

FRONT END EVALUATION FINAL REPORT

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

Hamilton Grange National Memorial
New York City, New York

Submitted by
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PROJECT SCOPE, TOOLS, AND METHODOLOGY

This front-end evaluation of findings and recommendations consists of statistical data, including visitor comments, of the exit surveys collected at the New-York Historical Society in New York City on February 11, 2005, phone interviews with NYHS staff and consultants in January, 2005, focus groups with 11th graders at the School of the Future in Manhattan and with 8th graders at the Secondary School of Law in Brooklyn on February 17, 2005 and from teacher questionnaires.

Front-end evaluation is generally used during the exhibition development stage to gauge audience interest levels and prior knowledge about the intended subject. It is used to develop themes, audiences, goals, messages and interpretive strategies. The purpose of this particular front-end study for Hamilton Grange, Alexander Hamilton's home in upper New York City, is to help determine the target audience's knowledge, attitudes and interest levels regarding the stated goals and themes of the interpretive media. To attain that information, Evaluator, Ellen Leerburger, with the assistance of Terren Baker of Whirlwind & Company, spoke or met with staff and consultants to the NYHS exhibit, "Alexander Hamilton: The Man Who Made Modern America"; people exiting that exhibit; students at The School of the Future and the Secondary School of Law; and teachers from both of those schools. The results were then tabulated and reviewed by the evaluator for this report.

The evaluation tools used included a comprehensive qualitative questionnaire (exit surveys, phone surveys and mail-in surveys) utilizing numerous short written responses in addition to a variety of ranking replies, in addition to focus groups. The format for this report includes a copy of questions from each questionnaire/focus group with statistical data and visitor comments included. Recommendations appear at the end of the report. It should be noted that, because some respondents gave more than one response or elected to not answer specific questions, statistics might not always add up 100%.

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR NEW YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY CONSULTANTS AND STAFF

1. What component of the exhibit worked best?

- The spaces were designed in such a way that visitors were brought into a different environment, unique spaces. The visitor senses that.
- I didn't see the play, but initially the visual impact is of all the portraits. It provided a statement of Hamilton's influence and interactions with people
- The statues, the play and the gallery guide – all made an imaginative impact.
- People said their favorite part was each of the rooms, which was surprising to me. A multi-talented multi-media/graphic artist liked the timeline best (which surprised me because I saw fewer people there). The duel, ultimately, was probably my favorite. It was familiar to people, dramatic, almost lurid. It combined arresting statues with real pistols. I loved "His World." It was great to see all those pictures together – like a cocktail party of people in his mind. Blows me away every time. I love the way they're stacked, the way great and mediocre artists are both represented – a great display.
- The room of portraits was physically beautiful, but then the labels are inadequate and it doesn't clear up why they are all "related." I was not a fan of the statues, but people seemed to be excited by them – perhaps it was the small stature of the men. I don't have a very positive response of to the exhibit.

2. What was the least successful?

- Everything needed to be integrated into the floor plan of the museum. The layout of the smaller galleries was challenging. Some of the insurmountable challenges included the traffic flow issues.
- The video screens throughout were unintelligible. They did not help to understand the modern legacy – too vague and sweeping. Detractive. I was also disappointed by two other failings: 1) the artifacts and paintings were not allowed to have their own voices as eloquent historical artifacts. They felt supplemental and were a lost opportunity. 2) It was troubling - an exhibit about words, more that culture. Visitors kept wondering where NYC and America were in the story. Names and quotes were given, but no dialogue. No texture or climate. Another lost opportunity – the socio-cultural climate was completely missing
- Some of the objects in the thematic cases because of the low level of the cases. Visitors don't pay attention to them – too easy to miss. Silent films in the Vision Gallery – some visitors found them off-putting, but others found them brilliant.

- People found the documents hard to read because of lighting and handwriting. They probably didn't understand the reason for needing low light.
- Juxtaposition of screens and manuscripts was a disaster. Screen had so little relation to the manuscripts. The dazzling light on the manuscripts made them hard to read, cases were too low and no transcriptions of the manuscripts. The booklets handed out to teachers were inadequate, as they did not utilize objects –only manuscripts – as a source for learning. There are a lot of reasons why manuscripts alone limit the discussion of history, not the least of which they highlight what the writer wants posterity to know, and only those who left a paper trail are studied.

