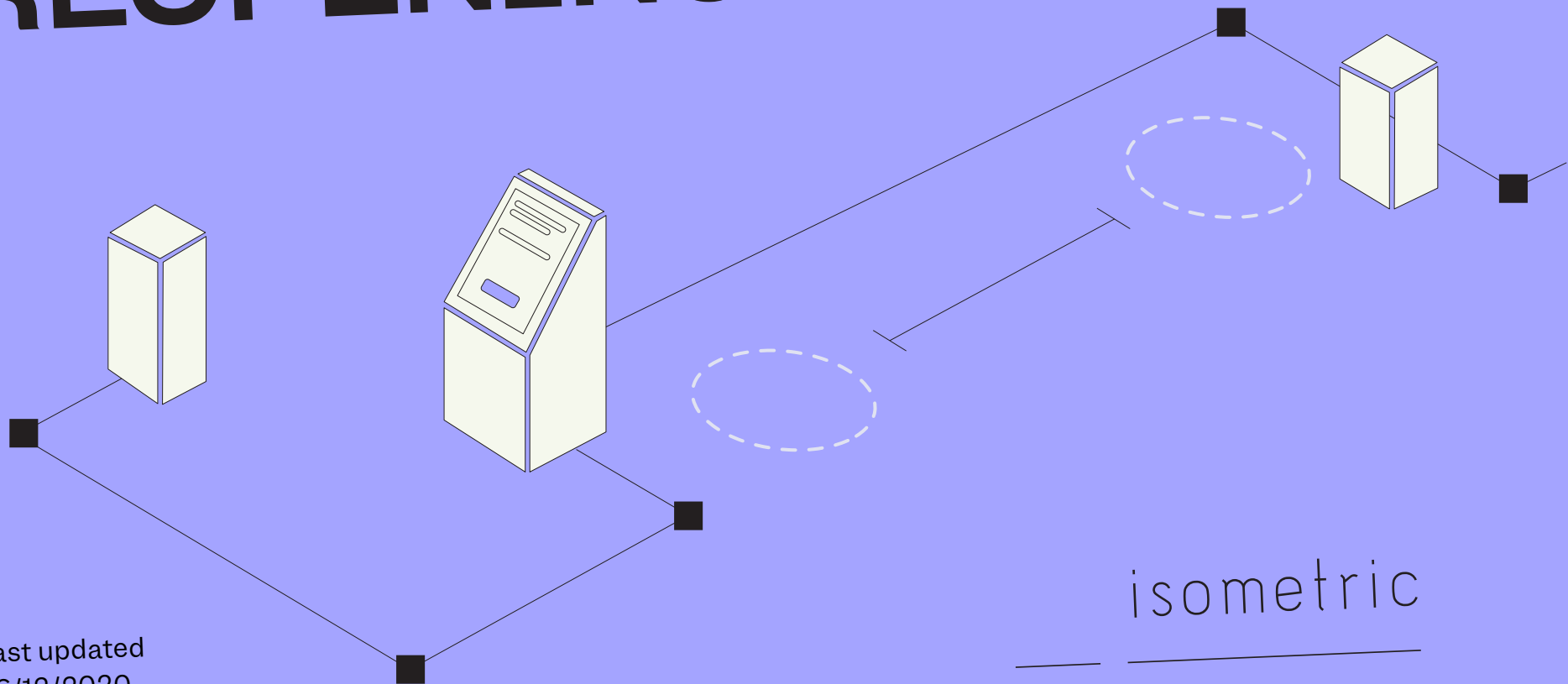


# TOOLKIT FOR MUSEUM REOPENING

Design Strategies  
and Considerations

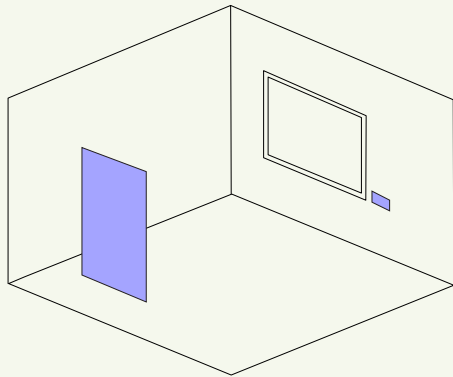


Last updated  
06/12/2020

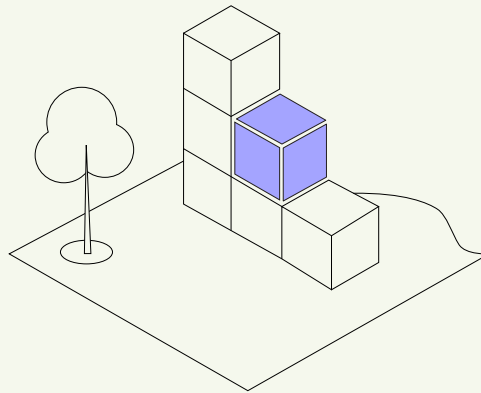
isometric

**In a time of health crisis and social transformation, museums are more important than ever.**

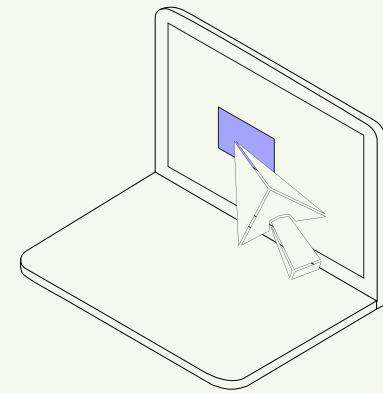
**This toolkit empowers museums with design strategies to reopen safely and with renewed purpose.**



**Indoor Exhibits**



**Outdoor Exhibits**



**Virtual Exhibits**

Please note that the recommendations contained herein are our subjective responses to the latest available public health information. They are our studio's opinions only and are not to be understood as official health guidance.

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# A Lens Towards Justice

The COVID-19 pandemic and continued police violence towards Black Americans have cast inequalities in healthcare, education, policing, and more in sharp relief. As guardians of cultural heritage, interpreters of knowledge, and educators for the public, **museums cannot afford to be silent.**

Audiences are seeking constructive ways to participate in the ongoing fight for justice. Museums have the unique capability to help us learn from history, make sense of these troubled times, and cultivate new language and iconography **to imagine and build a more just world.**

We hope that the design strategies offered in this toolkit can serve as a foundation for museums to continue to fulfill this critical mission.

# Who We Are

Isometric is a **graphic design and architecture studio** led by queer people of color. We create exhibitions, visual identities, and websites that **foster equity and justice.**



*Rising Together: The Black Experience with Police in America*  
Google NYC, 2019

