged. The backdrop throughout was a wintery urban streetscape from a city on the other side of the country and a time decades past.*

*The guests had entered the world created by children's author Ezra Jack Keats in his seminal work, *The Snowy Day*, which also inspired an exhibition of Keats's life and work at the museum. A snow machine greeted guests as they arrived, and the lobby was adorned with 3D re-creations of the gaslights and buildings from the Brooklyn streets that Keats roamed as a child. Yet, what made this sold-out gala stand out from others of its ilk was not so much the activities or the décor. Instead, it was the ages of its 500 some revelers, who ranged from as young as 3 right up through the oldest supporters of the museum. Half of the attendees were under 16. This was The CJM's annual Family Gala—its signature fundraising event of the year. Five years earlier, it was a triumph the museum—then focused on adult patronage—could not have pulled off.*

*Amid the gourmet food and elegant wines, the caterers served soft pretzels and shaved ice, and kiddie cocktails alongside alcoholic versions. There were art-making activities for families, as well as a*

*band for dancing and a teen lounge in the museum's "Yud" gallery. There were even street games like hopscotch, a reference to other Keats classics. Families could create their own mementos of the experience in a family photo booth with a snowy background and props from books by Keats, such as brightly colored goggles.*

*This was the reimagined CJM four years in the making. Back then, the museum leadership pledged to bring more families with children into the larger museum family. The Keats exhibition, part of the effort behind that pledge, was one of many exhibitions of high-profile Jewish illustrators and personalities whose life and work speak to both adults and children. This type of programming was a critical tactic in the transformation from niche museum to one that served a multigenerational Jewish and non-Jewish population. Exhibitions in prior years showcasing the work of Maurice Sendak (perhaps best known for his book, *Where the Wild Things Are*), *Curious George* creators H. A. and Margaret Rey, and Harry Houdini had similarly brought in family visitors by the thousands. Earlier Family Galas had seen magicians, *Sendak's Wild Things*, or *Curious George* freely roaming amongst the partygoers.*

*The theme of the most recent fundraiser—the seventh since the expanded museum opened its doors—was an evening of adult- and kid-friendly explorations into *New Experiments in Art and Technology*, or NEAT Night. These once unimaginable events now seem like a natural fit for a museum that has both embraced families and been embraced by them.*

## EMBRACING NEW AUDIENCES

**A**rts organizations looking to attract and retain new audiences confront multifaceted challenges. First and foremost, they must identify the barriers keeping sought-after populations away and how to overcome them. An organization pursuing audiences that haven't patronized it in the past needs to find effective ways to get on their radar screens and then convince them that the institution offers something they will enjoy and find relevant. To achieve long-term success, organizations also must learn how to accommodate the interests and lifestyles of these new groups.

Those were the hurdles that San Francisco's Contemporary Jewish Museum (The CJM) faced—and successfully overcame—when it sought to attract a greater number of families, both Jewish and non-Jewish, after the museum moved into a significantly larger building in 2008. At that point in its history, The CJM was neither well known as a family destination nor as an institution that served audiences beyond the Jewish community, so its challenges were substantial.

Founded in 1984, The CJM had always sought to present aspects of Jewish culture and ideas that would resonate with people of all backgrounds. In its first 24 years, the museum partnered with national and international institutions to present more than 100 exhibitions exploring Jewish identity, social history, and ritual, as well as the community's diversity through displays of drawings, photography, artifacts, and objects. It also

had presented exhibitions of popular artists, authors, and other personalities who happened to be Jewish, but weren't necessarily known for that. Typically, museum attendance ran between 10,000 and 13,000 each year. Although not specifically tracked, the staff assumed that most of those who visited in the first 24 years were in fact Jewish.

Unlike some Jewish museums, The CJM never sought to build a permanent collection or fill itself with religious or Holocaust artifacts. The CJM focused on aspects of the Jewish experience it considered too dynamic to be captured by anything static.

Yet its potential impact was limited. The CJM originally operated in a 2,500-square-foot space in the lobby of the office building of the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco. The gallery space was small and not climate-controlled, which constrained both the type and number of exhibitions it could bring in, and offered limited opportunities for other programming. What's more, while operating out of the Federation's office building enhanced its reputation as a resource for the Jewish community, the museum's location worked against it in terms of visibility to a wider audience.

The museum's leadership and board wanted to engage a broader audience in conversation about the Jewish experience, but to do so would require the ability to mount larger and more varied exhibitions. It also would mean maintaining a higher public profile than The CJM had ever attempted. They decided the commitment was well worth the potential reward.

Toward that end, The CJM—under the direction of then Director and CEO Connie Wolf—was reborn in a 63,000-square-foot facility on Mission Street in the city's Yerba Buena cultural district. Architect Daniel Libeskind designed the new museum around a landmark 1907 power substation, extending the brick

building with the addition of a contemporary geometric structure covered in blue steel panels. An ode to dialogue among diverse perspectives and philosophies, Libeskind's design of the combined buildings was modeled on the two Hebrew letters that spell "L'Chaim," which means "To Life."

The new facility includes 9,500 square feet of exhibition space in two main galleries and an education center that at 3,500 square feet is larger than The CJM's original facility. In addition, there is another exhibition area in a slanted-wall space designed to accommodate free-standing sound and artist installations; a 3,500-square-foot multipurpose hall; a 2,500-square-foot lobby; a 2,100-square-foot café; and finally, a 2,000-square-foot store.

**Figure 1. The Contemporary Jewish Museum and Adjacent Jessie Plaza**



Photo by Bruce Damonte; Courtesy of The Contemporary Jewish Museum

## THE CONTEMPORARY JEWISH MUSEUM AT A GLANCE

- Mission: “The CJM makes the diversity of the Jewish experience relevant for a 21st century audience. We accomplish this through innovative exhibitions and programs that educate, challenge, and inspire. The Museum’s Daniel Libeskind-designed facility enables and inspires its mission. Dynamic and welcoming, it’s a place to experience art, music, film, literature, debate, and—most importantly—people.”
- Founded in 1984
- A non-collecting institution that partners with national and international institutions to present approximately 12 exhibitions annually
- Director and CEO: Connie Wolf (1999–2011)
- CFO and Acting Director (2012–2013): Denise Childs
- Director and CEO: Lori Starr (effective June 10, 2013)
- Director of Education: Fraidy Aber
- Associate Director of Education: Janine Okmin
- Family Programs Manager: Daniel Barash (2010–2013)
- Operating budget: \$7.5 million
- 110,000 visitors annually

Based on analyses of institutions of similar size and budget to the new facility, The CJM believed it could serve as many as 150,000 visitors annually in its new home—a more than 10-fold increase over the museum’s earlier attendance. To help accomplish such dramatic growth and engage a broader audience, the

staff knew it would need to rely on the frequent rotation of exhibitions and a diverse offering in its new gallery space—which now allowed three exhibitions to be on display simultaneously, rather than one.

## SEEING THE FUTURE IN FAMILIES

**W**olf encouraged the museum to pursue families as an untapped source of the additional patronage and vitality the museum leadership was looking for in the reimagined museum. Based on years as director of education for New York’s Whitney Museum, where she spearheaded a family program, Wolf saw the “transformative” effect families had on that institution—not only increasing the number of visitors, but also injecting an exciting energy into the atmosphere in and around the organization. Wolf says:

*The stuffiness of a museum immediately exits the minute families walk in the door. When you walk in and see children engaged with the art and enjoying their experience, you cannot help but smile. Even if you’re not there with kids and you see kids and families enjoying things, it makes you think differently.... It’s a really engaging way of thinking about things being alive and intergenerational and full of life.*

The CJM Board of Trustees welcomed the idea of targeting families. Not only would it stimulate an intergenerational, intercultural dialogue, but board members also saw it as an enjoyable way to share Jewish values with their own children and grandchildren. Both Wolf and the board were adamant, however, that The CJM would not become a “family museum” or a “children’s

museum.” It would remain a contemporary museum that could bring together people of all ages to appreciate diverse aspects of Jewish art, ideas, and culture, while exploring important societal themes.

Working with families today also represented an investment in the future of the museum and its long-term attendance and growth. Bringing in young people via families helps create audiences decades later, the staff noted, citing research showing that children who attend museums with parents are more likely to visit museums as adults. To Wolf, these future museumgoers and their parents represented a potential pool of future museum supporters and leaders.

The strategy required a considerable stretch for the organization, which had made few direct overtures to families in the past, and almost none outside the Jewish community. Family programming at The CJM had consisted of two free Family Days per year during which the museum offered families the opportunity to create art together, explore current exhibitions, and listen to live music and storytelling. These included a spring celebration of the Jewish holiday of Purim, which usually attracted an attendance of about 250. On Christmas, a day when most institutions are closed and families that don’t celebrate are looking for entertainment, the museum offered a second Family Day, which typically drew about 500 people.

These Family Days, however, did not result in higher family attendance the rest of the year, the staff concluded, because there were not additional public family programs offered, and the museum’s exhibitions did not speak directly to families. “Many of our exhibitions would read to the public as intellectual, contemporary, and not family-focused, and space for programming was not available to make the bridge for a full family experience,” noted Associate Director of Education Janine Okmin.

During The CJM’s last two years of operation in the original building, families accounted for about 10 percent of all visitors—approximately 950 in 2006 and 1,300 in 2007—a large percentage of which attended on the Family Days and many of which came with their synagogue groups.<sup>1</sup>

## RESEARCH REVEALS CHALLENGES OF LOW AWARENESS AND LOW PERCEIVED RELEVANCE

**A**s part of its effort to formulate strategies for introducing the new museum to the public, The CJM commissioned background research to explore how the museum was perceived by both Jewish and non-Jewish audiences. That research revealed that the institution and its programs were not well known or were misunderstood, particularly outside the Jewish community. (See sidebar, *Brand-Positioning Research*.) Although most said they found the vision for the new museum compelling, many of those who had never visited the museum had either not heard of The CJM or considered it irrelevant to them. Those with children simply did not consider it a family destination.

The museum’s low public profile and programming were not the only challenges when it came to attracting families with children. The staff realized that these families have different needs and may be looking for a different kind of experience than the adult patrons the museum primarily had been serving.

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1. In describing attendance, this report refers to “family visitors,” a measure that The CJM developed to track results. While the museum does not actually track who visits with family members, it does track child and youth (under 18) visits on all except free-admission days, and derives the measure of “family visitors” from that number. Each child is counted as a “family visitor.” Staff then assumes one adult for every two children, so if two kids come in with one or more adults, they are counted as “three family visitors.” Children attending with school groups or other tours are not included in this tally.

## BRAND-POSITIONING RESEARCH

The staff engaged an outside consultant to convene two rounds of focus groups, with Jewish and non-Jewish audiences, in order to discuss existing perceptions of the museum and help develop an effective message to communicate the new vision. Participants included museum members and “potential visitors” who had never visited the museum; all were culturally active college graduates with at least moderate household incomes.

