

27 arts, science and cultural institutions

10 years of collaboration

And soon – one park-wide museum pass



Peter Comiskey – Executive Director

[peter.comiskey@bpcp.org](mailto:peter.comiskey@bpcp.org)

Karen Coutts – Director, Development

The Balboa Park Cultural Partnership (BPCP) is a model for multi-institutional collaboration that has been empowering twenty-seven arts and cultural organizations to collectively advance shared interests with innovative solutions since 2003. By leveraging resources, coordinating communication, leading public and political advocacy, and building networks and partnerships, BPCP improves professional practices, reduces costs, attracts new resources, drives sustainable practices and increases visitation and tourism. This, in turn, promotes the organizations, Balboa Park, and the region as a top arts and culture destination.

The BPCP was created by the leadership of Balboa Park institutions, and represents the first time they had ever come together as a group. Since early efforts to open the lines of communication, share information, and cut costs, the BPCP has expanded their role to encourage a shared focus on improving the “Balboa Park Experience” and incubating collaborative programs.

Successful organizations are driven by strong governance and leadership. With a Board of Directors comprising the leaders of the member institutions, the non-profit BPCP receives clear policy direction. Implementation of that policy is then the responsibility of the BPCP Executive Director. As a recent appointment to the BPCP, I claim no credit for any of the successes of BPCP presented here. I have the luxury of immersing myself in the work undertaken by David Lang, the first Executive Director who facilitated the initial collaboration of the organizations, and his successor Paige Simpson, whose tireless efforts and exceptionally broad knowledge of management strategies and learning paradigms provided a unique opportunity for BPCP to grow far beyond expectations.

### **About Balboa Park**

Before exploring the BPCP, it is likely beneficial to provide a quick overview of Balboa Park in San Diego. San Diego is located in the south west of the continental United States of America at the border with Mexico. The county of San Diego has a population of



Figure 1 : City of San Diego - map of the continental United States of America.

approximately 3.2 million people and is a 2-3 hour drive south of the Los Angeles and Orange Counties which have a combined population of over 12 million people.

The 1200 acre location in Downtown San Diego that would ultimately become Balboa Park was first established as a park in 1868. In 1910, Park Commissioners decreed the area would be known as Balboa Park, a name chosen in honor of Spanish-born Vasco Nuñez de Balboa, the first European to spot the Pacific Ocean while on exploration in Panama.

The majority of the development in Balboa Park occurred as San Diego prepared to host the 1915 Panama California Exposition, one of a number of events in America to celebrate the opening of the Panama Canal. While only four buildings were designed to be permanent, the community decided to retain many of the other exhibition buildings following the very successful year-long event. Although some buildings or parts of those buildings have been demolished, many were re-built in the original style and now house a variety of world class institutions. Balboa Park, including all buildings, remains fully owned by the very supportive City of San Diego.

### **About Balboa Park Cultural Partnership**

Balboa Park is visited by an estimated 10 million visitors per year. Over 6.7 million of these visitors also visit one or more BPCP member.

Eighty non-profit organizations impact or operate within Balboa Park. Twenty-seven of these organizations provide regular programming or services for the public, and so are eligible to be members of BPCP. This includes seventeen museums and cultural centers as shown in Figure 2.

- Museums, Zoo, Cultural Centers and Online**
- Mingei International Museum
- Museum of Photographic Arts
- Reuben H. Fleet Science Center
- San Diego Air & Space Museum
- San Diego Art Institute: Museum of the Living Artist
- San Diego Automotive Museum
- San Diego Hall of Champions Sports Museum
- San Diego History Center
- San Diego Model Railroad Museum
- San Diego Museum of Art
- San Diego Museum of Man
- San Diego Natural History Museum
- San Diego Zoological Society
- Timken Museum of Art
- Veterans Museum & Memorial Center
  
- Balboa Park Online Collaborative
- Balboa Park Visitor Center
- Centro Cultural de la Raza
- House of Pacific Relations
- Japanese Friendship Garden
- Spanish Village Art Center
- WorldBeat Center
  
- Performing Arts**
- San Diego Civic Youth Ballet
- San Diego Junior Theatre
- San Diego Youth Symphony & Conservatory
- Spreckels Organ Society
- The Old Globe

Figure 2: Balboa Park Cultural Partnership Members

BPCP member dues are scaled to the size of budget although each organization—regardless of size of budget or number of visitors—has an equal voice and an equal vote in setting policy directives.