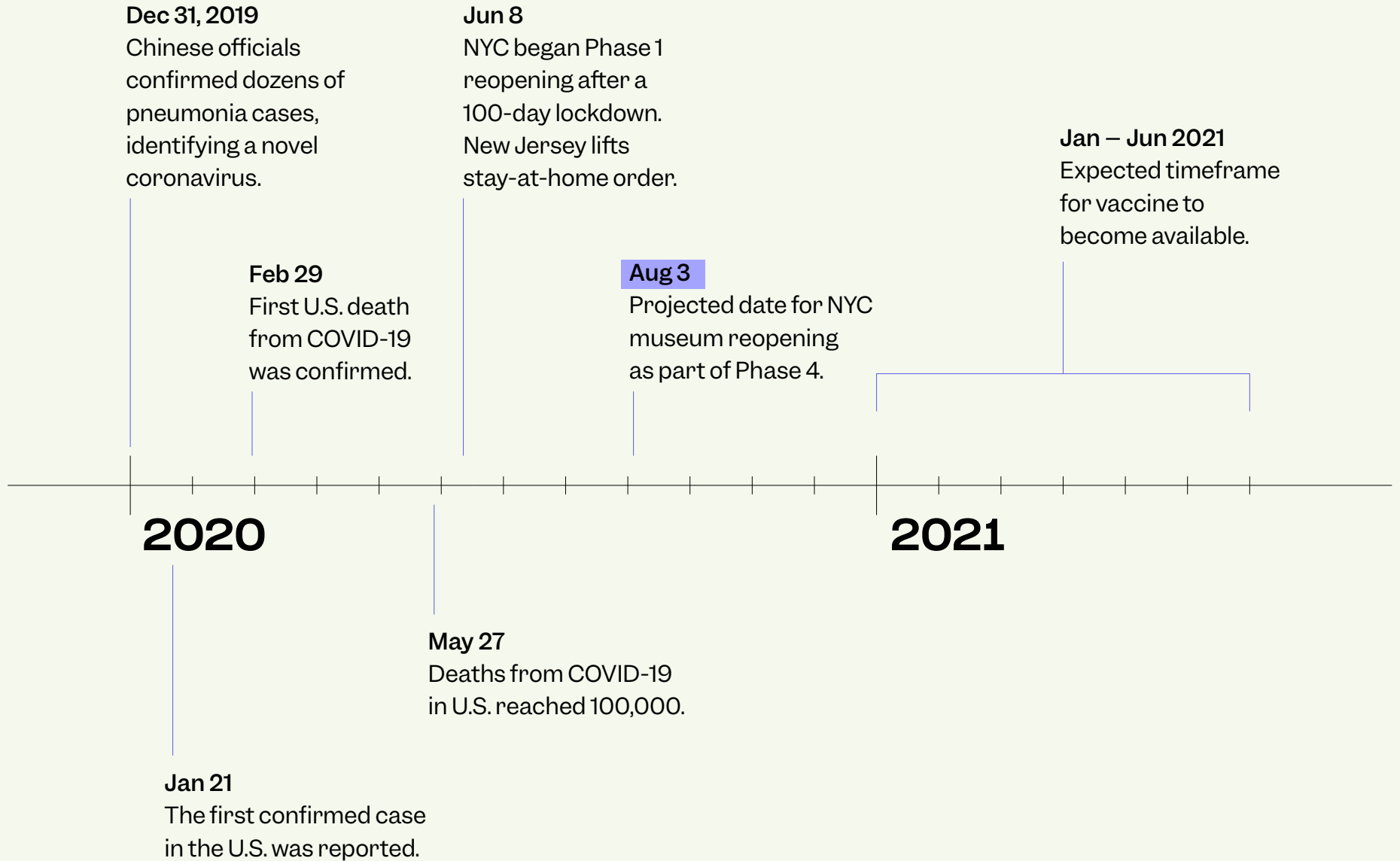


*Germ City, Microbes and the Metropolis*  
Museum of the City of New York, 2018

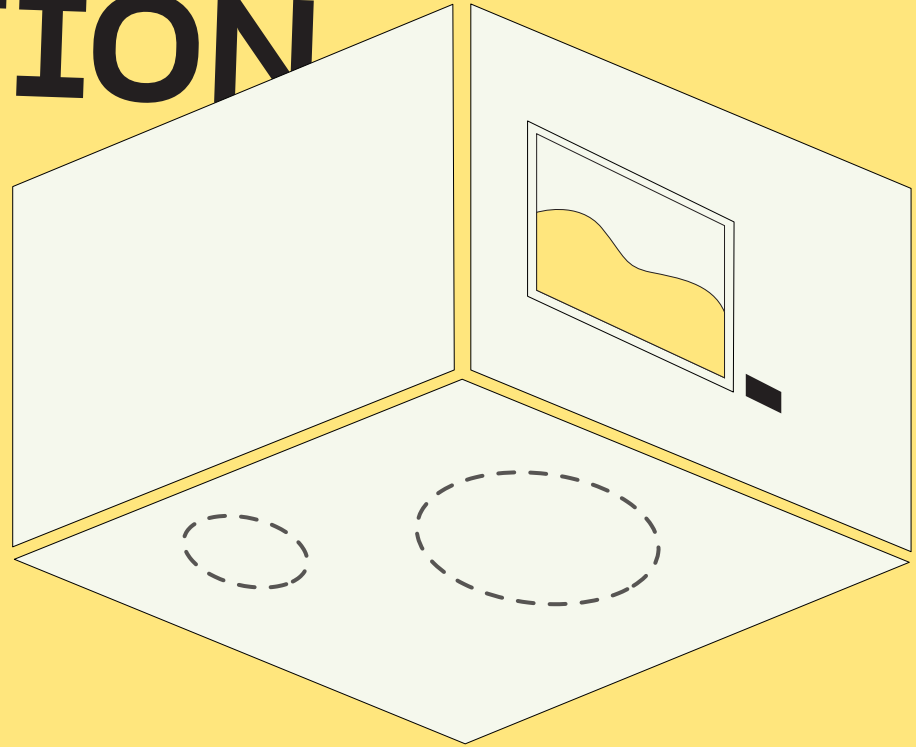


*Contemporary Muslim Fashions*  
Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, 2020