3. If you had the opportunity to mount the exhibit again, what would you do differently?

- There was a nice balance between technology and traditional artifacts/tableau. Maybe more traditional with more casework and text combined with more contextual background.
- Needed biographical framing at the beginning not at the end. Immigrant/formative experience allowed Hamilton certain maneuverability. That argument should be developed at the outset and with some authority. Modern legacy should be its own gallery. People need to know about vagaries of his reputation after his death. Who continues to hold the torch re: his reputation? Cultural wars, politically, regarding Hamilton over the course of the 20th Century.
- Transcriptions of all documents available, mount object cases 1 foot higher, mount scholarly programs right at the beginning to pre-empt bad publicity (Mike Wallace, disgruntled NYHS employees, NYT hate articles.)
- I fretted over the film in "His World." We did a great job of casting actors and an essential wallpaper. Washington does not sound like a 21st Century actor. Others weren't as strong. I was never happy with the sound quality. Woman who did narration's voice was too cute – always irked me. Make sure the sound quality of movies was better. Work harder on music – to be "in the style of" is crap and sounds horrible. Work/direct actors on that film more. Find music that works better.
- I would eliminate the large screens. They were disrespectful to the artifacts. No thought was given to object-based learning. More space should've been given to the Economy case. Anecdotes on the label copy would've "humanized" some of the portraits in the "Portrait Gallery." The newspaper (Gallery Guide) – really was dumbing down history. Satire is OK if visitors are familiar with the subject.

4. Which are the top three stories to tell in an exhibit on Hamilton?

- 1) Origins – love or hate it – an American Dream story; 2) Accomplishments and achievements – soldier, lawmaker, statesman, economist; 3) How his background made him have a sense of fairness and equality – a sense of justice
- 1) Outsider/Immigrant roots – definitive archetype of a certain Americans; 2) Complex engagement with slavery – from slave island yet becomes active in anti-slave actions. But in law practice, he defends those rights to own slaves; 3) Patterson story – economy that must be diverse is very prescient for 21st Century. Story of Patterson should be put forward in more prominent frames. Would continue to animate conversation regarding US economy.
- 1) Immigrant; 2) Economist/Economic genius; 3) Version of Patriot – Revolutionary War, Public servant without pay, speaking his mind
- 1) Curve of his life – from nowhere to heights to destruction. So dramatic for a founding father; 2) Man saved our finances – it's hard because it's so abstract; 3) A world war begins until 1790's and goes on until after Hamilton's death. The US is a little country that could've gotten washed away. It's a tribute to Hamilton's being a foreign policy realist; 4) Hamilton's role in slavery.
- 1) Revolutionary War period – George Washington's Aide de Camp; 2) Constitution and Federalist papers – to show conflict with his own views and others (debate and context); 3) Treasury – starting with a blank slate. Greatest contributions to our financial structure which still stands.

5. What do you think are the most successful exhibit techniques for telling these stories?

- Film, if affordable, to give arc of his life
- Timeline (people liked it) – chronology works well for school groups
- Audio narration would be helpful
- Too many documents – fewer documents, but better deconstruction of them. Show why it is so important to see these original words. More aid should be given to visitor to decipher their texture and life. Did he write them himself? etc. More interpretive assistance.
- Short films
- Live drama – stage performers or reenactment
- Original documents
- Use vivid objects, if possible,
- Use clear write-ups that are short and non-academic
- Use actual words of players
- Better labels with more content
- Intelligent use of computers
- More respect for the artifacts

6. Could you differentiate between what the public seemed to be most enthusiastic about and what the professional staff thought was the best element of the exhibit?

- Statues – public was very enthusiastic and staff was, too. Staff underestimated how exciting they would be. The A/V was hated by critics but the team thought they were a good way to bring the story to the public. Not sure about how the public felt about it.
- Public bought into ad campaign – learn more about the man on the Ten Dollar Bill. Effective job of placing ads. Professionally, the exciting opportunity was an unprecedented roundup of written and visual evidence of this man. Pay attention to importance of these materials and why original documents are do important. Give voice to original cultural evidence. With a captive audience, people questioned when they were finished with the exhibit. People expected more. Script was sophomoric for professionals, filled with platitudes. Nor further level of connections were made.
- Objects and paintings – too much written stuff, and on others that were not transcribed – too difficult to read. Academics have reacted positively. For the public – some have hated the films or disliked bending over to read cases. Most have liked play and gallery guide a lot.
- Public liked Duel – really accomplished the task. At many parties – people congregated there, but NEVER stood in front of a pistol. It was a compelling illusion.
- Only saw one class – but they were touching and hovering around the statues. Pistols were not a highlight (as hoped), because the lighting was so poor.

7. In developing an exhibit for Hamilton Grange, and using the house as the most important artifact in the exhibit, what would you think are the most powerful stories to tell?