The first phase comprised five two-hour focus groups in June 2006 with each of the following demographics:

- CJM members, ages 35 to 70
- Two groups of Jewish potential visitors: one younger (ages 25 to 39) and one older (ages 40 to 60)
- Two groups of non-Jewish potential visitors: one younger (ages 25 to 39) and one older (ages 40 to 60)

The second round in November 2006 included five one-hour interviews with the same groups to refine positioning ideas and test the appeal of various marketing taglines. The focus groups were complemented by individual interviews with seven museum senior staffers and board members, as well as seven leaders of local cultural and Jewish organizations.

The research surfaced several challenges to expanding the audience, the greatest being predictably limited awareness and knowledge of the museum itself. Potential Jewish and non-Jewish audiences did not clearly understand The CJM’s mission or vision. Although the museum was well liked by those who knew it, the institution did not seem to be well known outside that small circle. Even if people had heard of it, they often were unable to describe its mission or programs. Many assumed The CJM focused on the Holocaust and religious aspects of Judaism.

Focus group respondents warmed up to the museum when it was presented as a lively place that brought together people of all backgrounds to explore the Jewish experience through contemporary art. Jewish respondents welcomed the opportunity to learn more about nonreligious aspects of the Jewish experience, and non-Jewish respondents were receptive to learning about another culture.

All respondents agreed that more than any written statement of vision or intent, the key to successful engagement with a wider audience would be dynamic, relevant, and varied programming. In fact, the research identified that element as the most essential component of any campaign to capture the attention of non-Jewish audiences.

Although some staff members had worked with families in the past, they shored up their expertise through a series of discussions with parents and educators working with youth and family in local organizations. (See sidebar, *Internally Managed Focus Groups*.) The first set of discussions was held a year before the opening of the new facility.

From parents in focus groups, the staff heard:

- They wanted to be able to participate in family activities any time they visited.
- They were looking for scheduled programs that would provide opportunities to meet other families with children the same age as their children.

- They saw the admission price as a barrier to visiting museums.
- They often felt unwelcome in museums and were concerned that other patrons would regard their children as disruptive.

From educators, the staff heard:

- They too felt the admission price represented a barrier that kept many families away from museums.
- They emphasized that parents not used to attending museums—and even some who were—needed help when it came to discussing and experiencing exhibits with their children.
- The group expressed a hope that the museum could promote interaction—not just instructive talk—between parents and their children.

### **PUTTING TOGETHER STRATEGY AND TACTICS TO CAPTURE THE FAMILY AUDIENCE**

**B**ased on the research, the staff concluded that building a family audience in line with the vision for the new institution would require strategies to:

1. Raise awareness of the museum as a destination for families of all backgrounds
2. Create programs to help families of all backgrounds connect with the exhibitions and other families
3. Reduce or eliminate the admission price barriers facing many families

Wolf’s first step was to create an education team of professionals who had experience and expertise helping children and

### **INTERNALLY MANAGED FOCUS GROUPS**

Throughout the initiative, The CJM tapped into opinions of several constituencies through a series of internally managed focus groups. The CJM staff selected discussion participants from parents recruited for a “Family Programs Steering Committee” organized by the museum, as well as personal and professional contacts, including school directors and local librarians.

Each focus group followed a structured discussion format, with questions prepared and reviewed in advance by the staff. Participants were asked to explore potential programming areas and share feedback on existing programs and those under development. A staff member was designated to take notes of the proceedings, which were later distributed. The discussions and insights from the focus groups are included throughout this report.

There are risks with this type of approach versus relying on professionally managed focus groups. Internal recruiting may not cast as wide a net as professionally recruited focus groups. It also may be difficult for staff members, when leading discussions, to suspend their biases in a way that professional focus group moderators can. Nonetheless, these groups provided feedback from key constituent groups and a cost-effective means to augment The CJM’s own brainstorming and discussions.

families find ways into art. The CJM director appointed Fraidy Aber as the new director of education to lead the team, working alongside Okmin. Prior to the appointment, Aber had been the executive director of The Vail Symposium, a Colorado nonprofit that provides educational programs to diverse audiences.

Wolf also insisted that other staff members, including tour guides, teaching artists, and educators, have similar experience. In its first few years in the new facility, the museum added two full-time family program managers and five part-time teaching artists to develop and deliver new programs.

Originally, the staff put together a suite of tactics, including a slate of scheduled and “anytime” activities that would connect families to exhibits and one another. There also was a plan to develop discount and free admission programs that would be administered through various school and community partners.

As the initiative unfolded, two additional tactics were adopted to support the museum’s strategies—development of high-profile exhibitions with content for audiences of all ages, and partnerships with other Bay Area institutions. The one that had the greatest impact was undoubtedly the museum’s new roster of major family-oriented exhibitions. These exhibitions were built around widely read and loved children’s authors and illustrators who were Jewish. A few years into the initiative, the museum developed a series of close partnerships with schools and public libraries that became a direct line to thousands of parents and children the museum might not have otherwise reached.

The CJM received a \$410,000 Wallace Excellence Award from The Wallace Foundation to support these strategies and tactics over four years, beginning in 2008. Among the goals set: Attract 150,000 visitors annually to the new facility, of which at

least 18,000 or 12 percent would consist of families with children. The funding was used to underwrite additional marketing, programming for families at the museum, program evaluations (focus groups and survey research), and free-admission programs.<sup>2</sup> The four principal strategies making up the plan are detailed in the next sections, followed by attendance results and a discussion of factors that drove those results.

### **STRATEGY #1: MAJOR EXHIBITIONS DESIGNED TO ATTRACT FAMILIES**

The staff knew from its research that the biggest hurdle was getting families to include The CJM as one of their leisure-time options. How do you get on the radar screens of families? The answer for The CJM—and what has become the primary driver of family attendance—has been presenting high-profile, well-promoted exhibitions around themes that can be made simultaneously intriguing to both children and adults. The new programming has acted as a beacon to attract families and demonstrate the museum’s sincere commitment to becoming a family-friendly institution with broad appeal beyond the Jewish community.

In 2008, the museum opened to large crowds, thanks in part to the substantial press that accompanied the debut of The CJM’s dramatic new home and the premiere exhibition, *In the Beginning: Artists Respond to Genesis*, which featured newly commissioned installations by significant contemporary artists as well as historical works by artists such as Tiepolo, Blake, Rodin, and Chagall. In the first three months in the new facility,

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2. The funds were to support the scheduled and non-scheduled family programs, several components of the strategy to eliminate financial barriers, marketing, and community partnerships. Although important components and discussed in this report, the Wallace funds did not support the family-oriented exhibitions.

the museum served its largest audiences ever with attendance reaching 14,766 visitors per month.<sup>3</sup>

But the *In the Beginning* exhibition was not the only draw. To attract families with children, The CJM realized it needed to offer art that would appeal to younger visitors, but that adults could also find intriguing. Thus, alongside *In the Beginning*, The CJM also presented an exhibition of William Steig's illustrations, including both adult-oriented cartoons from *The New Yorker* as well as illustrations of the ogre Shrek, perhaps Steig's most famous creation whose name means "fear" in Yiddish. *From The New Yorker to Shrek: The Art of William Steig* ran from June 8 through September 7, 2008. Thirteen percent of visitors in those months were families with children.

The ability of the exhibition to draw family visitors (and non-family visitors for that matter), however, became clear after it closed: Monthly attendance dropped to 6,918, with only 8 percent of the reduced numbers representing families with children. This meant family attendance dropped from nearly 1,900 visitors a month during the Steig exhibition to approximately 530 after it closed. Recognizing the pull of names like Steig, or Shrek when it came to families, the museum committed to featuring a high-profile, family-oriented exhibition at least once a year.

Table 1 shows monthly general admission and the percentage of visitors that were families during the run of those major family-oriented exhibitions. Monthly general-admission figures, reflecting times when no major family exhibition was installed, also are shown (that same data is shown in an abridged format in Figure 2). Both family attendance and

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3. Regular attendance excludes Family and Community Days, discussed in Strategy Component #3. See footnote 2 on page 19 for a definition of "family visitor" and how it is calculated on general admission days. For Free Family Days (discussed on p. 38), the museum assumes 60% family visitors, a figure confirmed by informal surveys.

general attendance tended to be higher when family-oriented exhibitions were on view. On average, families were a larger proportion (18%) of total visitors when those exhibits were on view compared to times when they were not (8%). (The one exception was the 2014 Arnold Lobel exhibition, during which attendance was lower than the monthly average for that year and for any of the other major family-oriented exhibitions.)

Typically, the major family-oriented exhibitions were linked to children's book authors and/or illustrators, with the notable exception of the Houdini exhibition that began in October 2011. At the same time, each exhibition was selected because it also contained a level of sophisticated thought and adult themes that would be engaging for adults as well—they were not "children's exhibitions" or adult exhibitions with select pieces added for children. Visitors of all ages could appreciate different aspects of each exhibition and the individual works presented within them.

For instance, while most children probably see Peter, the hero of *The Snowy Day*, as a boy who simply is experiencing the joy of his first snowfall, he was actually the first African American protagonist in children's literature when the book was published in the early 1960s. His creator, Ezra Jack Keats, was a white Jew from an impoverished background, and the exhibition explored the author's identification with and affinity for those who suffered prejudice, regardless of their origins. At the same time, the work on display explored Keats's innovative collage techniques and his use of shape and color.

Recognizing the importance of family-oriented exhibitions to the museum experience, The CJM made a commitment to have at least one high-profile exhibition that would be a family draw each fall, as well as at least one exhibition always on view with content that is highly accessible to families. Sometimes

**Table 1. Monthly Admission During and Outside Runs of Major Family-Oriented Exhibitions**

Fiscal Year		Monthly General Admission Total	Monthly Family Visitors (Percent of Total)
<b>2009</b>	<b>During run of family-oriented exhibition, FY 2009:</b> <i>From The New Yorker to Shrek: The Art of William Steig</i> June 8, 2008–September 7, 2008 Over 190 of Steig’s drawings for <i>The New Yorker</i> —for which he produced over 1,600 drawings and 120 covers—and children’s books, including his 1990 picture book <i>Shrek!</i> , as well as his lesser-known mid-life symbolic drawings	<b>14,766</b>	<b>1,891 (13%)</b>
	Monthly general admission remainder of FY 2009:	6,918	528 (8%)
<b>2010</b>	<b>During run of family-oriented exhibition, FY 2010:</b> <i>There’s a Mystery There: Sendak on Sendak</i> September 8, 2009–January 19, 2010 Watercolors, sketches, drawings, and other materials from more than 40 of Sendak’s books, exploring hidden messages behind Sendak’s stories and the life events prompting them, explained through video interviews with the author	<b>9,483</b>	<b>1,881 (20%)</b>
	Monthly general admission remainder of FY 2010:	6,524	652 (10%)
<b>2011</b>	<b>During run of family-oriented exhibition, FY 2011:</b> <i>Curious George Saves the Day: The Art of Margret and H. A. Rey</i> November 14, 2010–March 13, 2011 Nearly 80 original drawings and watercolors of Curious George and other characters from the Reys’ books, alongside vintage photographs, journals, and documentation related to the Reys’ escape from Nazi Europe	<b>9,224</b>	<b>2,470 (27%)</b>
	Monthly general admission remainder of FY 2011:	6,993	618 (9%)