# COVID-19 Timeline



# INDOOR EXHIBITION DESIGN



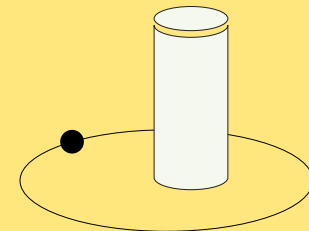
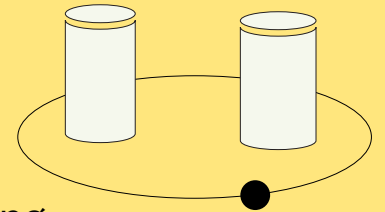
Museums are cultural hubs that bring people together to advance our shared discourse and understanding. How do we retrofit and design indoor exhibitions and spaces to keep visitors and staff safe?

# Rethinking Galleries for Social Distancing

Before the pandemic, exhibitions were designed to be creative, engaging, and educational. This will not change, but they will now need to be redesigned with another factor in mind—keeping visitors safe. Rethinking the architecture and visual design of exhibitions can allow us to build a better museum experience in a post-COVID world.

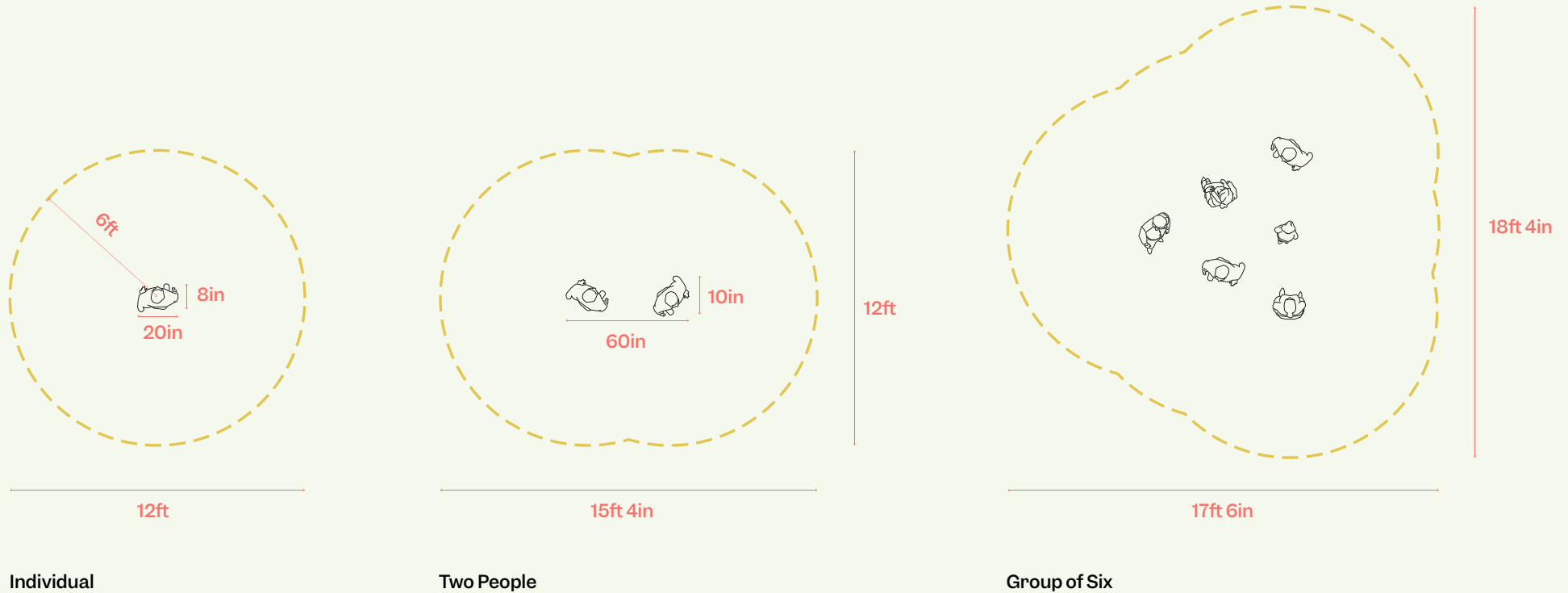
## Design Recommendations

- Based on the size of galleries, calculate new occupancy limits for social distancing
- Subdivide galleries into zones and indicate these areas with floor decals
- Regulate the number of visitors per zone (e.g. 3 non-affiliated visitors; or friend group of 6)
- Designate a single direction of circulation and indicate this using floor decals
- Create clear space for museum staff to guide visitors safely



