

## **New Possibilities and Big Ideas Result of Exhibition Development Workshop**

In spring, 2004, the Heritage Philadelphia Program presented a course in exhibition development for seven institutions. They were: African-American Museum in Philadelphia, American Philosophical Society, Betsy Ross House, Independence Seaport Museum, National Constitution Center, and the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. The course allowed participants to learn about the process of exhibition development and to address issues like “the Big Idea,” identifying exhibit goals, using designers and evaluators, and focusing on audience interests. The course, offered on Monday afternoons, consisted of eight three-hour sessions with different guest speakers each week. Leading the course were two of the field’s top exhibit developers and teachers, Janet Kamien and Leslie Bedford. Kamien has worked on exhibits for the Boston Children’s Museum, the National Constitution Center, the Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati, the Franklin Institute and the Field Museum. Leslie Bedford is an exhibit developer as well as the Director of the Leadership in Museum Education Program at New York’s Bank Street College.

Following speakers who discussed audience evaluation, budgeting and fundraising for exhibits, prototyping exhibit elements (multiple times) and developing ideas, each institution was asked to develop a small exhibit plan on a topic related to work in their sites and museums. Currently several of the ideas developed during the course are slated for future institutional development within the next two years.

Participants found the course to be stimulating and informative. Their comments included: “I realized there are resources for what I don’t know.” “I learned about staff communication and audience development.” “. . .the course covered a lot of ground.” “It was beneficial to me on a professional as well as personal level to be exposed to all of the participants, their backgrounds and their points of view.” “This course has encouraged me to think more strategically about exhibitions. . .”

To further advance state-of-the-art history exhibitions, HPP is planning to offer a more advanced course in exhibition development in the coming months.