Fiscal Year		Monthly General Admission Total	Monthly Family Visitors (Percent of Total)
<b>2012</b>	<b>During run of family-oriented exhibition, FY 2012:</b> <i>Houdini: Art and Magic</i> October 2, 2011–January 16, 2012 Exploring the life and legend of Harry Houdini from the 19th century to present, the exhibit included more than 160 objects, such as magic apparatuses, posters, photographs, and films, and 26 works by contemporary artists inspired by Houdini	<b>13,271</b>	<b>2,289 (17%)</b>
	Monthly general admission remainder of FY 2012:	6,757	510 (8%)
<b>2013</b>	<b>During run of family-oriented exhibition, FY 2013:</b> <i>The Snowy Day and the Art of Ezra Jack Keats</i> November 15, 2012–February 24, 2013 Over 80 collages, sketches, and other works by the award-winning author and illustrator Ezra Jack Keats whose book, <i>The Snowy Day</i> (1962), was the first modern color picture book to feature an African American protagonist	<b>7,506</b>	<b>1,197 (16%)</b>
	Monthly general admission remainder of FY 2013:	4,254	375 (9%)
<b>2014</b>	<b>During run of family-oriented exhibition, FY 2014:</b> <i>Frog and Toad and the World of Arnold Lobel</i> November 21, 2013–March 23, 2014 Approximately 100 original illustrations and works on paper by Arnold Lobel, author and illustrator of children’s books produced since the late 1960s, including the <i>Frog and Toad</i> series, <i>Mouse Soup</i> , and <i>Fables</i>	<b>5,280</b>	<b>1,079 (20%)</b>
	Monthly general admission remainder of FY 2014:	7,650	596 (8%)

Note: The museum’s fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30.

**Figure 2. Monthly General Admission During and Outside Runs of Major Family-Oriented Exhibitions**

Fiscal Year		Family Visitors (percent of total)
2009	During run of family-oriented exhibit (Steig)	14,766 13%
	Outside run of family-oriented exhibit	6,918 8%
2010	During run of family-oriented exhibit (Sendak)	9,483 20%
	Outside run of family-oriented exhibit	6,524 10%
2011	During run of family-oriented exhibit (Curious George)	9,224 27%
	Outside run of family-oriented exhibit	6,993 9%
2012	During run of family-oriented exhibit (Houdini)	13,271 17%
	Outside run of family-oriented exhibit	6,757 8%
2013	During run of family-oriented exhibit (Keats)	7,506 16%
	Outside run of family-oriented exhibit	4,254 9%
2014	During run of family-oriented exhibit (Lobel)	5,280 20%
	Outside run of family-oriented exhibit	7,650 8%
Average 2009-2014	During run of family-oriented exhibits	9,922 18%
	Outside run of family-oriented exhibits	6,516 8%

that appeal wasn't immediately obvious, and that meant finding family-friendly elements in exhibitions. In the summer of 2012, for example, The CJM mounted *California Dreaming: Jewish Life in the Bay Area from the Gold Rush to the Present*. The exhibition documented the development of the Jewish community in the Bay Area, but included auxiliary tools such as an iPad-driven interactive game specifically designed to engage younger audiences.

## STRATEGY #2: PROVIDING NEW PROGRAMS AND A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT FOR FAMILIES

This was a two-pronged strategy. First, the staff was asked to design a variety of on-site family programs that helped parents and children engage with the exhibitions together. Next, staff members identified ways to make families feel welcome and comfortable when they visited.

Regarding the family programs, there were two kinds with two different objectives. The first was a set of scheduled activities that would take place at specific times on certain days. The goal for these group activities was to attract many families to the museum at the same time, so they could enjoy the exhibitions in the company of other families, most likely with children of similar ages based on the activity offering.

But what if families wanted to come at other times? Aber also wanted something for them to do whenever they chose to attend. To accommodate these family visits, the museum staff created "anytime" activities that were available all the time and could be enjoyed by families on their own.

Aber was not looking for a hodgepodge of activities. These had to be as carefully conceived and developed as the exhibitions themselves. Their common objective: helping parents and children connect with the themes and ideas in the exhibitions, often relying on some of their own personal experiences. "In general, we think of our educational philosophy—not just family programs—as a triangle that connects the artwork on view to some kind of big idea," says Associate Director of Education Okmin. "We provide an opportunity for visitors to connect self, a big idea, and what's on view at the museum."

## 1. SCHEDULED PROGRAMS FOR FAMILIES

Sunday, a day of the week most families are able to do things together, was designated as a special day for family programs and the museum made sure something was always available. By offering the programs consistently on the same day, it made it easier for families to remember, for the museum to plan, and for adult visitors looking for a quiet museum experience to plan around. One of the chief family Sunday activities, offered weekly, was drop-in art making in the museum's education center.

There also was a suite of family activities on the second Sunday of each month. These included tours targeting families with younger children and a multifaceted "gallery hour" tailored to preschoolers. The second Sunday programming proved to be a particularly effective draw, attracting on average 50 children 12 years old or younger, plus accompanying adults. That's in addition to Preschool Gallery Hour attendance that typically ran anywhere from 75 to 150 parents and preschoolers. Other Saturdays and Sundays typically draw only between 20 and 30 children per day.

**1. Drop-In Art Making.** Drop-in art making is a hands-on activity that the entire family can do together. The CJM began its weekly program in the summer of 2008, shortly after the new facility opened. Every Sunday between 1:00 and 3:00 p.m. and on select school holidays, the museum has offered sessions in its spacious education center developed around a specific theme, usually relating to exhibitions on display or Jewish holidays and traditions.

The drop-in format was designed to provide maximum flexibility. It doesn't require preregistration, and

families are allowed to join in at any time during sessions. While art projects can be completed in as little as 45 minutes, the staff reports that most families opt to stay longer; the average stay is closer to 90 minutes. The activities also are designed to be appropriate for all ages, from childhood to adulthood.

Attendance at the weekly drop-in art making ranges from 10 to as many as 60, with even larger numbers showing up when major exhibitions with family-oriented content are on display in the museum. The CJM increases staffing, depending on the number of participants anticipated, to explain the art project and help families get started.

Typically, programs begin with one of The CJM's teaching artists—a trained educator who is also a practicing artist—greeting family members when they enter the education center. The artist will describe that day's art making and sets up the family in a workspace. The teaching artist will float among the families, with volunteers and teen interns assisting families with material or instructions as necessary.

CJM teaching artists typically offer one project at any given session and develop a new project every two weeks in a variety of media, picking up on diverse themes over the course of an exhibition. For example, during the *Frog and Toad* exhibition showcasing the work of children's author Arnold Lobel, projects included creating paintings or holiday cards in watercolors (a technique used by Lobel); using colored clay and other materials to create a miniature pond of the kind featured in one of Lobel's stories; designing button art that picked up on an event from another Lobel story; and creating puppets inspired by the colorful Lobel

characters. Projects during the run of the *Curious George* exhibition included creating illustrations using color separation and linoleum-cut printing stamps.

The CJM teaching artists structure the programs to encourage exploration and attempt to accommodate a range of children's learning styles, such as offering them activities at tables or an activity that involves more movement like hanging paper or making a community mural. They encourage adults to make their own art alongside children, allowing the kids to explore the art and materials on their own without parents taking over their projects.

**2. Preschool Gallery Hour.** In the fall of 2009, in response to parents' reservations about bringing their youngest children to museums—and a recognition of the necessity of midday nap time—The CJM opened one hour earlier than scheduled to create a Preschool Gallery Hour. The special hour—with child-friendly gallery tours, art making, and music—gives preschoolers and their families exclusive access to the museum when they don't have to worry about other patrons.

Educators are “literally sitting on the floor and walking around with participants, selecting art that really speaks to this age group, often with a hands-on component,” The CJM's former Family Programs Manager Daniel Barash notes. The educators will “often have them use their bodies to call upon the different audio, visual, and tactile ways that we learn.” That may include singing songs, having preschoolers strike the poses of figures they see, or dramatic play. The fact that only preschoolers and their families are present means they can take up a little more space or make a little more noise than might normally be acceptable in the museum.

In the education center, artist-educators are leading art-making sessions designed for very young children. For many preschoolers, the experience marks the first time they have used art-making materials like tape, oil pastels, or 3D sculptural materials. Visitors can attend either or both the art-making and gallery activities, which take place between 10:00 and 11:00 a.m., the hour before the museum opens.

At 11:00 a.m., as the museum opens, the preschoolers and their parents are led to the performance space for a music program, a preschool-age favorite activity. The live musical performance is held in the museum's intimate Goldman Hall, where guest musicians perform works that fit the theme of that day's preschool hour and encourage the children to sing and dance along.

Originally run year-round, the Preschool Gallery Hour had low attendance in the summer of 2010, and a decision was made to limit the activity moving forward to the months of September through May.

A typical Preschool Gallery Hour has consistently drawn between 75 and 150 participants, with higher attendance when an exhibition with family-oriented content is on display. For example, the Preschool Gallery Hours during the Ezra Jack Keats exhibition often drew more than 200 visitors, while the Preschool Gallery Hours conducted during the *Curious George* exhibition drew more than 400—a level of visitor traffic the museum sees only on its busiest free-admission days. (To accommodate the extra traffic, the museum opened at 9:00 a.m. instead of 10:00 a.m.)

Preschool Gallery Hours are staffed by two full-time program managers, two part-time educators, at least three teen interns, and three volunteers. That's in addition to

the usual complement of visitor services and security staff members asked to come in an hour or more earlier on designated Sundays.

**3. Family Gallery Tours.** The CJM staff designed Family Gallery Tours specifically to provide an activity-based, guided exploration of the exhibitions for families with elementary-school children too old for the Preschool Gallery Hour. Lasting about 45 minutes and offered on the same Sunday as Preschool Gallery Hour, the tours allow families something for their older children in the afternoon. Tours attract, on average, 15 visitors, with more in attendance when the museum hosts family-oriented exhibitions. (The museum limits the tours to 25 participants.)

The Family Gallery Tours, with interactive family activities led by a CJM educator, focus on one exhibition and several key pieces within it. Like the Preschool Gallery Hour, these tours are designed to accommodate children's diverse, often physical learning styles. Responding to suggestions from parents, staff members have incorporated more hands-on activities, including drawing and even performance with props. For example, the Family Gallery Tour during an exhibition on the life and legend of Houdini included:

- *Search and Find Activity:* Locating specific images of Houdini
- *Body Movement Activity:* Acting out two of Houdini's famous tricks
- *Drawing Activity:* Drawing handcuffs
- *Manipulative Activity:* Trying to unlock a set of locks in 10 seconds

Because these tours occur during regular museum hours, the activities are chosen to be quieter and require

less space than the Preschool Gallery Hour. Tour guides make it a point to keep the group contained, so as to preserve a museum atmosphere that allows for reflection.

