

**VISITOR INFORMATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL
INTERPRETATION PROJECT PLANNING GRANT**

In December 2015, the Board authorized an \$85,000 planning grant to the Tahoe Fund for development of conceptual alternatives for environmental education and interpretation on behalf of the Lake Tahoe Basin's (Basin) key agencies and stakeholder groups.

The Tahoe Fund contracted with the Exploratorium's consulting arm, Global Studios, to assist in the process of developing a coherent mission and vision for environmental education and interpretation or visitor centers across the Basin. The process included four stages: listening sessions to determine needs in the community, workshops to develop mission, a design charrette to develop concepts, and lastly a final report that captures all of the input, ideas, and future direction.

As part of the initial workshop, the Exploratorium team (Team) held in-depth interviews with public and private sector leaders to understand key issues driving the community. The Team also toured existing interpretive sites and conducted a full-day workshop with a core group of stakeholders, focused on the existing programs and facilities as well as perceived needs. This core stakeholder group continued their involvement throughout the remainder of the process.

The Tahoe Fund coordinated a second workshop at the Exploratorium in San Francisco for the core stakeholder group. The purpose of this workshop was to build upon the first workshop and interviews to develop a cohesive vision. At the workshop, the Team facilitated the core stakeholder group to clearly identify a mission, vision, and the target audiences, and to begin developing new channels for executing this mission.

- The mission: The purpose of this initiative is to connect people with the Basin to nurture a culture of stewardship and sustainability.
- The vision: The Basin is an environmental success story and a global role model for sustainability.
- Target audience: People who visit more than once a year or live in the Basin and have the desire and ability to learn more about the Basin.

The workshop also included brainstorming sessions to imagine the various ways that the core stakeholder group could reach this target audience with stewardship and sustainability messages.

The purpose of the third workshop, a design charrette, was to hear the inspiring ideas from the Team and develop the concepts into a plan to move forward. After a successful second workshop, the expectations were fairly high for the Team to deliver innovative and transformative ideas for the core stakeholder group to execute. After a few hours of working through the ideas, it was clear that the concepts were not as exciting or as big as the core stakeholder group was expecting.

The Team heard the feedback and offered to do a new round of ideas and another workshop at their expense. As presented in a fourth workshop, the three main components of the final recommendation are:

- **Paradigm:** Create a new organizational structure in the Basin to better align missions and coordinate efforts of the many stakeholders doing environmental education. The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) agreed to step into a coordinating role of this group, much as they have for the Tahoe Bikeway Partnership and the Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinating Committee.
- **Place:** Science Center on a Barge: Build a science-based center on a flat bottom barge that can be docked at a few set locations around Lake Tahoe. The barge would host various exhibits and provide a hands on experience on the water for locals and visitors of all ages.
- **Collaborative Programming:** The Team presented a proposed thematic structure, broken out by the seasons, which could link all environmental education programming in the Basin (Attachment 1). This would help connect all of the current physical spaces and non-physical programs.

The final workshop ended with enthusiasm and energy for moving these ideas forward. The TRPA will schedule the next meeting of the stakeholders to begin to put an organizational structure in place. The U.S. Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit will reach out to see if the currently non-operational Tahoe Queen is available for the science barge. While the planning grant is now completed, the Tahoe Fund and core stakeholder group are dedicated to continuing this effort.

List of Attachments:

Attachment 1 – Proposed Collaborative Programming

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