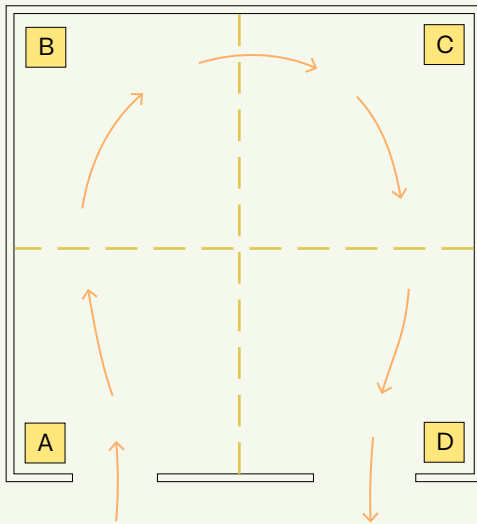


# Ideal Clear Space Allotment

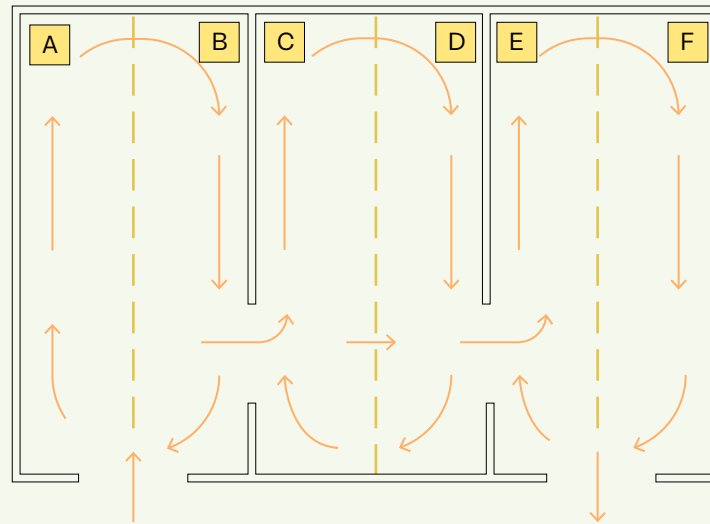


- Establish zones that limit the number of individuals or groups at any given time
- Whenever possible, allow 6 ft. of distance between non-affiliated visitors
- Families or friends can move together with adequate space around the entire group