- The transporting quality is an amazing benefit. More a/v or tableaus through the building – integrate the experience that uses the house. Use architecture and artifacts.
- The personal story – a living, human side to a great, important man. New York is a story about real estate. Why Hamilton chose the Grange to be where it was, and why we attach meanings to the homes of famous people. People will be on their feet – tell the story succinctly and with a lot of drama to keep people engaged.
- Eliza Hamilton’s story – wife, mother, matriarch through several tragedies (personal, financial, etc.) and also a civil leader. The Immigrant success story – culmination of immigrant success is the Grange. Wuthering Heights/Ford Theater – dramatic writings and thinkings. Letters to Burr and Eliza. Letters that are lethal while keeping a cheery face to family. Capitalize on the intimate setting.

- Emphasize personal story – arch of his life. The Grange was built after he was in public service as a place for him to relax, reward himself with. Tell the family story – loved his wife and children, yet betrayed his wife in such a spectacularly public fashion and then abandons them by getting himself killed. Social life – had John Jay and G. Morris for dinner.
- The Grange represents his rise from obscurity to property class – rags to riches story. Landed gentry/aristocrats of NY at the time – lifestyles, tastes, and pretensions of NYC at the time. Also, the Grange had a checkered history – use house as a parallel/symbol of his reputation (house into disrepair, him too.) Treatment of house parallels his treatment in history.

8. What educational opportunities should an exhibit at the Grange provide?

- At the house, it's easier to get a sense of the man and his family. Use the house as a springboard for bigger issues – where he wrote the letter for the duel. Use daily life as a touchstone to his accomplishments, etc.
- Use every opportunity to look out window to reflect on the modern scene as reflection back to time of Hamilton. Use living, breathing neighborhood as springboard to the man.
- Why Hamilton's ideas about economy should matter. Self-made success. NY story – anti slavery story – given his upbringing in the Caribbean. The Harlem location of the Grange
- Tours for school groups – tell kids that really important stuff happened in our city. NY Post connection relates well to kids and his relationship with Colman, the editor.
- What's missing at the NYHS is the fact that everything was not clear at the beginning. Lots of tumult and conflict. Set up a series of debates, role-playing. Conflict is an important element for thought and discussion. A brilliant, aggressive man in the fray.

9. Do you have any other recommendations or suggestions for this new exhibit?

- Emphasis on storytelling and not just artifacts. Use 3D elements to enhance story, but start with story narrative
- Why, in NYC, are there more statues of Alexander Hamilton than anyone other than George Washington? Why is he so important to NYC and why don't we think of him as a New Yorker? Public appreciates demagogues made human. Don't gloss over the mistakes he made, humanize him.

- Effects of his death on his family. His son was already dead; Angelica loses her mind, widow marches on for another 50 years.
- Use Angelica's piano as a key artifact – she continues to play it after deaths of brother and father.
- Use bust of Hamilton that the Grange owns to discuss modern egotism. More excusable because he really was a great man.
- City College/Columbia – bring college kids in to have functions and events there for older students.
- Use model of how building sat on a slope.
- At the Grange, Hamilton learns that Northern Federalist friends are plotting succession (1804.) They are also talking to Burr and Hamilton is deeply alarmed. In part, this leads to the duel – a thread in his mind. The importance of political gossip.
- Use professional staff that has worked with exhibits before. Design over substance doesn't work.
- Add more anecdotes.

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ADULT AUDIENCES AT NEW YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

1. Did you enjoy the exhibit? if No, "Why not?"

100% of respondents said "Yes"

2. What did you think was the most successful part of the exhibit?

- Original documents (20% of respondents)
- The way it was organized (13% of respondents)
- Audio tour (13% of respondents)
- Artifacts and documents
- Federalist papers were most moving
- His writings
- Timeline
- Entry was fabulous
- My education about Hamilton's life

3. What did you think was the least successful part?

- Wasn't one (20% of respondents)
- Too many noisy kids/distracting (20% of respondents)
- Arrangement of cases should've been right to left
- Too crowded in timeline gallery
- Portraits were too hodge-podge – would rather have seen them more spread out
- Main gallery was too crowded
- Tour guide was too close and was driving me crazy
- Some of the everyday items (silver or pewter) – didn't have to do with Hamilton, just the era
- Timeline – since I had just read the book

4. Please rank each of the following interpretive devices in terms of how informative they were (from 1-5, 1 being the least useful, 5 being the most useful)

	5	4	3	2	1
Label copy	67%	33%	0%	0%	0%
Graphic panels	47%	27%	13%	0%	0%
Audio Guide	40%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Portrait Gallery Video	33%	20%	6%	20%	0%
Lg. Screen Videos	20%	20%	20%	20%	6%
Cases w/ documents	73%	6%	0%	0%	0%
Cases w/artifacts & docs	73%	20%	0%	0%	0%
Timeline	67%	20%	0%	0%	0%
Gallery Guide (NY Post)	13%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Theater performance	6%	0%	6%	0%	0%

