

The attached proposal to the
Frederick J. Kennedy Foundation
will be discussed at the meeting
of Monday, April 13th. 1970

THE PROPOSAL

The following is a request to the Frederick J. Kennedy Foundation to help the Children's Museum make a fundamental realignment of its human and materials resources. Specifically, we seek \$500,000 to develop a program of collaborative efforts with several neighborhood organizations that will permit us to respond more creatively and effectively to the diverse and special needs of children living in the inner city of Boston.

To Serve the City

To grow up in this tough and demanding world is difficult for any child. If, in addition, the child is poor - or black - or speaks with a foreign tongue - or is a member of a frightened, inward-turning community - or lives in a decaying hostile environment, the difficulties are tremendously increased.

We believe that the chances of such a child growing up to become a confident constructive adult are significantly reduced. The resulting demoralization of the individual and the overall loss to society demands our concern and our action. We also believe that the Children's Museum and the community groups with whom it is working are not presently organized in such a way as to be able to effectively cooperate in minimizing these disadvantages. This proposal, therefore, offers strong remedies to the solution of this problem.

During the fifty-six years of its existence the Children's Museum has a significant record of accomplishment in developing and applying innovative and effective programs - programs that make a difference in a child's development. Although many have been used with city kids, most are the direct response to the more aggressively expressed needs of suburban communities and may not be well suited to the urban child. To this must be added the fact that most neighborhood organizations serving city children either lack the money or are not skilled at exploiting the institutional resources available to them. Therefore city kids, those most desperately needing the materials and programs of the Children's Museum, are not now receiving them since all too often the Museum is in effect irrelevant and inaccessible to them.

To serve all the children of Boston, the Children's Museum is, therefore, prepared to commit itself to the following major realignment of staff, programs and materials:

1. get the Museum's staff and materials into the neighborhoods to learn directly of special community needs and points of view;
2. allow neighborhood organizations to send their staff and ideas to the Children's Museum to learn about our talents, materials and problems;
3. exploit existing resources in both the Museum and communities to better meet the needs of city children; and
4. develop new human and materials resources in both the Children's Museum and the community.

This plan recognizes that before we can provide programs which address real urban interests and needs, we must first understand clearly the shape and style of life in the city's many neighborhoods. Those who know these best are not at the Children's Museum, but in the neighborhoods. Therefore, we seek to develop a cooperative process with them as a method of solving this problem. The mutual nature of the proposed effort, Boston neighborhood and community organizations, plus the Children's Museum, emphasizes the fact that we have much to learn from each other, and reflects our intention to become a museum of the city.

The two-part plan described below is the result of extensive work by both Museum staff and representatives of many diverse groups representing a cross-section of Boston neighborhood and community organizations.

Using Up What We Have - Building Up What We Need

The first stage of our two-part proposal is designed to fully exploit and use existing resources; both those here at the Museum, and those presently available in the community organizations with which we have worked. The second stage will concentrate on developing those human skills and material resources which are identified as needed but found lacking during the first stage.

Stage I: Using Up What We Have (one to two years)

During this phase of the program, we intend to work in ways designed to fully use and explore those talents and materials now available. Through staff sharing and internships, we plan to make new skills available to community organizations, and bring new insights to the ongoing work at the Museum. Through a review and revision of the collections, programs, kits and exhibits now available at the Museum, we plan to provide maximum exposure and use of these things.

With certain of the community groups with whom we are currently working we will share staff for a twelve-month period. One Children's Museum staff member will intern, half-time with a given community group. Tasks will vary and will be determined by the group in question. Examples might include: Working on Afro-American History, planning urban nature and ecology programs for kids of the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood House, training volunteers to conduct Indian and photography clubs at the East Boston "Y," or, expanding our present parent/child pre-school art workshop for mothers from NICE (a group concerned with child care at the Bromley Heath Housing Project). The purpose is two-fold: to expose our staff, in an in-depth manner, to people and concerns of the city, and to make our personnel and technical skills known and immediately known to them.

In turn, each participating community group will choose two of its staff members to serve as Children's Museum staff interns. After an initial period of becoming acquainted, the interns will assume the role of a Museum staffer in an area of particular interest to them. For example, folks from the South Cove might work up an exhibit from our oriental collections, an experienced mother from a day care program might help redesign our Workshop of Things to make it more appropriate for urban mothers and their children, or a representative of the Roxbury Community Library Project might intern with our cataloging and collections departments.

During this period, we will also undertake a comprehensive review and analysis of what we presently have in our collections and program packages. The purpose here is to seek maximum utilization. We plan to rework and redesign and wherever necessary

make these materials more appropriate for use in Boston communities. While it is hard to predict what such a review will show, suggestions have included reworking mapping and model building equipment in our City MATCH Units for young people to use and work out ideas of what their city ought to look like, adding materials on the life cycle and habits of starlings and pigeons to the material on birds in our natural history exhibits, combining pieces from different periods in an exhibit about how home life in Boston has changed through time, and developing inexpensive portable display units so that a variety of interesting things might be toured and demonstrated at playgrounds around the city.

At the conclusion of stage one, three things will have prepared the way for stage two:

1. We and people from around the city will have become familiar enough with each other's skills, needs and dreams to insure effective working relationships.
2. We will have fully explored, used and exhausted the personnel and material resources presently available to us and our associates, and in so doing learned the strengths and limitations of both.
3. The combination of the first two will point the way to those major development efforts needed to create the human skills and material resources necessary, but not now available.

Stage II - Building Up What We Need (two to three years)

As the first stage concentrated on using what is, the second will concentrate on developing what isn't. Approximately, two-fifths of the funds requested will be set aside for this work, and will be allocated by a board drawn from the Children's Museum and the community participants in stage one. The allocations will be made on the basis of proposals drawn from all those who participate in and have contact with the program. No a priori structures will be placed on the kinds of programs considered and they might well include: design of new training methods for staff in neighborhood

craft centers, a program for exhibit on the changing life styles of children growing up in South Boston, development of materials and activity kits on African culture for use by students at the Highland Park Free School, or using old maps and plot plans to work up archeological digs in urban renewal sites.

In short, we see this work as full of promise, but impossible to rigidly define in advance. We believe that the experience and work of the first years will disclose new possibilities, demand new responses, and most significantly, teach us and others more effective ways to respond.

Conclusion:

In sum, we must repeat that we believe that the future of the Children's Museum, will be determined by its capacity to respond in this fashion to the needs and demands of the children of Boston. The above proposal reflects both our conviction in this fact and our faith in the process of cooperative effort proposed. The city in which our young people grow up during the next decade will in part be a result of the success or failure we and others like ourselves have in meeting this challenge. Half measures will not do. We are prepared to commit the Museum's full resources to the task, but realize that large scale additional funding will also be necessary. For this reason, we earnestly seek your help.