Our team asks the same three questions for any new project for BPCP:

- How can this program be best achieved through member collaboration?
- How can the program help our member institutions?
- How can the lessons learned be shared throughout the museum community?

The on-going baseline activities of the BPCP include: network building, data collection, information exchange (within the Park and between the Park and external stakeholders), meeting and task force facilitation, research and development, and the incubation and implementation of collaborative programs. From these, four major programs have emerged:

#### The Balboa Park Learning Institute (BPLI)

**BPLI** is a multi-faceted professional development and education program. Originally created for the staff of the cultural institutions in Balboa Park, this program has expanded in recent years to serve representatives from organizations throughout San Diego County. On average, BPLI offers 75 workshops each year, serving more than 2,000 people. BPLI programs build new networks and enhance attendees' abilities to explore, gain, and share knowledge about professional practices. BPLI topics are wide-ranging and include: governance, technology, diversity, audience engagement, marketing, collections care, and communication. Examples include: *Creating Audience Centered Program Outcomes*; *Accessibility Policy Writing*; *Collections Emergency Response Training*; *Communicating Financial Performance to Your Board and Team and Supervisors' Leadership Training*.

The Learning Institute facilitates special projects that use Balboa Park as a learning laboratory for experimenting with new practices that have implications for the broader cultural and educational fields. For example: *Evaluating the Balboa Park Experience (the Park's first collaborative visitor study; it yielded 10,000 responses)* and *Prototyping*

*Universally Designed Museum Interactives (in partnership with the Museum of Science, Boston, to make exhibits more accessible).* Each year BPLI presents the Smith Leadership Symposium, a nationally attended conference to advance the issues faced by arts organizations. The most recent symposium engaged more than 700 participants, both in person and virtually. Twenty workshops on diversity issues were presented by the Learning Institute over the past year attended by 513 individuals. (Examples: *Expanding Beyond the Americans for Disabilities Act; and Inclusion & Engagement*).

BPLI is currently undertaking a wide-ranging Guest Services program designed to identify new strategies to engage visitors throughout Balboa Park. Members of every organization will collaborate to plan and implement this program.

#### The Balboa Park Sustainability Program (BPSP)

The BPSP preserves and enhances Balboa Park by helping the cultural institutions save money and natural resources through education and project management—particularly in the areas of energy efficiency and LEED certification. LEED certification is a formal certification of buildings and operations that encourages environmentally aware facilities.

A strong partnership with the City of San Diego and the utility provider, San Diego Gas and Electric (SDG&E), has allowed Balboa Park to make incredible strides. Since 2008, BPSP has helped implement HVAC, lighting, and other projects at multiple organizations that have reduced utility expenses by \$1.1 MM and saved 6.2 MM kWh of energy. The program has delivered over 120 free, public workshops to 5,000 participants and created a series of Sustainability Walkabouts to showcase the institutions “Green” advances, such as: using mineral oil in lamps outside the Old Globe Theater; installing systems that automatically regulate heating and air conditioning at Mingei Museum; and replacing lighting at the Model Railroad Museum that allows them to be energy efficient *and* simulate dusk and dawn for the first time in their exhibits.

Improvements like these are increasing the Park's appeal as an eco-tourism destination. Our current sustainability goal is to certify ten LEED buildings within the park over the next two years.

### Art of Science Learning

The BPCP is the lead organization for a new national research initiative, funded by the National Science Foundation to explore the impact of the Arts on innovation in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) education and workforce development. The **Innovation Incubator Program** will launch incubators in three cities (San Diego, Worcester (MA) and Chicago), that each bring together 100 arts and culture professionals, STEM professionals, artists, educators, business leaders and students in each place to work in 10 cross-disciplinary and inter-generational teams.

This program will formalize a new arts-based innovation curriculum for distribution; conduct research to measure the impact of arts-based learning on creativity, collaboration and innovation; and develop programs that advance civic engagement in arts education. Thus far, this program has resulted in numerous strong national and international relationships with organizations and key individuals outside Balboa Park. BPCP looks forward to reporting details of the curriculum that is developed and the impact of that curriculum on creating solutions for major challenges in our communities.

### Balboa Park Explorer

Thanks to the support of the James Irvine Foundation, in November of 2013 BPCP will launch the first annual park-wide Balboa Park museum pass – called the **Balboa Park Explorer**. This has been developed in response to a long-standing request by the local community and regional tourists to find an economical way to regularly visit multiple Balboa Park museums. The Explorer will allow visitors to pay one price for year-round general admission to all 17 museums in Balboa Park. Modeled on the successful BPCP "Passport Program," which allows for 1-day or 7-day admissions to multiple museums, and

based on strong market research and business planning, the Balboa Park Explorer is expected to generate significant new revenue to be shared amongst Park institutions.