## **2. ANYTIME ARTPACKS**

Anytime ArtPacks were developed to complement the scheduled programs and provide an on-demand option for any parent with children visiting the museum at any time on any day. Similar to activity backpacks provided to children and families by other museums, ArtPacks are specially designed tote bags, boxes, or other containers with art supplies, guides, and activities that help families more deeply explore ideas, themes, and pieces of exhibitions.

ArtPacks often include sketchpads, journals, or other booklets that children can take with them to continue their experience at home, although the packs themselves and most of the contents need to be returned at the end of the visit. ArtPacks are offered free of charge. An example of an ArtPack's contents is included as an appendix.

Two notions guided their development: First, many parents welcome assistance helping their children enjoy museum visits, and second, audiences of all ages can benefit from activities that help them connect ideas in exhibitions to their own lives.

The activities encourage art making or storytelling related to themes in the exhibitions. Barash points out that they typically employ a framework of "find, discover, wonder, and connect," asking families to "find something of note, discover something about it, ask a question that personalizes it, and then connect—do something with those discoveries to make them even more meaningful."

“The world today is very *snap, snap, snap*,” said Andrea Guskin, family programs manager. At the museum, the goal should be “slowing down, focusing, interacting with works.”

The CJM develops ArtPacks for all the major family-oriented exhibitions and for other exhibitions seen as particularly accessible to young children. Guests with children who stop by the Visitor Services desk in the lobby are informed of the ArtPacks and can check them out there. Staff members who spot visitors with children also make it a point to let them know about the packs.

The education staff trains visitor services staff about each ArtPack’s contents, their use, and age-appropriateness, so that they can in turn describe, demonstrate, and make recommendations about ArtPacks to parents. Once returned, interns and visitor services staff replenish the ArtPacks—replacing parts that may be missing or partially used (e.g., sketchpads with missing pages)—to be used again.

The staff usually prepares between 10 and 20 of each ArtPack, depending on the anticipated popularity of an exhibition. While for exhibitions attracting a large number of family visitors such as *Curious George*, it was common for all 20 to be in almost constant use during the exhibition, typically the packs are requested by families about 30 times per week.

The museum staff also developed “evergreen” ArtPacks with activities not linked to any exhibition. These evergreens include a *Be an Architect!* ArtPack containing activities connected to the unique design of The CJM building and a *Sketch-Pack* ArtPack with different sketching pencils and papers to take through the galleries.

The CJM’s ArtPacks aren’t expensive to produce, often with small objects purchased locally and small booklets printed at the museum. They do, however, require time to be designed and put together by the family programs staff. They then require

constant replenishing to be ready for distribution to each successive round of families.

For certain exhibitions that already contain multiple interactive elements or features that children can manipulate, the ArtPacks The CJM creates tend to be smaller and less complex, so much so that children can even keep them. That means they can be made freely available at gallery entrances instead of requiring a checkout from the Visitor Services desk.

Although these “take-home” ArtPacks have fewer components, they end up being more widely used, most likely because they are easily obtained at gallery entrances. On average, families use 100 to 200 a week of these “take-home” ArtPacks versus about 30 of the “checkout” versions. That number has climbed during major family-oriented exhibitions and high-attendance Family Days described on page 38. During the 15-week exhibition in 2015 of work by children’s book illustrator J. Otto Seibold, creator of *Mr. Lunch*, the museum ran out of its 10,000 take-home ArtPacks one week before the exhibition ended.

### **3. CREATING A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT FOR FAMILIES**

While staff members always make an effort to make all visitors feel welcome, they make an extra effort when it comes to families, a response to concerns aired in focus groups that young children were often considered disruptive to an art museum setting and somehow didn’t belong. And the staff believes that welcome needs to begin as soon as families arrive.

First, The CJM’s lobby is a contemporary, stark, white space that staff members have recognized does not immediately communicate “family friendly.” Moreover, because The CJM is a Jewish institution, security is higher than at other museums: bags are searched, and all visitors pass through a metal detector when entering.

To neutralize these potential negatives, the museum has provided annual sensitivity training for all staff including security, visitor services, education, curatorial, and all senior management. These training sessions have focused on welcoming families and other visitors who may be hesitant entering a museum. A trainer from a city family agency has led the sessions, which include role-playing exercises on welcoming visitors of all ages and with varied needs.

In addition, the director of security makes a point to station security guards who are the most adept at welcoming young visitors at the museum entrance on weekends, the busiest family times. These guards are the first point of contact for most visitors. Thanks to the policy, many of the long-term security guards have developed a rapport with returning family visitors.

In addition, the staff has worked to create a more inviting atmosphere when family-oriented exhibitions are on view. During the *Curious George* and *Sendak* exhibitions, for example, the museum had graphics on lobby walls of George jumping rope or Sendak's characters looking wild. On days during those exhibits when a large family audience was anticipated, a costumed Curious George and Sendak's "Wild Things" circulated through the lobby and on the plaza in front of the museum to welcome arriving children.

Visitor Services staff stationed in the lobby are proactive when it comes to families, reaching out to them as soon as they enter the museum and orienting them with general visitor information on programs such as free tours, art making, or the café. Families also receive information about stroller parking, coat check, ArtPacks, and other family programs. Visitor Services Manager Annie Labe noted how important this function is, since most families come to see particular exhibitions, but are often unaware of what else the museum has to offer, such as its regularly available family programming.

On busier days, education staff members set up a Family Table in the lobby that serves as a central location for all information on family programs and activities. The table's presence is called out with a large "Families at CJM" banner above it. At the table, families will find a list of the day's events, a sample of the day's drop-in art-making project, and a disassembled ArtPack that allows visitors to see its contents. Visitors also can sign up to receive updates about future family programs.

Several amenities have been designed to help families stay integrated in museum activities. Clearly marked stroller parking in the lobby signals that younger children are welcome. It also has reduced congestion in the lobby and galleries. Every museum restroom now has a changing table; when the museum first opened, they were only in select restrooms. Most recently, steps have been added near a sink in each restroom for young visitors, who now can wash their hands without being lifted by a parent.

Family seating nooks are placed within many exhibitions. These include low seating for children, providing families space to read, draw, or just take a breather without leaving the galleries. The education center, where drop-in art making takes place each Sunday, acts as home base for The CJM's family programs. In the middle of the entrance lobby and easy for parents to get to without leaving the main museum area, the center has come to be a physical representation of the priority The CJM places on families. (See sidebar.)

That said, the vast majority of CJM visitors are adults, and the museum staff recognized it couldn't allow what it was doing for families with children to detract from the museum experience for adults. The CJM leadership and staff also wanted to studiously avoid any semblance of becoming a children's museum.

So far, visitor feedback has revealed no concerns that The CJM's offerings are any less sophisticated than in the original

museum, according to Okmin. Nor has the museum received any complaints that the presence of children is disruptive. “What we hear in the hallways and galleries is that our [adult] audiences support and are heartened by the inclusion of multiple generations,” Okmin said. Long-term supporters and the board also continue to support the new direction.

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### PLACING FAMILY ACTIVITIES AT THE HEART OF THE MUSEUM

Family activities at museums can often seem like an afterthought, taking place in out-of-the-way rooms far removed from galleries and other public spaces. In designing the new facility, Wolf wanted to avoid that impression, and instead placed the education center—the place where art making and other family programs took place—in the middle of the museum’s open lobby, with windows on several sides for people to look in and out (see Figure 3).

Wolf wanted family program participants to feel like they were at the heart of the museum, and she wanted visitors without children to see the intergenerational experiences happening at the museum. “I wanted family art-making activities out in the open, not in a basement or down a dark hallway,” Wolf said. “I wanted people to be able to peer in and experience what was going on.”

The 3,500-square-foot space includes activity rooms and an exhibition area set in a sitting-room atmosphere with tables, comfortable seating, and various resource materials.

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**Figure 3. Education Center as Viewed from the Inside (top) and the Lobby (bottom)**



Top photo by Mark Darley; Courtesy of The Contemporary Jewish Museum

### STRATEGY #3: REDUCING FINANCIAL BARRIERS

The CJM employed several tactics to reduce financial barriers to family attendance. For starters, admission at the new museum is free for children under age 18—unlike many other institutions nationally where free admission ends at age 12, and a first for museums in the Bay Area. Of course, that didn't remove the barrier entirely, since parents had to pay full admission—\$10 per person in the first four years and \$12 since the fall of 2012.

The museum also offered several annual days with free admission to all visitors and additional family-oriented activities. These days were heavily promoted, and they attracted both large numbers of families and a more diverse audience than usual. The museum also piloted several programs in which free-admission passes were distributed in public schools and bookstores, but as a stand-alone tool they have not increased museum attendance or family visits.

#### 1. FREE FAMILY DAYS

To encourage visits from those who might not normally come to the museum, The CJM has offered at least two days annually with free admission and special family activities since the new museum opened. Target Corporation has underwritten these Family Days since their beginning.

The CJM held its inaugural Family Day on the first Sunday the new building was open, June 8, 2008. The festivities included musical performances, storytelling, dance, and various family art-making activities. The museum received more than 4,500 visitors, and informal surveys suggested that as many as half of

them were families. (Typical Sunday attendance at the museum is 375 people, of which approximately 15 percent represent families.)

Family Day attendance (as shown on Table 2) has since ranged from a low of 745 to a high of 4,500, with most days attracting more than 3,000 visitors. Four additional Family Days were held over the next 12 months. In subsequent years, the number of annual Family Days dropped because of a shift in funding priorities at Target, and included two Family Days each year:

- *Yerba Buena Family Day*, which is held one Sunday in September or October, in conjunction with four other institutions in the Yerba Buena Cultural District—San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Museum of the African Diaspora, the Children's Creativity Museum, and Yerba Buena Gardens Festival. Each institution offers activities reflective of its typical programming, including art making and gallery tours. The day includes concerts on the plaza in front of The CJM and in other locations in the neighborhood to create a festive family atmosphere.
- *CJM Community Day* is one of its most popular and a legacy from its years in the smaller museum. It is held on Christmas Day, when other institutions are closed. Admission is free, and the museum hosts art making and musical performances targeting children and their parents. In addition to Jewish families, these days attract Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu families from South Asia, as well as Latino families whose holiday gatherings are often held on Christmas Eve, and many families who do celebrate Christmas, looking to find an out-of-the-house family activity.

**Table 2. Target Family Day Visitors**

<b>FY 08</b>	June 8, 2008 4,500			
<b>FY 09</b>	Oct. 19, 2008 3,730	Dec. 25, 2008 4,500 (est.)	April 26, 2009 1,255	May 10, 2009 2,500
<b>FY 10</b>	Oct. 18, 2009 3,608	Dec. 25, 2009 3,751	April 11, 2010 745	
<b>FY 11</b>	July 18, 2010 3,248	Dec. 25, 2010 3,312		
<b>FY 12</b>	Oct. 16, 2011 3,751	Dec. 25, 2011 3,608		
<b>FY 13</b>	Sep. 23, 2012 1,325	Dec. 25, 2012 2,651		
<b>FY 14</b>	Sep. 15, 2013 1,882	Dec. 25, 2013 2,531		

Sixty percent of those attending the Christmas Day event are families with children and 70 percent are first-time visitors, according to informal surveys. The attendance on Christmas—with 60 percent to 65 percent of visitors Caucasian, 15 percent Asian, and the rest from other groups—also is more ethnically diverse than the museum’s regular attendance. (The staff estimates that the museum’s attendance is typically at least 70 percent white, based on informal surveys.)