Comments:

- The labels were not always organized well
- Some audio guides didn't work
- The portrait gallery video was remarkable
- The portrait gallery video was good, but distracting
- The large screen video in the main gallery was nice, but not that effective
- I liked the combination of the traditional with visual art abstract concepts in the large screen video
- The cases with documents were too dark and difficult to read
- The cases with documents were well done but I can't read them – need transcripts
- The timeline was my favorite part of the exhibit
- I wish the timeline had more information on the duel
- The play would be good for kids

5. Did the design of the exhibit enhance your experience? Why? Why not?

73% of respondents thought the design enhanced their experience

Comments:

- It was laid out nicely, but I didn't know where to start
- Very well arranged – nothing was out of sequence
- Read books on Hamilton. The exhibit made it come alive
- Design didn't influence me one way or the other. I came for documents, artifacts and portraits
- I liked that the exhibit was broken up with smaller types of displays
- Followed a great pattern – easy to keep up with
- Timeline should be first – wanted integration of themes with timeline
- A bit dark

6. Did you like the way the exhibit was organized?

80% of respondents liked the way the exhibit was organized

Comments:

- Liked timeline – helped me understand what went on
- Would like timeline to have been first
- Timeline was a good wrap up, but I would to have liked to know more about the people in the Portrait Gallery after I was more familiar with the story
- I walked right past the big room and headed for the timeline. Should have been better marked
- Yes, because each room could be done in segments

7. Did you come here to specifically to see this exhibit?

100% of respondents came to the NYHS specifically to see the Hamilton exhibit.

8. Would you be interested in other exhibits on Alexander Hamilton?

67% of respondents would be interested in other Hamilton exhibits

Comments:

- What else could you say –they said it all?
- Interested in other Revolutionary era Americans
- Interested in Founding Fathers

9. Did you know you could visit Alexander's Hamilton's House in upper Manhattan?

40% of respondents knew about the Hamilton Grange

20% of respondents have been to the Hamilton Grange

20% wondered where the Grange is located

10. Any final comments or suggestions?

- Other than the problem with crowds of school kids, timeline should be in a space with more room
- Thought it was wonderful – would like to see more American History
- Great to bring students here
- I brought a friend and she got lost in the exhibit – enjoyed it a lot
- Are the Hamilton and Burr statues life size?
- Wonderful – very well done

SCHOOL FOCUS GROUP – 11th GRADE

School of the Future, Manhattan, NY

1. What kinds of museums do you like?

- MoMA, Guggenheim (museums that are interesting spaces)
- Interactive, hands-on museums
- AMNH, 3D experiences, how much you weigh on Mars, etc.
- Like accoustiguides
- Sony Wonder
- IMAX – and movie exhibits, but some museum movies are bad
- Hall of Science
- Transit Museum
- Museum of Television and Radio

2. What kinds of museums do you dislike?

- Art Museums – boring, visual displays only, Mass MoCA, everything behind glass and can't touch things
- Video exhibits and installations
- Things that aren't explained well or don't have to do with anything
- Galleries that are maze-like – closed off rooms
- Ones that are too expensive
- No seating
- Small displays where people crowd together
- When you can't talk or touch anything
- Don't like big bus tours/groups
- Don't like walls to be same color – should be colorful and happy
- If it's too colorful, it's hard to focus
- Should have sound effects
- Hate to do too much reading
- Guides should keep their tours short

3. What is your favorite thing that you remember from a museum?

- Monkey section at AMNH
- Duel statues at Hamilton exhibit at NYHS
- Planetarium – when you look up and see stars moving
- Benjamin Franklin Museum in Philadelphia – can play with everything
- Louvre – it's easy to walk around
- Kid sections of museums
- Like new architecture, art and people and cut-out windows at the new MoMA
- Gift shop
- West Point gift shop – toy soldiers and atomic bombs
- Like lunch area
- Lighting is memorable
- Cool to go inside to look at things, like a space capsule

- Like when museums give little gifts like stickers, pencils, etc.

4. What is your favorite thing to do in a museum? (Students will be asked to raise their hand after list has been read once)

- 1. Look at pictures or displays**
- 2. Watch a movie**
- 3. Use a computer station that is part of a display**
- 4. Use interactive displays like puzzles, flip panels, magnet boards**

- Most popular is interactives – things to touch and do
- Somewhat like movies
- Somewhat like pictures/displays – depends on topic
- Computers were uniformly ranked last (in one group of 11 students, 0% raised their hands for this) – too much like doing research at home or school; are distracting from the exhibit

5. Do you read the labels at museums? If not, why?

- About 50% of respondents like to read labels
- Too much text or a topic that's not interesting makes them not want to read
- Like to know dates and where things come from
- Only read things that are interesting to them, otherwise not
- Should be translation of labels

6. How many of you have been to historic houses or sites? Please describe most/least favorable experiences at this kind of a museum.