The Balboa Park Explorer family of passes (Figure 3) will seek to achieve a number of goals:

- Provide several complimentary products that will be offered to guests both within San Diego County and out of market including Los Angeles County and Arizona.
- Communicate with guests based upon known preferences.
- Provide an efficient and effective system to manage value driven pass holders.
- Capture and analyze data including visit frequency, park-wide visitation patterns, demographic information, visit day weather and day-of-the-week impacts.
- Create social interaction models, including electronic trails and badges to entice guests to develop an affinity with Balboa Park.
- Encourage upgrading by regional tourists from day passes to annual passes.
- Develop a mechanism for Balboa Park institutions to support the community as “One Park” by providing passes at no charge to disadvantaged families in the region.

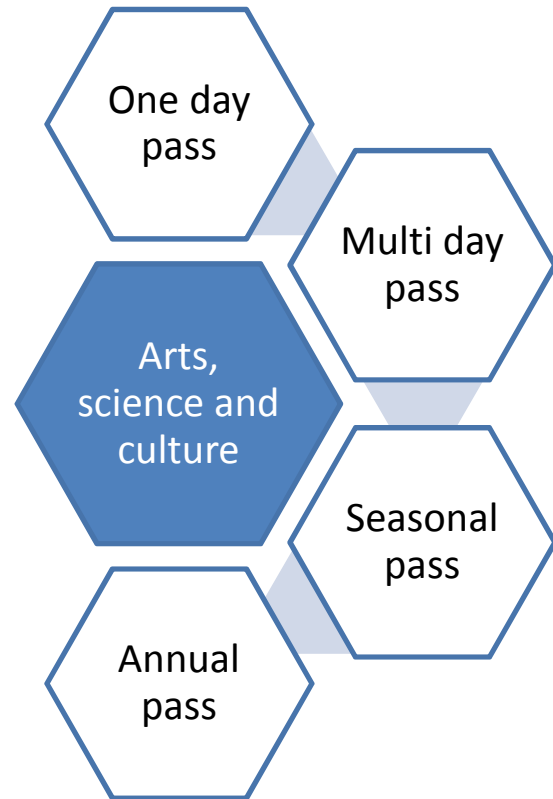


Figure 3: Balboa Park Pass Family. Offering opportunities to encourage return visitation and targeted guest communications.

There is also an important bigger picture here. With the help of a structured collaborative review of the program by the Learning Institute, it is hoped that lessons learned from the rollout of the Balboa Park Explorer may provide valuable data to museums that are looking

for alternate models for managing value members – those members who join for the primary benefit of free admission.

Fundraising professionals throughout the non-profit field are very familiar with the concept of the fundraising pyramid. At many museums, in addition to having a number of lower level mission driven supporters, the base of the pyramid is comprised of

value/transactional members – people who have joined as members primarily to receive free admission. From that base, museums seek to cultivate members for annual campaigns or other mid-range giving opportunities.

Next comes major gifts and then ultimately planned giving. Of course each museum defines their pyramid

differently, and the reality is that the actual fundraising profile of many museums would look nothing like the stylized pyramid shown in Figure 4.

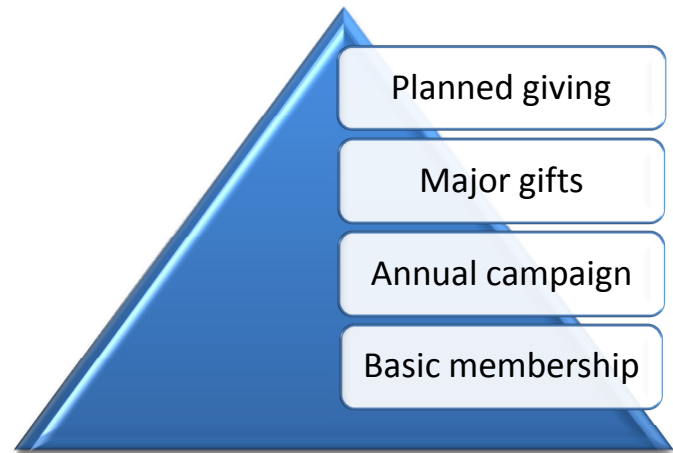


Figure 4: Fundraising Pyramid – large numbers of basic members at the lower levels are encouraged to progressively increase their level of support.