The success of these events poses certain challenges, mostly connected to limited space and staff time. For exam-

ple, during the Yerba Buena Family Day and the Christmas Day activities, The CJM staff develops art-making projects that require less time than the usual Sunday drop-in projects. “We don’t want people to linger for over an hour, as they do with regular drop-in, because we need to accommodate hundreds of people,” Barash explained.

The CJM also does not make its “checkout” Family ArtPacks available on these days because of the staff time required to prepare, distribute, and replenish them after they are returned. The museum does provide smaller take-home versions. The museum tries to achieve a balance between the desire to serve as many visitors as possible and maintaining the integrity of the art projects offered, Barash noted. Recognizing that it would be almost impossible to provide the fullest possible experience on these days, staff members hope Family Days serve as a gateway experience for a broader audience than the museum usually reaches, raising awareness of The CJM and its family programming, while also overcoming the hurdle of getting people to attend for the first time.

## **2. PASSES PROVIDING FREE ADMISSION**

While children and teens are always admitted free, the adults who accompany them must pay admission. Having heard in their early discussions with families and educators that admission for two adults might be a barrier for some families, the staff created free-admission programs for up to two adults. These proved much less successful, however, than the free Family Days.

**1. “Family Passports” Distributed Through Schools.** To reach moderate- and low-income parents, the staff used the museum’s longstanding relationship with the public schools, which dated back to when the museum was in the smaller facility and as many as 100 teachers annually brought classes through exhibitions. Reasoning that every student who toured with his or her class represented a family, the staff came up with the idea of distributing “passports” to student groups that provided free admission to one or two adults as a way to introduce parents to the museum.

The staff wanted to create a physical passport with a passport holder and activity guide, with information on exhibitions and family programs. The passport also would encourage repeat visits by offering incentives, such as free family membership to the museum after three visits. Because the project would have involved a large commitment of staff time and complicated logistics and design, The CJM piloted a simpler “Family Pass” prototype to gauge response. Tour guides provided each visiting group free-admission postcard passes—enough for every student. The postcards offered a one-time free admission to The CJM for two adults, with an image on the front of families visiting the museum with the words “A Museum Free For You” in large bold text.

In all, 2,000 were distributed during the program, and fewer than 1 percent of the passes were ever used. The process of getting the pass from tour guide, to teacher, to student, to parent may have left too many possibilities for the pass to be mishandled or its benefits miscommunicated, the staff suspected.

The staff decided to redesign the pass to make it look more like a coupon with a prominent message that it was a

“Free Family Pass” in large bold lettering, and the instruction to “present this pass for free admission.” The return rate did not budge above the 1 percent usage rate, and the program was discontinued.

The staff didn’t give up on reaching parents through school relationships. Eventually, it developed a more successful partnership program with schools that reached out to parents directly, and also had more points of contact with students and teachers. (See “Involving Parents in a School Partnership” in the next section).

**2. Discount Admission Bookmarks.** In the fall of 2009, The CJM produced bookmarks that offered two-for-one admission to The CJM when family-oriented exhibitions were on view. Since admission is already free for children, the bookmarks provided a discount for adults.

The bookmarks had eye-catching graphics from a specific exhibition and were distributed through libraries and bookstores. The staff reasoned that if the bookmarks’ discount offer had a deadline based on the closing of specific exhibitions, it would create an incentive for families to use the discount to take advantage of the offer. The 10,000 bookmarks distributed were redeemed at a higher rate than family passes, but still at a disappointing 2 percent.

In subsequent years, that rate dropped to 1 percent, but The CJM decided to continue to distribute approximately 10,000 a year to promote exhibitions.

## **STRATEGY #4: REACHING FAMILIES THROUGH COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

A program that yielded much better results involved creating ongoing strategic partnerships with institutions having close ties to families. Each involved specific activities and programs

at The CJM that were promoted to parents by The CJM's partners. The key to making each partnership work, the staff determined, was figuring out how to make it as important to the other institution as it was to The CJM, encouraging each partner's ongoing and active investment.

## **1. MAKING A CONNECTION WITH PRESCHOOLS**

The prototype for The CJM's partnerships emerged out of efforts to build an audience for the Preschool Gallery Hour. During a series of CJM-led focus groups, preschool directors bemoaned the lack of opportunities to build a sense of community with parents that would in turn help with their own efforts. The CJM staff recognized this void as an opportunity, and Aber pitched the Preschool Gallery Hour to various preschools as a community-building tactic by offering to designate one of the upcoming dates for their school. "It worked immediately," she says.

Initially, Aber approached a handful of larger schools in Jewish community centers, where a connection with The CJM would be a natural extension. The partnerships have since expanded to dozens of preschools—Jewish and non-Jewish—with more added every year.

The museum has partnered with up to four preschools on any given Sunday. (Families not affiliated to those preschools also are able to attend.) Between seven and nine parents from each participating preschool usually attend, accounting for between 10 percent and 15 percent of the families at any preschool. The museum staff has created flyers and online announcements for each partnering preschool to let parents know that The CJM will host the institution on a particular date, with an invitation to join them. Says Aber, "It gets posted to online communities and flyers are placed in every child's mailbox, usually by the parent leader."

Museum staff members had suspected they might need to offer incentives to drive attendance, such as a special room, and cookies and milk, or maybe even agree to allow some preschool parents in free when requested. After operating the program for a while, they discovered not all enticements were necessary; they stopped offering refreshments, with no impact on attendance.

## **2. INVOLVING PARENTS IN A SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP**

Even though the family passes distributed through school tours did not pan out, The CJM staff still saw schools as an avenue to reach families who were not coming to the museum. In the fall of 2010, the staff launched an experimental partnership on a smaller, but more targeted scale that stressed more direct outreach to parents. The more they honed their communication and programming tactics, the better their results became, the staff found, and despite a slow start, they eventually got on track after some trial and error.

The program combined a mix of evening arts instruction for students and parents at the school, followed by museum activities also for both students and parents—an unconventional approach for museum-school partnerships. Three public elementary schools participated in the first year,<sup>4</sup> with varying degrees of ethnic and economic diversity: one was a bilingual school that was 76 percent Hispanic and mostly lower income; the others were lower- and middle-income schools with more diverse student bodies (approximately one-third Caucasian, with the remainder being mostly Asian and Hispanic students). The CJM and school principals consulted in selecting one grade

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4. One private Jewish day school was also invited to participate but dropped out early on; the need for art teaching resources may not have been as great as at the public schools.

from each school to participate, based on such factors as class readiness and teacher fit. All students and teachers from that grade took part.

The program has five main components, which were modified in the first year based on feedback from the schools and research with parents to identify ways to boost participation (discussed in the sidebar, *Research-Driven Improvements to the School Program*):

- **One planning meeting** during which CJM educators assigned to the classroom heard from teachers about the dynamics of the classroom and their needs in the upcoming year and then, with the participating teachers, created the curriculum
- **Three one-hour, CJM educator-led classroom sessions** including a lesson about a specific exhibition with links to California Content Standards and two classroom art-making sessions, tailored to supplement themes the class was studying
- **A field trip to The CJM** by the classes to view the exhibition they had been studying, with CJM educators providing more background and discussion topics on-site
- **One Family Art Night**, which began as an unsuccessful parents-only workshop, at the school for art making with parents and children from the participating grade
- **One free-admission Sunday** at The CJM for families from participating grades (some schools, with approval from The CJM, extended the invitation to other grades, and even to the entire school).

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**THE STAFF  
BELIEVED THEY  
NEEDED MORE  
DIRECT OUTREACH  
TO THE PARENT  
COMMUNITY.**

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The CJM covered all program expenses, including supplies, with the exception of student transportation to and from the museum on museum visit days.

Since the beginning, The CJM's partnership with the schools has served approximately 200 students and 10 to 12 teachers each year. As shown in Table 3, family attendance in the first year was low despite the exhibition being a marquee one, *Curious George Saves the Day*. The museum asked an outside consulting firm to conduct focus groups with parents to identify the problems and ways to build interest in the program (see sidebar).

For the art nights at the schools, the firm's research suggested that while parents welcomed tips from the museum about how to make the most of museum visits with children, the parents-only workshop—which was what was offered the first year—seemed to parents potentially less effective than activities that involved both parents and children. Many remarked that the need to arrange for childcare for the evening detracted from the program's appeal. They also expressed a wish for something more engaging that they could do with their children.

The museum responded by replacing the parents-only workshop with a family art night, where pizza was served and a CJM educator guided parents and children through an art-making project designed for a range of ages. Attendees can include parents with children from the participating grade (between grade 1 and grade 5, depending on the school), and possibly their siblings.

The project is a guided example of how parents can engage their children in conversations about art. The educator points out techniques that she uses to create dialogue with students (e.g., "You may notice that I just asked an open-ended question"),

**Table 3. Family Participation in CJM School Partnership**

Year	Family Art Night (school site)	School Family Day (museum)	Total	% Repeat Visitors
FY 2011	47	71	118	53%
FY 2012	175	293	468	61%
FY 2013	265	161	426	62%
FY 2014	135	200	335	77%

allowing parents to see the effectiveness of those techniques firsthand. This refined format was better attended, and subsequent events regularly attracted more than double the number of family attendees than the first time around.

The research also confirmed the earlier brand-positioning research finding that parents—whether Jewish or not—were open to visiting a Jewish museum, and many were even eager to learn more about the culture.

The research also showed that each classroom had its own preferred method of communication with parents, and a passive “one size fits all” approach by The CJM would be less effective than tailored tactics. According to Okmin, “We went in saying, ‘We’re going to have this event and we’re going to send you a flyer.’ And then we heard from one parent group that they would rather hear from us through the Yahoo group they had formed or from another that ‘at our school we all text one another.’ We needed to think about customizing.”

The finding matched up with the staff’s experiences during the program’s first year when the majority of parents who attended came from a school where The CJM had worked closely with the PTA. In contrast, no parents showed up from one of the

three schools where The CJM had failed to make strong connections.

Moving forward, The CJM asked each school to designate a parent liaison to advise the museum about how best to share information. Teachers also were asked to identify the most effective way to communicate with families of students in their classes. While more time-consuming, the more tailored approach has resulted in greater parent participation, particularly at schools with a strong PTA, classroom parent, or other network with which to connect.

### **RESEARCH-DRIVEN IMPROVEMENTS TO THE SCHOOL PROGRAM**

The first year of the partnership had less than expected parental involvement, so The CJM engaged outside consultants to conduct focus groups in June 2011 on parent needs and the best way to reach the parent community through a school program. The three groups comprised:

- Public school parents who had participated in the program
- Parents of students of a Jewish private school who had participated in the program
- Parents of elementary school students from non-participating San Francisco public schools

The conversations covered (1) supplementary programs in schools, (2) visiting art museums with children, (3) The CJM school partnership program activities, and (4) how to best communicate about the program with parents.