- Everyone had been to a historic house or site (such as Jamestown, Salem, Nathaniel Hawthorne's house, Underground Railroad, Amish Country, Sleepy Hollow, Colonial Williamsburg)
- Like to see the way people lived, furniture, tools - and how they relate to the time
- Like people dressed up in character
- Like re-enactments
- Like old stuff like pots and candles
- Like to see how technology advances
- Like the fact that the house is a museum
- Liked crawling through a dark space at one place
- Don't like non-art museums that have art that's not as good and doesn't have to do with anything (like Hunters and Dogs)
- Don't like locations – they're usually different and dry, not urban
- Tour guides are boring – they list too many facts, need to be more engaging

7. Have you ever been to Hamilton Grange National Memorial, Alexander Hamilton's country home in Harlem?

100% of respondents have NOT been to the Grange

8. Are you interested in American History

- The majority of respondents were somewhat interested in American History
- Liked the Holocaust Museum and having the booklet with the person's information
- Liked Ellis Island

9. What can you tell me about the founding of this country?

- There are Four founding fathers
- 13 colonies settled by the British
- George Washington was the main person and became President
- People came here to colonize, not conquer – not here to dominate, wanted to stay, not make a fortune and leave
- Wanted religious freedom
- Declaration of Independence

10. How many of you have heard of Alexander Hamilton?

Everyone had heard of Alexander Hamilton because they had gone on a class trip to the New-York Historical Society's exhibit. Their comments on that exhibit:

- Liked old documents, letters, sale books
- Main room was much too dark
- Timeline was too crowded
- Liked learning about Hamilton's background and that he was anti-slavery
- Didn't like that each room was so different – no flow
- Timeline was too childish
- Timeline had good information, but was in a bad location
- Too much to read – too much important information but couldn't get it all
- Didn't know how to connect all the portraits
- Felt too rushed
- Too crowded
- The movies were really boring – the quotes weren't enough to make it interesting
- Nothing stuck – too many small details
- Museum movies are factual, but they should be more fun

11. What can you tell me about Alexander Hamilton and his life?

- Born in the islands
- His father was killed and his mother shipped him off to the United States
- He was naïve and foolish regarding the duel for both himself and his son
- He was a lawyer
- Signed the declaration of Independence
- Banks – came up with some important idea
- Shot in a duel and died
- Married wife because her father was wealthy
- Cheated on his wife
- Helped to found something economically

12. Is there anything specific about Alexander Hamilton and his life and times you would like to learn more about? Please describe.

- Would like to see what he looks like “under the covers”
- Timeline with someone speaking – hearing his thoughts
- Write labels in the first person – put it in his point of view
- Tour guide could act like he’s Hamilton
- What was he known for?
- What did NYC look like at the time?
- Don’t bring computers into it
- Why is he on the \$10 bill?
- His acquaintances, friends and rivals
- More about Aaron Burr and their relationship
- More personal details about him as a person
- More about his relationship with George Washington
- Recreate the time period
- Most interested in currency and duel
- Put a hologram of Hamilton in the library
- Why preserve the house? Why was it important?
- If the furniture is not real, say it is
- I would like to be able to sit on furniture and touch things
- Labels should be short and colorful
- Make quotes integrated into the architecture
- Use feather pens
- Labels should be readable from far away crowds can read it from afar
- Tour guides would be helpful, but students don’t like being “talked at” – want the tour guide to be lively

13. Do you think you would visit Hamilton Grange with your friends/family? Why/not?

A small minority of respondents would be interested in visiting the Grange (unless it was with a class trip)

- Alexander Hamilton doesn’t interest me
- I like old houses – I had fun at George Washington’s house
- Not that important a historical figure (like Franklin or Washington)
- Knowing about him doesn’t give you anything
- If not for school – I wouldn’t know anything about him

SCHOOL FOCUS GROUP – 8TH GRADE

Secondary School for Law, Brooklyn, NY

1. What kinds of museums do you like?

- Science Museums - electronics
- History - dinosaurs
- Transit Museum
- Brooklyn Children's Museum
- Wax Museum
- Brooklyn Museum of Art – mummies
- Aquariums

2. What kinds of museums do you dislike?

- Art Museums – only flat pictures
- Zoos – too smelly
- Ones where you can't touch anything

3. What is your favorite thing that you remember from a museum?

- A lot of hands on activities
- Ancient artifacts, hieroglyphics
- Old stuff
- Swimming with animals
- Staircases at Wax Museum that hangs off the wall
- AMNH – Mastodons, Indian Women, big dinosaur
- Pequot Museum – liked activities and movie about how Indians lived
- Hall of Science – bicycle that you pedal and go up in the air
- Feeling the A/C hit your face in the Aquarium
- Re-enactments
- Computer to tell you about dinosaurs
- Museum where you touched a ball that was electrified