Measuring success for membership programs can be challenging. Success for many museums may simply be judged by the number of members they have. The challenge in this case comes with an overabundance of value driven members – a situation that venues like science museums have dealt with for many years. Membership spikes when blockbuster exhibitions are scheduled and drops off in periods where fewer new exhibitions or programs are offered. Membership programs with a large number of value members are often expensive to run due to communications costs, support staff and the opportunity cost of a high visit frequency with minimal incremental revenue. Such programs can suffer significant turnover of members, and fail to graduate similar percentages of donors to higher giving levels when compared to museums with fewer value members.



The National Parks Service (NPS) highlights an important element for their pyramid model, with the foundation of the pyramid being “Visitor Awareness and Quality Experience”, followed by more traditional levels. This begs the question – is it important for museums to control and communicate directly to a large base of value members or will institutions that focus on delivering a quality and compelling experience to all guests attract, almost by default, those who wish to support the mission at a higher level?

The Balboa Park Explorer seeks to provide a mechanism to focus on this very question. By establishing a volume driven pass system, offering products for multiple museum experiences that would not be possible for individual museums, driving data collection and analysis and controlling messaging to the pass holders, it is hoped that the Balboa Park Explorer can lower the membership program cost structure for the institutions and provide them with valuable data that is designed to grow higher levels of support.

One example of this opportunity is that while email addresses and names of all pass holders are not shared with the museums, in order to minimize excessive communications, the contact details for any “frequent guest” is. The program also offers the opportunity for the museum to cross check their membership lists against active pass holder lists so they are aware which of their members are also Balboa Park Explorers. Although the definition of a “frequent guest” will likely change with each museum, the intent is to provide information that the museums can trust to form more meaningful relationships.

No one pyramid model therefore works for Balboa Park or for the Balboa Park Explorer. Our relationship forming goal can be represented in Figure 5 – the BPCP pyramid cluster.

With this, the BPCP believes:

- That many guests who visit the park may not enter an institution, however they should have the same high quality visit experience regardless.

- That the Balboa Park Explorer family of passes is a prime opportunity to manage value seeking guests and also to begin to cultivate supporters for the institutions.
- That each institution, represented by the separate pyramids, will attract unique supporters to their mission, a percentage of who will be drawn from pass holders.
- People who support each institution at any level are also helping, indirectly, to improve the Balboa Park Guest Experience.
- With a high quality Balboa Park Guest Experience then all BPCP members, not just those participating in the Explorer and the broader community will benefit.



Figure 5: The Balboa Park Explorer base for the pyramid cluster which is encompassed by the Balboa Park Guest Experience. A fundraising pyramid rising off the Balboa Park Explorer base represents any of the unique donor progression opportunities at BPCP member institutions. The base is far broader than any one museum could achieve.

## Communication and collaboration

For the BPCP, inter-organizational activities are not just something we do, they are what define us. With 27 arts, science and cultural institutions as our collaborators, we work together every day to achieve greater organizational efficiency, innovation and excellence. For example, working within the park on a collaborative audience research project allowed some institutions to do audience evaluation for the first time. By pooling our resources it made the expertise and man-power--

including almost 1000 hours of volunteer time--available that some organizations wouldn't have access to otherwise. Further, the BPCP facilitates at a very functional level with excess capacity exchanges among the institutions. For example, when one institution has extra--or formerly used—lighting, shelving, furniture, or even specialized equipment, such as a golf cart—BPCP facilitates exchanges so organizations in need can make use of equipment.

Staff from a variety of Balboa Park institutions teach workshops through BPLI and various institutions host programs so that a formal space need not be leased for this purpose. Our larger programs such as the Art of Science Learning Incubator Innovation program will bring together individuals from across sectors in this four-year project.

We lead cutting-edge projects that provide learning opportunities for the community, drive attendance and awareness of Park institutions, and support the critical programs that are presented by our collaborating institutions. Through this collaborative model that focuses on inter-organizational work, the Park institutions are able to create an outstanding “Balboa Park Experience” for people who are visiting, working, and partnering with the Park.

Over time, our members have explored and embraced the reality that our collective is truly stronger than the sum of our parts. Our individual members are each special in their own right – but as a group they are truly unique. They comprise one of the largest and most diverse campuses of cultural institutions in the United States, and serve as a model for how to move beyond competition to increase promotion, visitation, sustainability, and innovation through collaboration. This is not easy to do, and the BPCP members will continue to forge a path.