The CJM implemented several other changes in response to feedback from teachers, school administrators, and its own staff. Originally, there had been only one in-class CJM-led session in which a CJM educator presented an exhibition and led a short project connected to the class's curriculum. Educators pointed out that one session did not allow sufficient time to make an impact and recommended that the number be increased. Two CJM educator-led art-making sessions were added to bring the number to three.

In addition, The CJM had originally thought that it could build buy-in from teachers by minimizing their involvement and having them participate only in a short introductory workshop. In practice, the limited participation prompted some teachers to disinvest. In response, The CJM added a stipend and two to three hours of professional development for teachers. The required workshops included a preview of the exhibition and pointers for engaging the students in the classroom art making. The new sessions also provided a time to identify ways to integrate the exhibition into the curriculum. The greater involvement has created more buy-in from the teachers and increased their comfort levels with the art materials and techniques used, Okmin said. It also helped them plan in advance for things like storage and mess.

In addition to the focus groups, approximately 25 percent of parents completed surveys, and results indicated that increasing numbers of families returned to the CJM (shown in the last column of Table 3).

### **3. TEAMING UP WITH THE PUBLIC LIBRARY**

A partnership with the San Francisco Public Library System provided another avenue for The CJM to inform families about its

programs. Initiated in the fall of 2009, The CJM staff reached out to the library with the idea to promote children's literature through its exhibitions of children's book illustrators.

The partnership provides activities at the museum and library branches, and a library day at the museum (detailed below). The events are promoted via posted and online announcements as well as the word of mouth of the library staff. The city's public library system eagerly embraced the partnership because its goals closely aligned with what the library was trying to accomplish with young audiences, according to Barbara VanderBorgh, who managed the partnership through 2012 as the children's program specialist at the San Francisco Public Library.

The ongoing partnership has included three elements:

**1. Free Library Days at The CJM.** One day per year, library cardholders and one of their guests may visit the museum for free. Since the partnership began, the days have coincided with major exhibitions of children's book illustrations by such popular Jewish authors and illustrators as Sendak, the Reys, and Keats. On these days, local librarians conduct readings in the museum's galleries from the books being featured, and musical performances targeting families also have been programmed. The Library Days draw, on average, more than 1,000 visitors—more than double the museum's usual Sunday average of approximately 375 visitors. About 300 adults use their library cards for free admission on these days; half of them are accompanied by children, whose admission is always free.

One of the library's bookmobiles is parked outside so people who do not have a library card can get one and receive free admission, but on average only about 10 people per day have done so. The San Francisco Public Library's communications department and the children's librarians

at individual branches publicize the event.

**2. Art on the Go.** This program has been providing free CJM exhibition-inspired readings and art workshops to about a half-dozen branch libraries annually since 2010, when it was launched. The art making has involved everything from collage to bookmaking, to puppet making, based on the rotating exhibitions of children’s book illustrations at The CJM. Participation has been fairly steady since the program’s inception but varies across libraries—with anywhere from 10 to 35 parents and children taking part. In 2015, for example, the program served 168 participants in eight libraries.

The staffs from both The CJM and public library meet in advance of exhibitions to identify a program that will draw families to the library, has a clear tie-in to children’s literature, as well as themes of The CJM exhibition, and will not tax limited library resources. The library workshops are conducted by The CJM educators or by librarians working from packets developed by The CJM, which contain easily deployable activity plans and materials.

**3. Free CJM Admission Passes for Checkout at the Library.** In late 2009, the City of San Francisco launched “Check Out San Francisco,” a program of free family passes, valid for one week, to a variety of San Francisco’s cultural institutions and city attractions. The printed passes were available to be “checked out” at any of 28 branches of the public library.

The CJM was one of the 15 to 20 participating institutions. In the first year of the program, The CJM attracted about 107 family pass visitors; that number increased to 897 in 2011, and more than 1,000 in later years. (The CJM

does not have data on who those visitors are, nor whether they are new to the museum or families with children.)

In return for The CJM’s participation in this ongoing program, the City of San Francisco provides free publicity in periodic advertisements and press announcements, as well as promotion in all San Francisco public libraries. It also provides links to The CJM on city websites, including SFgov.org, SFPL.org, and SFkids.org.

#### **4. TURNING PARTNERSHIPS INTO COLLABORATIONS**

In 2013, The CJM took its partnerships with the city schools and library to a new level by hosting an annual bookmaking competition, the *Ezra Jack Keats Student Bookmaking Competition on the West Coast*. Modeled after a similar East Coast program created by the Ezra Jack Keats Foundation and the New York City Department of Education, the contest is based on students creating illustrated books on topics of their choosing. Its goals are to support child and teen literacy, book appreciation, and creativity.

The competition is open to students in grades kindergarten through 12. The contestants are then divided into four age groups: grades K through 2, 3 through 5, 6 through 8, and 9 through 12. The students typically work with English teachers, librarians, and visual arts teachers—either alone, in collaboration with another student, or in the case of the youngest students (K–2), as a classroom. Schools submit one winning book per age group to the competition. The panel of librarians, educators, and artists ultimately selects two winners from each age group.

In each of its first three years (2013 through 2015), hundreds of children submitted entries, with more schools

## GETTING THE WORD OUT TO PARENTS

The CJM promotes its family-friendly programming to parents in large part through its partnerships with preschools, the city public schools, area private schools, and the San Francisco Public Library. Family programs also are promoted using a mix of paid and unpaid advertising.

## PAID ADVERTISING

The CJM has an annual marketing budget of about \$240,000—typical for museums of its size.<sup>1</sup> Most paid advertising is focused on exhibitions and typically includes online, radio, and outdoor advertising. Because the major family-oriented exhibitions are among the marquee exhibitions for the museum each year, a large portion of the marketing budget—about 30 percent—is dedicated to promoting them (with most of the remainder going to other important exhibitions). That advertising has included radio, television, and outdoor advertising and has targeted a mass audience, reflecting the broad appeal of the exhibitions. Media outlets have tended to not be family specific, and messages don't tout the fact that an exhibition is "fun for the whole family." Instead, the marketing has showcased the art and has highlighted the ideas and themes explored in the exhibitions. For instance, the *Curious George* exhibition promotion featured

1. The American Alliance of Museums reports that in 2009, median marketing budgets for arts museums were 4.4 percent of operating expenses, or \$2.15 per visitor—which would provide two different estimates if factored into The CJM's \$11 million budget or 110,000 average annual visitors: either \$484,000 or \$236,500, respectively. Elizabeth E. Merritt and Philip M. Katz, *2009 Museum Financial Information* (Washington, D.C., 2009: The AAM Press).

the image of the iconic monkey and emphasized the "original drawings and dramatic story of their creators' journey."

A relatively small component of the marketing budget has been spent on smaller parent-focused local media outlets, such as *Bay Area Parent*, and *The San Francisco Chronicle's 96 Hours'* family section. There, banner ads link to the exhibitions on The CJM website. Given limited resources, the museum has opted to not advertise other family-friendly activities, such as drop-in art making and the Preschool Gallery Hours.

The CJM has received help on promotion from longtime supporter, Target Corporation, in paid advertising. The Yerba Buena Family Day, which involves five neighboring institutions, is advertised widely by Target, as a "a non-stop day of free indoor/outdoor family fun with free admission to local museums for all ages, hands-on art-making activities for kids and special family-friendly performances throughout the neighborhood." That advertising goes far beyond The CJM's usual reach—including outdoor media (billboards, bus sides, and subways), radio, and postcards to every schoolchild in the district, including the East Bay Area. It does not, however, focus on The CJM.

## NEWS MEDIA HELPS GET THE WORD OUT

Although also sponsored by Target, the Christmas Family Day event is not advertised, because its uniqueness—an institution open for business on Christmas—"earns" the event many free mentions in the local media.

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The CJM's small marketing department also provides details of family-friendly exhibitions and Sunday activities to blogs and websites that target parents and have event listings. Although that promotion is technically free, it tends to be somewhat labor-intensive because of the number of sites that must be contacted. With a few exceptions (e.g., Red Tricycle, Golden Gate Mothers), most parent-focused websites restrict coverage to small neighborhoods and communities, with very limited reach.

#### **OTHER MARKETING EFFORTS**

The CJM has not created a separate brochure for family programs. Instead, programs for families and teens are called out using a different color in the main brochure that is distributed to the museum's full mailing list and different institutions and partners (e.g., schools, teachers, public libraries, community centers, religious centers, and other youth/family-oriented organizations) in the Bay Area.

In addition, a monthly e-newsletter—called Family eNews—contains all events designed for families. It goes out to approximately 7,000 addresses acquired at such family events as the Preschool Gallery Hour, where parents are asked to sign in and have the option of providing their e-mail address.

participating each year—20 in 2013, 60 in 2014, and 93 in 2015. Each year, a book viewing and award ceremony is held at The CJM. The winning books go on tour and are featured at the San Francisco Public Library's Main Library in an exhibition each spring. In April 2014 and again in 2015, the event drew almost 300 children, parents, educators, and community members—more than double the number that attended in the inaugural year. The program was honored in 2015 with the State Superintendent's Award for Excellence in Museum Education.

## RESULTS: OVERALL AND FAMILY ATTENDANCE

As shown in Table 4, the grand opening and first year attracted large numbers, as expected given the publicity and press surrounding the new building. While no year since the opening has reached the goal of 150,000, all of them, except 2013, have brought in consistently large audiences—nearly 10 times the size of the museum’s audience in its former facility.

Family visitor attendance took a big jump up in fiscal 2009 and beat the attendance goal of 18,000 each year until fiscal 2013, when total and family attendances dropped substantially.<sup>5</sup> In the years since, the numbers have fluctuated, which staff believe is due to the presence or absence of major, well-publicized exhibitions.

5. See footnote 2 on page 19 for a definition of “family visitor” and how it is calculated.

**Table 4. Annual Visitors**

	June 8–30, 2008	FY09	FY10	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY15
<b>Total Attendance</b>	11,912	132,744	116,093	116,595	112,138	87,824	107,592	77,674
<b>Family Visitors</b>	1,309	17,892	19,711	22,030	18,532	12,327	14,572	11,469
<b>Percent Family Visitors</b>	16%	13%	17%	19%	15%	14%	14%	15%

The museum opened June 8, 2008.

Fiscal year runs from July 1 through June 30.

Total attendance includes general admission, tours, public events, and private events with gallery access. (Visitor data in Table 1 is general admission only—not tied to tours or events.)