4. What is your favorite thing to do in a museum? (Students will be asked to raise their hand after list has been read once)

- 1. Look at pictures or displays**
- 2. Watch a movie**
- 3. Use a computer station that is part of a display**
- 4. Use interactive displays like puzzles, flip panels, magnet boards,**

- Most popular response (by far) is interactive displays, followed by watching a movie
- Many liked computers – but only when they were games, not questions and answers which remind them too much of school
- Like when the movie is integrated into the exhibit

5. Do you read the labels at museums? If not, why?

- 50% of respondents like to read labels
- They like to know the dates of things, and where the object or living creature came from
- It depends on how long the labels are – if it takes too long, they would rather press a button
- Reading the label lets you know about what the thing is, but sometimes it's boring
- Labels use big words that you don't understand
- Make labels bigger

6. How many of you have been to historic houses or sites? Please describe most/least favorable experiences at this kind of a museum.

- The majority of respondents have been to a historic house or site (such as Ellis Island, Liberty Bell, Statue of Liberty, place where they made their own butter in Philadelphia, etc.)
- Liked old furniture
- Allowed us to do work that people did a long time ago
- Boring because there's too much reading and not enough to do
- Don't like it when the tour guides try to give their own opinions and "cover things up."
- Nice to look at the real thing and not just pictures
- Good to see where people lived

7. Have you ever been to Hamilton Grange National Memorial, Alexander Hamilton's country home in Harlem?

100% of respondents have NOT been to the Grange

8. Are you interested in American History

- 32% of respondents were interested in American History

9. What can you tell me about the founding of this country?

- Columbus came here – debate between whether Columbus or Indians found this country
- Boston Tea Party
- Bill of Rights
- Civil Rights
- Declaration of Independence
- Emancipation Proclamation
- Dutch came here
- After evaluators mentioned some of the names of the founding fathers, students had heard of them

10. How many of you have heard of Alexander Hamilton?

100% of respondents had NOT heard of Alexander Hamilton

11. What can you tell me about Alexander Hamilton and his life?

100% of respondents could not give any information about Hamilton and his life

12. Is there anything specific about Alexander Hamilton and his life and times you would like to learn more about? Please describe.

- How he spent his free time
- What did he do before he worked with George Washington
- Wife, kids, family
- Did he help George Washington come up with any big ideas?
- Why did he think Slavery was a bad thing?
- Why don't we know anything about him?
- Why didn't he run for President?
- Would like to see a diary of his life
- Would like to see his writing
- Discussion with evaluators about duel – almost no one knew what a duel was – showed he had morals

13. Do you think you would visit Hamilton Grange with your friends/family? Why/not?

50% of respondents said they might visit, especially if it didn't cost them anything to get in.

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS

Teachers from School of the Future, Manhattan, NY and Secondary School for Law, Brooklyn, NY

1. Please describe your most successful field trip – and what made it successful

- NYHS Hamilton Exhibit - timeline of his life was fabulous as was the statues of the duel
- Paris - the enthusiasm of the students
- None taken – new teacher
- AMNH – Human Evolution – it connected with our studies and students taught each other

2. Please describe your least successful field trip – what didn't work?

- Not enough visuals and no attention-grabbers for the students
- If given a worksheet to complete, they need to be able to find the answers on well organized visuals
- A scavenger hunt around the upper east side, the French institutions – the shop owners were distrustful of students, even in small numbers

3. What do you consider an educationally successful field trip?

- When the students want to talk about what they saw/learned on the Field trip the day after class – if it promotes a debate or panel discussion
- One that can help teacher with pre-trip plans, how to prep students is cross-curricular, how many students can I bring
- One is which students gain insight into their world with hands-on activities
- Students engage with what they see, have a job to do on the trip that's authentically meaningful, connected to classroom learning

4. How do you choose your field trip destinations?

- French themes
- What information is available
- Depends on content of field trip and curriculum and if there is overlap

5. Would you plan to bring your class to Hamilton Grange?

75% would bring their students to the Hamilton Grange

Comments:

- Sorry to have missed NYHS Hamilton exhibit, would bring if I could do some pre-trip lessons on what they could see
- How much would they learn about Hamilton – why is he important to US history

6. What would help you decide to bring your class?

- Information brochure - like NYHS newspaper on Hamilton
- Cost
- How much they could learn
- Is it connected with other content areas
- Can it help broad US history topics or is it Hamilton specific
- If there were an exhibit about French settling in America
- Focus on his politics, less on architecture