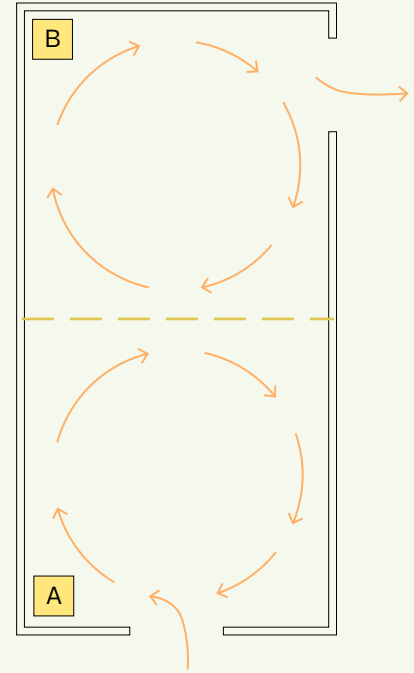
# Single Direction Circulation



Large Room with 2 Entrances



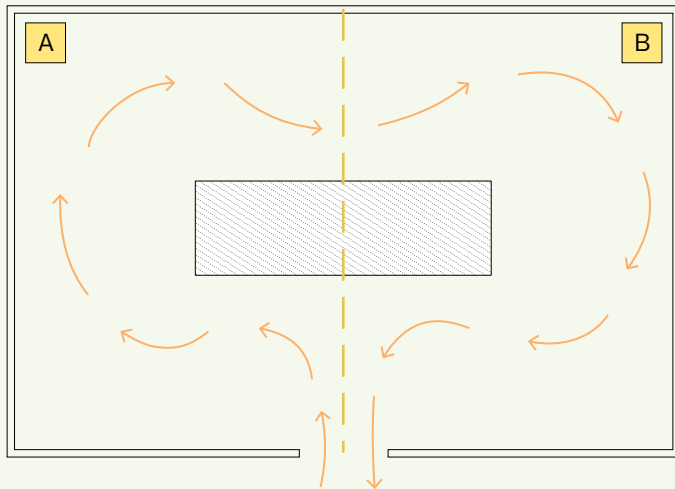
Enfilade Sequence with Deep Rooms



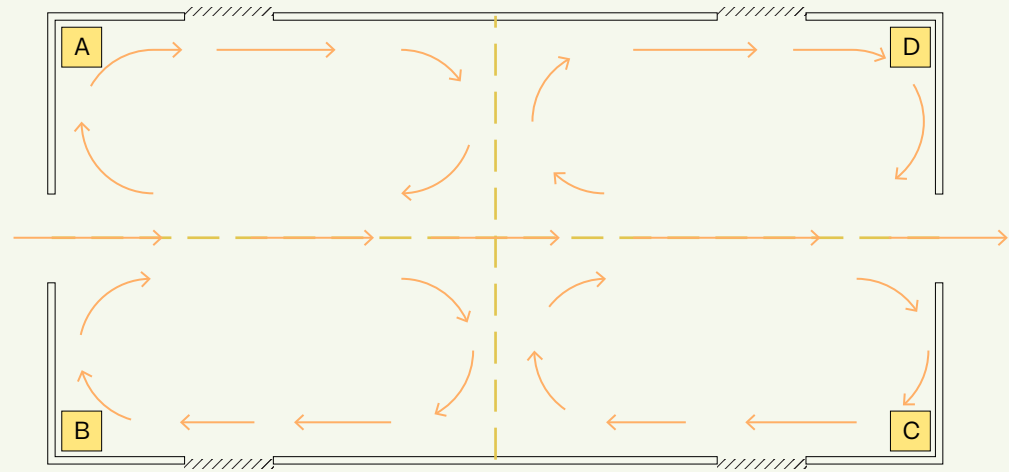
Long Room with Two Entrances

- Encourage circulation in a single direction, marking recommended paths with floor decals
- Subdivide galleries into zones (denoted by the yellow dashed lines) and limit to one group per zone
- Adhere to the overall gallery capacity with timed entry and stationed museum staff