The sharp drop in attendance in FY13 may be connected to the fact that exhibitions were not being rotated as frequently during that year. Two exhibitions that opened in FY12 remained on display for more than a year, as opposed to the usual three to five months. The museum has since expanded its curatorial staff, which is bringing in new exhibitions at a faster pace, a move that appears to have helped museum attendance in FY14. The museum staff attributes the lack of a marquee exhibition in the summer to the drop in FY15 (although not tied to The CJM’s initiative to attract families, prior summers included highly publicized exhibitions of the life and work of such well-known figures as Gertrude Stein and Allen Ginsberg). Family attendance has also moved along with the presence of blockbuster exhibitions, peaking during the years of the *Curious George* and *From the New Yorker to Shrek* exhibitions.

Beyond attendance data, information about the visitor experience has been hard to come by. While The CJM has tried to conduct audience surveys, it has been a challenge to get a high enough response rate to deliver a reliable portrait of the visitor experience. (See sidebar, *Response Rate Challenges with The CJM Visitor Survey*.) The staff has been working to remedy the situation.

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## RESPONSE RATE CHALLENGES WITH THE CJM VISITOR SURVEY

The CJM commissioned an outside research firm to conduct visitor surveys after the new facility opened in June 2008. Among other things, the surveys were to identify the makeup of the visitor base and help evaluate the quality of their museum experience.

Postcards given to visitors either at the Visitor Services desk or the coat check while exiting invited them to complete the survey at a terminal in the lobby, or at a later date by visiting a URL listed on the postcard. These invitations were supplemented by targeted interventions one weekend each month in which every third visitor leaving the museum was asked by a staff member to complete the survey. The response rate—the percent of people who completed the survey among those asked to—was low in the first year (July 2008 to June 2009), at less than 2 percent.

Low response rates are problematic, because they may result in a sample that is biased and not representative of a visitor base. For instance, it may be that only an institution's biggest supporters think it worthwhile to complete surveys, potentially biasing the results in favor of that group's opinions.

To try to improve the response rate, staff shortened the survey from 15 minutes to less than 10, and entered respondents in a drawing to win one of three \$100 American Express cards. In later years,

the response rate reached 6 percent—an improvement, but still far below the *minimum* 30 percent to 35 percent rate visitor surveys can achieve. (Guidance on how to create a survey that will elicit a high response rate is provided in Chapter 3 of *Taking Out the Guesswork: A Guide to Using Research to Build Arts Audiences*, available at [www.wallacefoundation.org](http://www.wallacefoundation.org).)

Although the museum did obtain several hundred completed surveys every year, the possibility exists that they do not represent The CJM's full audience, given the low overall response rate, so the results are not being used in this report. That leaves some programs without formal evaluation outside attendance and use data. For example, although the Preschool Gallery Hours were widely attended and thousands of ArtPacks were used, it is difficult to understand their impact on the overall museum experience without an adequate survey response.

Another challenge: One of the museum's audience-building objectives was to attract families that reflected the diversity of the Bay Area, including African American, Hispanic, Asian, LGBTQ, and low- to moderate-income families, but without reliable survey data, it is difficult to gauge The CJM's progress.

A shorter survey with a dedicated staff on select days to help audience members fill it out might have raised the response rate and provided the museum more reliable data.

## KEYS TO SUCCESS

The experiment to expand its following among families with children started with The CJM's ambitious agenda to enhance its impact on the community at large and serve a wider audience through a larger, more public-facing, and dynamic institution. In its quest, The CJM has met or exceeded its attendance goal of 18,000 family visitors in many of the intervening years since it moved into a significantly bigger facility. Although family audiences have fluctuated, the institution is now serving more than 10 times the number of family visitors it had before the move and can declare success on building momentum and a core institutional capability with families. On the way, The CJM experimented with several tactics, and, as with any initiative involving experiments, some were more effective than others. A discussion of factors contributing to success follows:

### 1. THE ATTRACTION OF FAMILY-ORIENTED PROGRAMMING

The CJM's success starts with relevant programming. The museum's early research suggested that growing its family audience required building awareness of the institution as having programming that audience would find relevant. As the staff had hoped, well-publicized exhibitions of high-profile artists whose work spoke to both children and adults expanded the size of the family audience as well as the overall attendance. The number of family visitors typically tripled or even quadrupled when those exhibitions were on view. The second Sunday programming also lifted family visitor attendance, although on a smaller scale.

### 2. OFFERING FREE ADMISSION ALONE WAS NOT ENOUGH

While the price of admission had emerged in the research as a barrier for some families, the museum found free admission by itself was not enough to bring in new audiences. Few free-admission passes and bookmarks distributed through schools, libraries, and local bookstores were redeemed, and The CJM concluded it was better to shift resources to other efforts.

In hindsight, it's easier to understand why the free passes didn't work: Given that The CJM's research suggested that the museum had not been well known outside a small circle, parents who received a free pass through a mass distribution program would need additional information before knowing if they wanted to attend the museum—even for free.

The CJM is not alone here. Other studies suggest that audiences that are not already inclined to visit an institution are unlikely to be moved solely by reducing or removing cost as a barrier.<sup>6</sup> Those audiences need to first see the institution as having something relevant to them, which could be difficult to communicate on a postcard-size pass. The challenge has an additional layer for parents, who in several forums voiced concerns about feeling welcome in museums with their children and being able to make museum visits enjoyable for them.

The promotions around the Target Family Days, which heavily publicized the event as a celebration with special programs for families and children, appeared to provide the necessary assurance and attracted family visitors by the

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6. Kevin F. McCarthy and Kimberly Jinnett, *A New Framework for Building Participation in the Arts* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp., 2001), <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/audience-development-for-the-arts/key-research/Documents/New-Framework-for-Building-Participation-in-the-Arts.pdf>, 32.

thousands.<sup>7</sup> The same can be said for the family-oriented exhibitions, which also were highly promoted.

### 3. REACHING PARENTS THROUGH FAMILIAR INSTITUTIONS

Thanks to its partnerships, large numbers of parents heard about The CJM's programs through schools and the public libraries. These trusted sources seemed to have been effective in helping the unfamiliar institution cross that relevance barrier, and ultimately led to thousands of family visits.

Surveys of parents in the local school partnerships have suggested that the relationship is creating repeat visits from families involved, and the partnership with preschools has attracted many of the same preschools back every year. What's more, many families have continued to come as their children get older, Aber noted.

The CJM's partnerships are high-touch tactics requiring considerable staff time to maintain—requiring approximately 15 percent of Okmin's time for the school partnerships, and 5 percent of a family program manager's time on the library partnerships. They have not produced a particularly high volume of visitors, but they are creating longer-lasting and deeper relationships, the staff said, both with the partner institutions and the parents. In the words of Barash, the partnerships create “on

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7. Other organizations have also found that non-attendees can change their minds about visiting when given assurances that they will enjoy a visit. Minnesota Opera, for example, attracted thousands of newcomers to the opera when a popular talk radio host offered free tickets and explained what about the opera they would enjoy, carefully avoiding “insider” language that might alienate them and instead opting for language accessible to non-operagoers. A ticket giveaway from a television station that lacked that explanatory component was much less successful. See Bob Harlow and Cindy Cox Roman, *Someone Who Speaks Their Language: How a Nontraditional Partner Brought New Audiences to Minnesota Opera* (New York: 2015, Wallace Studies in Building Arts Audiences), available at [www.wallacefoundation.org](http://www.wallacefoundation.org).

### HOW THE CJM MAKES PARTNERSHIPS WORK

While The CJM has garnered some success with its partnerships, that's the exception to the rule for arts organizations, according to experts. Francie Ostrower, a professor of public affairs and fine arts at the University of Texas at Austin, has suggested that such partnerships often deliver a poor return on the investment of time and resources needed to build and maintain them. Therefore, she has suggested that institutions use caution when considering one. They should be pursued only “when two or more organizations have complementary missions, when they can bring different resources to the table, and when those resources are crucial for achieving the objective,” she wrote.<sup>1</sup>

The CJM's partnerships with the San Francisco schools and libraries, for example, were built on a shared interest in engaging young children in activities that involve art and literature. Each also brought unique resources to bear to make the partnership work.

In addition to complementary goals, the partnerships equally addressed unique needs of both organizations. For instance, the San Francisco Public Library wanted to give parents a reason to bring their children to the library more often, and The CJM wanted those same families to learn about the museum

*Continued next page*

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1. Francie Ostrower, “The Reality Underneath the Buzz of Partnerships,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review* 3 (Spring 2005), 34-41.

and then come and see its exhibitions. The CJM-designed and delivered programming at the library addressed both goals.

That kind of self-interest can motivate organizations to stay invested in partnerships over the long run, providing the resilience to persist in the face of inevitable challenges or when results come more slowly than hoped, as they usually do.<sup>2</sup> The CJM staff members made it their business to understand and advocate for benefits not only for the libraries, but also for teachers and school administrators. Their concern about making sure both sides of the partnership benefited hasn't gone unnoticed by their partners.

The CJM's staff is "very interested and invested in finding out ways that the library's interests and the museum's interests can converge. It's not always that way," remarked Barbara VanderBorgh, the children's program specialist at the San Francisco Public Library who managed the partnership through 2012. "A lot of times people approach us with things that they think are relevant to the library or to children but they really aren't. There are a number of museums in the city, yet we don't have a relationship like this with any other museum."

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2. Arts education partnership experts Craig Dreeszen, Arnold Aprill, and Richard Deasy conclude that successful partnerships between schools and community arts organizations are fueled less by altruism and more by "enlightened self-interest" in which each partner has a stake because the partnership meets their own needs. See Craig Dreeszen, Arnold Aprill, and Richard Deasy, "Learning Partnerships: Improving Learning in Schools with Arts Partners in the Community" (Washington, DC: Arts Education Partnership, 1999).

the ground ambassadors who literally spread the word" about The CJM.

#### **4. USING RESEARCH AND EVALUATION TO SHARPEN TACTICS AND IMPROVE RESULTS**

The lack of a prior history with families could have been a barrier to building successful family programs, but staff members used formal and informal research to remove some of the guesswork. They often went right to the source—family visitors, potential family visitors, and professionals who work with parents and children—to inform their thinking. They also consulted a wide variety of publicly available studies. That groundwork underscored the primacy of programming, and the need to find ways for parents to experience the museum with their children. It also steered the staff in the direction of providing their second-Sunday scheduled programs and partnering with preschools.

Even though they did a good deal of research up front, The CJM staff could not be entirely sure what would happen once programs were deployed. The museum mitigated the risk of untested programs by pilot testing and evaluating smaller versions of proposed programs. Staff members recalibrated as necessary, and then went big once they found a winning formula.<sup>8</sup> They also shifted resources from underperforming tactics

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8. Wolf likens this approach to Jim Collins's "fire bullets, then cannonballs" principle (see Jim Collins and Morten T. Hansen, *Great by Choice: Uncertainty, Chaos, and Luck—Why Some Thrive Despite Them All* [New York: Harper Business, 2011]). The principle uses the metaphor of firing a cannon with a limited amount of gunpowder. Using all the gunpowder and missing would mean missing for good. A wiser approach would be to first fire bullets using small amounts of gunpowder, recalibrate until the target is hit, and then use the remaining gunpowder to fire the cannonball.

to ones that showed more promise—such as diverting resources from the free family passes to the more successful school partnerships.