7. Please rank each of the following interpretive devices in terms of their success in your students' learning: (from 1 to 5, 1 being the least successful and 5 being the most successful)

	1	2	3	4	5
Exhibit labels	75%	0%	25%	0%	0%
Graphic panels w/ photos	0%	50%	50%	0%	0%
Video presentation	0%	0%	0%	25%	75%
Audio devices	0%	25%	%	25%	50%
Hands-on interactives	0%	0%	25%	0%	75%
Computer interactives	0%	25%	25%	0%	50%
Cases w/artifacts & docs	73%	20%	0%	0%	0%

8. What pre-site visit information do you find helpful for your classes?

- Controversial facts to get them interested
- Summary of what is contained in the house, i.e. degree of historical information or timeline of his life
- How can I prep them for what they can see - I want to build their background knowledge, tell them what to look for and how they will be assessed
- What the point of the exhibit will be, who the main players are
- Historical background and target vocabulary

9. Would you use additional curriculum materials prepared by the National Park Service?

50% of respondents would use additional curriculum materials prepared by the NPS

10. If yes, what format would you like to receive this in:

75% of respondents would like to receive hard copies of materials
25% would prefer an electronic file

11. Other comments or suggestions:

- Why should kids know about this
- How does it connect to today
- Make it relevant

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

American history is a topic that captures the interests of a broad range of audiences and usually makes for excellent museum experiences because of the potential for both fascinating factual information and dramatic interpretation. The New-York Historical Society's exhibit on Alexander Hamilton is no exception. While some critiqued various design elements or uses of technology, the vast majority of visitors, both adults and students, found the exhibit interesting, informative and, at times, dramatic. This front-end evaluation has allowed me to talk to wide variety of people associated with the NYHS' exhibit – consultants and staff who created it, general audiences, and student visitors and teachers who brought their groups to view it - and in doing so, I have been able to make certain recommendations based on the comments of knowledgeable museum-goers. What I have not been able to do as well, however, is to speak with the random "person on the street" who might be able to shed some light on why he/she would or would not be interested in an exhibit on Alexander Hamilton, or in visiting his home in Harlem, New York. Please keep that distinction in mind when reviewing my recommendations below. In addition, please note that of the two school groups I met with, one had visited the exhibit at the Historical Society and was, obviously, much more knowledgeable and interested in the topic as a result, whereas the other group had barely heard of Alexander Hamilton and was, therefore, answering my questions from a completely different starting point. The data for both school groups will show that differential quite distinctly.

- 1. *Make it Personal to Alexander Hamilton*** - The most important artifact related to Hamilton Grange is the house itself, and it's importance and relevance to the story of Hamilton cannot be underestimated. Any exhibit at the Grange should emphasize the personal story of Hamilton – as one student so aptly put it, what's he like "under the covers?" Here is the opportunity to peel back the layers of the man himself, and deal with his family issues - his wife and children, his personal relationships with Washington and Burr and some of the difficult issues he might have grappled with like slavery and how to shape the economy. Why did he purchase the Grange, when during his lifetime and how could an immigrant man become a man of property class able to purchase a "country home?" are additional questions that might be interesting to discuss in this venue. These questions will teach important history while also allowing for a more intimate glance at Alexander Hamilton (including the humanizing personal foibles), the drama of his life, and the context in which he lived.
- 2. *Importance of timeline*** - Visitors love timelines! At historical exhibits, they enjoy (and expect) knowing details about what was going on during the time period highlighted. Facts that pertain to politics, the social context of the time, and known milestones add to the enjoyment of the visitors. They like to double-check what they already know and infuse that knowledge with new facts. Some respondents commented that the place for the timeline is before they get into the meat of the exhibit – like a preface; while others prefer it to be more of a wrap-up. The timeline is a tried and true exhibit technique that designers and educators are always attempting to improve upon – whether to make it more interactive for the visitor, highlight the drama in a new and

innovative way or simply make it less dense and user friendly. I recommend that the designers of the Hamilton Grange exhibits once again consider these challenges and try to create a timeline experience that is informative, while simultaneously engaging.