For an experimental approach like this to work, organizations need data about which programs are working and which ones need adjustment. Staff members vigilantly tracked metrics and relied on focus groups to diagnose problems in underperforming programs.

It wasn't easy—while the data sometimes signaled that it would be best to change strategies midcourse, doing so was unnerving for some staff members who had already committed to a course of action and became personally invested in certain programs. Aber often needed to provide support and encouragement, because shifting resources felt to some like the museum was cutting a service—and one that members of the staff were invested in and hoped would work.

When the summer Preschool Gallery Hours had low attendance and the museum made the decision to run them September through May only, some staff wondered if not having a regular monthly event would be detrimental—would parents and preschoolers still come back in the fall? Aber found that hard data helped win staff over. That also was true when the museum made the decision to shift resources from the Family Pass program to the school partnership. Aber also needed to make clear to her staff that learning what worked was a critical part of the experimentation process, and reaching the museum's larger audience-building objectives was more important than any individual tactic.

## 5. BALANCING THE NEEDS OF DIFFERENT AUDIENCES

The CJM is trying to have it both ways: transform itself into a family destination as it continues to serve adults, the majority of the institution's visitors. These audiences interact differently with exhibitions and require different activities, amenities, and services to make their visits enjoyable. The staff remained cognizant of this divergence and proactively tackled the potential for friction with creative thinking and persistence.

It was, by no means, easy. Some staff members questioned whether it made sense to go to such lengths to accommodate families. Several were initially concerned that an overly large family presence—some engaged in ArtPack activities or looking to take a snack break—may make The CJM seem like a children's museum and interfere with the experience for other visitors. Denise Childs, The CJM's chief financial officer (and acting director from December 2011 to June 2013) recalled how some curatorial staff had questioned whether having family events and activities in the galleries was realistic, particularly after some parents brought in food following The CJM's first Family Day.

Working through that resistance required some resolve. In the end, Childs came to a simple conclusion: "This is part of who we are. So we've just got to make it work."

For The CJM, making it work meant finding ways to heed curator concerns, while still accommodating families with often very young children. "It's not as if curators' concerns are territorial, and of course we share their concerns about the safety of the artwork," Aber said. "Those are exceedingly important. So the question became, how do we better prepare our visitors and

how do we better prepare our staff so that we are proactively addressing possible conflict areas?<sup>9</sup>

Aber stressed that success required vigilance on the part of the entire staff and anticipating potential problems. “We inform visitors about areas where they can pull out a snack, the museum spots with touchable activities, and the kids’ menu at the café,” Aber said. “This has become a standard part of the welcome when parents enter the museum.”

The key is to make these suggestions helpful and not sound like harsh rules, she noted—to be problem solvers for parents and not make them anxious about what their child might do. “We try to be clear about what we can allow in a really friendly way,” Aber said. For example, the signage The CJM uses throughout the museum as well as on the plaza outside focuses on communicating what is allowed—for example, “This is a great place to eat”; “Pencils only allowed for drawing in gallery”—rather than what is prohibited, which could play into perceptions the staff heard in focus groups that families are seen as disruptive in museums.

The goal is to strike a balance when it comes to the family experience, other patrons, and museum standards. For example, The CJM received feedback from parents that they had to lift their children so they could see the artwork. Lowering the height of the art posed problems: It would make it difficult for other patrons to see; it could push The CJM out of compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act requirements; and it might put the artwork in jeopardy of being harmed.

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9. Many management and organizational behavior experts believe that resistance comes from those who know institutions well and can spot where plans may run aground, and can be used to improve results. See, for example, Jeffrey D. Ford and Laurie W. Ford, “Decoding Resistance to Change,” *Harvard Business Review*, April 2009, 99–104.

An idea to install risers for children to stand on to view the art was vetoed because of the potential they posed for tripping. The solution: The CJM created dedicated spaces within exhibitions where children could sit and work on activities, amidst and related to the work on view. Select pieces were hung salon style, allowing a number to be at children’s eye level. The works in these areas also get highlighted in the Family ArtPacks or other family programs.

Reaching such compromises requires making time to have the necessary conversations about families in the first place. Curatorial and security staffs work with the educational staff to choose which works and gallery locations should be the focal points for ArtPack activities, especially those requiring sitting or drawing. The sensitivity of certain works, potential congestion points, and the overall flow through the gallery guide those decisions.

The staff has tried to be proactive in managing parents’ expectations and also helping them understand how to navigate the museum. On crowded days, when there are long lines, staff members often greet families outside the museum, using the line time to share information about gallery locations and lists of activities. At the same time, they share options about food and strollers.

Another tack for managing expectations on both sides: In response to overcrowded galleries on Family Day, The CJM began using time stickers for more popular exhibitions, which has helped control crowds while reassuring families that they will get in to see the exhibition. The added complexity of distributing a sticker and explaining how to use it has the potential to slow down the line, and the museum has found that the tactic makes sense only on its busiest days.

The staff doesn't always have the answers, because new audiences come with surprises and needs that can't always be anticipated, and staff members learn as they go. "It was always a learning curve, and it's still a learning curve," Aber noted.

## **6. EMBRACING, FROM THE TOP DOWN, HOW IMPORTANT FAMILIES ARE TO THE CJM'S SUCCESS**

Building a new audience at The CJM required not just resources; it required a durable investment and commitment from the leadership and the staff. Even as it was slow going at times, with occasional setbacks, staff members had to stay on top of the work. That kind of continuing organizational focus required its leaders—from the board to the senior managers—to see the target audience and the initiative as an integral component of the institution's long-term success.

Without that level of commitment, an audience-growing effort may not be sustained, and will likely be set aside for more urgent priorities or projects with better odds of success. "It was essential that the trustees supported this vision and commitment to family programs so that it was never in jeopardy and was seen as a core function of the museum," Wolf said.

At The CJM, family programs became the province of the whole museum, reflecting Wolf's belief that they cannot be the work of only one department. She said:

*A family program insists on all the departments participating... visitor services, and security, it permeates everywhere. It's about making sure that on Family Days there are enough staff participating, including the number of janitors because kids are going to spill something. In the*

*curatorial department, you need to think about how you install a show, creating areas in exhibitions where kids can actually sit down and do things. It requires everyone to make some changes.*

The importance of families to The CJM has meant the programs are well resourced to provide a consistent experience (e.g., all staff running them are professionals, not volunteers), and not become marginalized. Families have even become the focus of The CJM's major annual fundraising event, a "Family Gala" that has offered parents the opportunity to attend a formal evening with their children at the museum. Each gala has had performers, art making, and activities around a theme, usually one linked to a current family-oriented exhibition, as well as adult and kid-friendly food. The Family Gala has grown so popular that it sells out its attendance of approximately 550 adults and children each year, many through sponsorships.

An added bonus: The unique fun aspects of The CJM gala and the children's participation—setting it apart from so many other nonprofit fundraising events—has helped bring trustees and board members closer to the museum and to the family initiative.

## GOING FORWARD

**T**he CJM has been building upon its knowledge of how to involve families with museum exhibitions, taking insights from existing programs to improve them and developing new ones. For instance, launched in January 2014, the “Zim Zoom Family Room” in the education center has become a central element in The CJM’s efforts to become a family destination. With a rotating artist interactive installation, screening booth, puppet theater, and art project table, the space offers year-round appeal independent of the exhibition schedule and activities for families any time they visit. There also is regularly scheduled storytelling, collaborative building games, and puppet shows.

More recently, a 10-month “In the Studio” installation was created in Zim Zoom that allowed families to watch and work with local teaching artist Ascha Drake. The project attracted thousands of families. Subsequent programming has included work from Evan Holme, another local artist known for the interactive elements in his art, and further interactive programming is planned.

The CJM also is just completing a robust family research project led by a third-party evaluator. The project included in-depth interviews, focus groups with museum users and non-users, and on-site visitor interviews. The learnings will continue to inform The CJM’s family offerings as well as aspects of marketing, facility improvements, and staff trainings.

The success of Zim Zoom Family Room shows the progress The CJM has made in becoming a family destination. The room, a natural fit for the museum, found a following almost immediately because The CJM is on the radar of families, who are now an immutable part of everything that The CJM does and stands for. Reflecting on where the museum has come, current Director and CEO Lori Starr remarked, “I don’t think it’s appropriate to call it an initiative anymore.... I think it is just now really expected, something we do as The CJM. Families are part of our fabric as an institution.”

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Any arts institution targeting a new audience must first learn about what audience members think of the institution and the kind of work it presents, and the elements necessary for them to have a satisfying visit. Is your institution's time horizon long enough to accommodate this learning process? Do leaders and your board agree that the audience is enough of a priority that the initiative will get the necessary long-term support? What tools do you have to raise awareness with the new audience?
2. Is your organization ready to welcome a new audience? How will you prepare the organization to welcome new visitors and communicate with the potential new audience to ensure that everyone's expectations are met?
3. What community partners can be brought together to collaborate with your institution in this initiative and create activity and conversation around the work you plan to present? What benefits could you offer to organizations that currently have relationships with target audiences?
4. Partnerships can help build relationships with new audiences, but the results may be a long time coming. If you are thinking about them as a strategy, will you be able to dedicate sufficient resources over the long run?

## APPENDIX: MAIRA KALMAN'S FAMILY ARTPACK

In the summer of 2010, The CJM presented the *Maira Kalman: Various Illuminations (of a Crazy World)* exhibition featuring original illustrations, photographs, embroidery, and textiles spanning over 30 years of Kalman's career as an illustrator, writer, and designer. The CJM developed an ArtPack for the Kalman exhibition (see Figure 4) that came in a plastic case and included a guide, a journal to write in, buttons, photographs, a pencil, and felt shapes. An activity about "Ordinary Objects" had the following instructions:

**FIND:** To the right of where you entered the exhibition, locate the jar of buttons on one of Maira's "Many Tables of Many Things." Now find the jar of buttons inside your "Box of Various Things."

**DISCOVER:** Maira loves ordinary objects, and collects things like buttons, funnels, boxes, onion rings, and Slinkys! To her, even ordinary objects can be wondrous.

**WONDER:** In what ways can buttons, funnels, boxes, onion rings, and Slinkys all be ordinary and wondrous at the same time?

CONNECT: Choose an interesting button or the funnel from the “Box of Various Things.” Examine the button or funnel carefully. Draw a picture of this object in your journal. What new things did you notice about your object by drawing it? What are some other ordinary-wondrous things from your own life?

Other activities included drawing from a real object as well as from Kalman’s photographs. This exercise encouraged children to think about the differences between drawing from a 2D photo and a 3D object and how that changes the way something is drawn. Children were allowed to take their journals home in order to continue activities on their own.

Figure 4. ArtPack Contents



Photo by Daniel Barash; Courtesy of The Contemporary Jewish Museum

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**T**his report details how The Contemporary Jewish Museum built a following among families, an audience it had not targeted in the past. The museum learned in-depth what that audience was looking for, and developed programming and community relationships to serve it. While tailor made for families, their broader approach could be adapted by any organization looking to engage new demographic groups.

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