- 3. First person quotes** – Visitors want to hear Hamilton’s words. Wherever possible, try to infuse the exhibit with his own thoughts and comments about his life, background and economic and political as well as personal policies. It is a challenge, however, to make sure that people understand the context behind these words. It might sometimes be necessary to provide simple explanations of more complex thoughts and issues. Obviously, the designers do not want to be condescending to the visitor by “explaining” what might be clearly evident to some, but often, an “aside” comment or contextualization for a statement can add depth of meaning and understanding for the audience. This, of course, is especially true of students, several of whom commented that not being able to understand vocabulary or meaning in texts found in historical exhibits was something they disliked about museum-going.
- 4. New York City component** - Several respondents commented on the importance of New York City’s role in Alexander Hamilton’s life and I think this is an excellent point that deserves further consideration. Questions included: Why are there so many sculptures of him in NYC? Why don’t we think of him as a New Yorker? Why has his house been treated without the respect and care that a home of a Founding Father deserves? Isn’t it impossible to discuss New York and its history (up to the present) without mentioning the importance of real estate? All of these questions help round out the story of Hamilton and add dimension to our understanding of him and his role in American history and in our city. New York City is an important player in Alexander Hamilton’s life story and should be treated as such. In addition, New Yorkers, as we all know, can be quite city-centric – any topic that relates to “their” city and how it looked and felt hundreds of years ago is inherently interesting to them, and therefore, can be used as a springboard for discussing broader issues.
- 5. Make it engaging and dramatic** – According to the data collected, people like (and expect) historic houses to be replete with all the usual trappings – period furniture and artifacts, tour guides dressed in costumes, etc. 100% of students had visited historic homes and seemed to enjoy the experience. However, respondents, including adults, appeared to be interested in places where history comes alive for them. While they expected the traditional interpretive techniques, I believe they would be quite open to newer, more innovative approaches to learning in this kind of an informal setting. I recommend that the designers of exhibits at Hamilton Grange emphasize the human drama of the story – make it engaging and surprising for the visitor. At the New-York Historical Society’s exhibit, some of the most popular elements were the play (using Hamilton’s and others’ real words) and the bronze statues of Hamilton and Burr re-enacting the duel. I encourage those creating the Grange’s exhibits to delve further into the ideas of interpretive theater, interactive sculpture and the use of artifacts (some, perhaps that are touchable) that encourage the use of imagination and critical thinking, discussion and debate. There is nothing more memorable than a heated discussion in teaching history and in understanding the complex situations in which the

Founding Fathers found themselves, which in turn, helped shape our country as we know it today.

- 6. *Don't modernize experience*** – As I mentioned above, visitors like their historic site experience to be somewhat “historic” in feel. That does not mean, however, that they would not appreciate the use of innovative interpretive strategies to help history come alive for them. What I would suggest, however, is that those kinds of exhibit techniques (high-tech computer or other technologies) are kept separate from the house experience, itself. As the data in this evaluation has clearly illustrated, the vast majority of respondents feel that video and computers are distracting to them in this kind of an environment, or for students, that they are too reminiscent of how they are required to learn in school. I strongly believe that visitors learn in different ways and appreciate experiences that utilize a variety of learning styles, but I also think that in this type of informal learning environment, their needs would be best suited to keeping the really high tech elements, while they might integrate nicely with the information, apart from the historic elements.
- 7. *Provide transcriptions and explanations of documents/keep text concise*** – One of the great highlights for all involved with the NYHS's exhibit on Hamilton was the use of original documents. Nothing is better than the real thing and all respondents appreciated being able to experience this type of unbeatable learning tool. These invaluable documents are living, breathing proof of what life was like, how words were used, interpreted (or misinterpreted) and how our country has become what it is today. However, one of the critiques of those same documents was the inability to read them due to the lack of transcriptions or poor lighting. These documents are often written in small, difficult to read handwriting and contain words, ideas and themes that might be difficult for some to comprehend. I strongly recommend that when using original documents, they be accompanied by transcriptions, and when necessary, short, concise explanations of their meaning and importance. Visitors overwhelmingly are readers – some read every word of every text panel, while others skim. For that reason, I suggest keep panels brief, but engaging. Label copy should be written by those who are experienced in writing for museum audiences and not necessarily scholars. Additionally, make the labels as large as possible to avoid groups gathering around reading panels while blocking the view for others.
- 8. *Importance of crowd – control*** – All museums wish they had the problem that the exhibit or site is so popular or successful that they have to worry about crowd control. However, it is one of the chief complaints in museums. The designers should definitely pay attention to through-put and wayfinding when creating exhibits for the Grange. Be careful not to crowd artifacts, documents, or place a timeline or other interpretive devices in a place that would cause a traffic issue and hinder the enjoyment for others. This issue can be an especially difficult one when dealing with school groups. The Grange might want to consider having school groups visit during different hours from

the general public or stagger groups and experiences so that large numbers of people are not in the house simultaneously.

9. **Formative Evaluation** – Finally, I would recommend that the NPS engage in on-going evaluative studies as the exhibits are designed to continue to gain feedback as to how well the proposed exhibits are communicating the desired goals and messages. Focus groups with special interest groups and testing of texts, exhibit design ideas, methods and mock-ups can be invaluable to keeping a project on task with regard to cost, program and overall goals.