# Single Direction Circulation



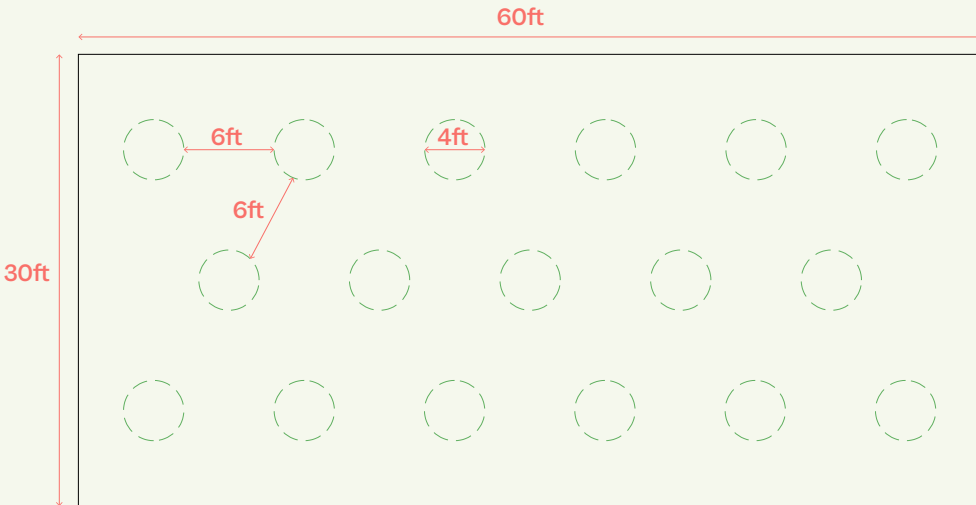
Wide Room with One Entrance



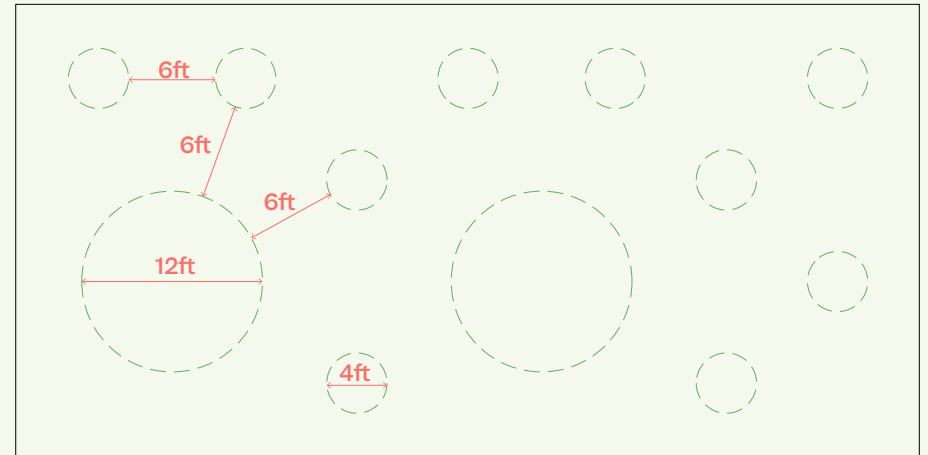
Enfilade Sequence with Square Rooms and Multiple Entrances

- Open up previously unused pathways and corridors to allow single-direction circulation
- Close select entrances to galleries that may impede a clear directional flow

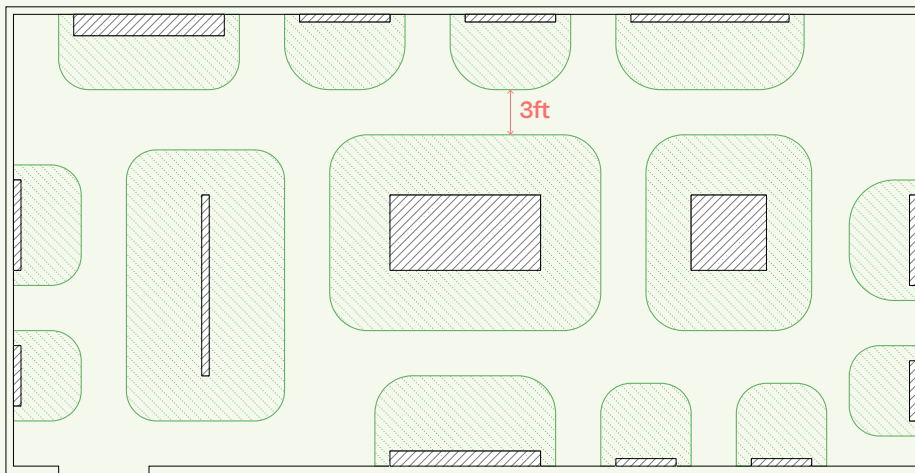
# Floor Demarcation System



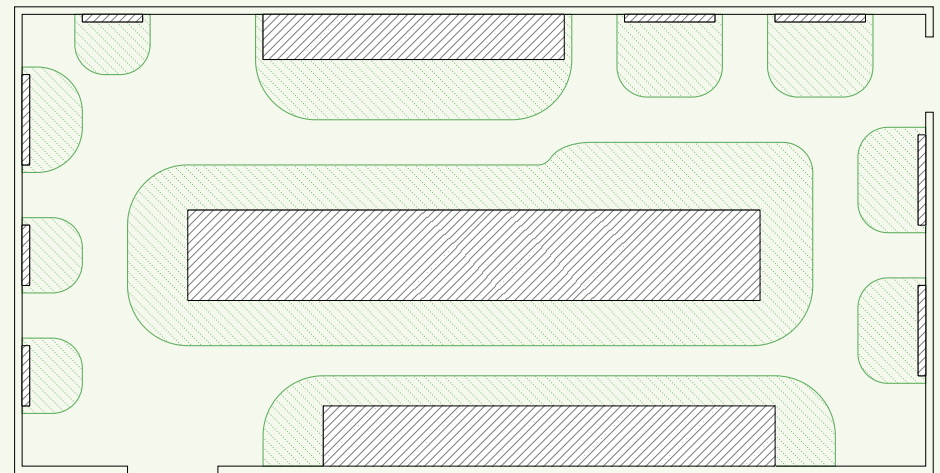
Regular Field



Field with Accommodation for Groups



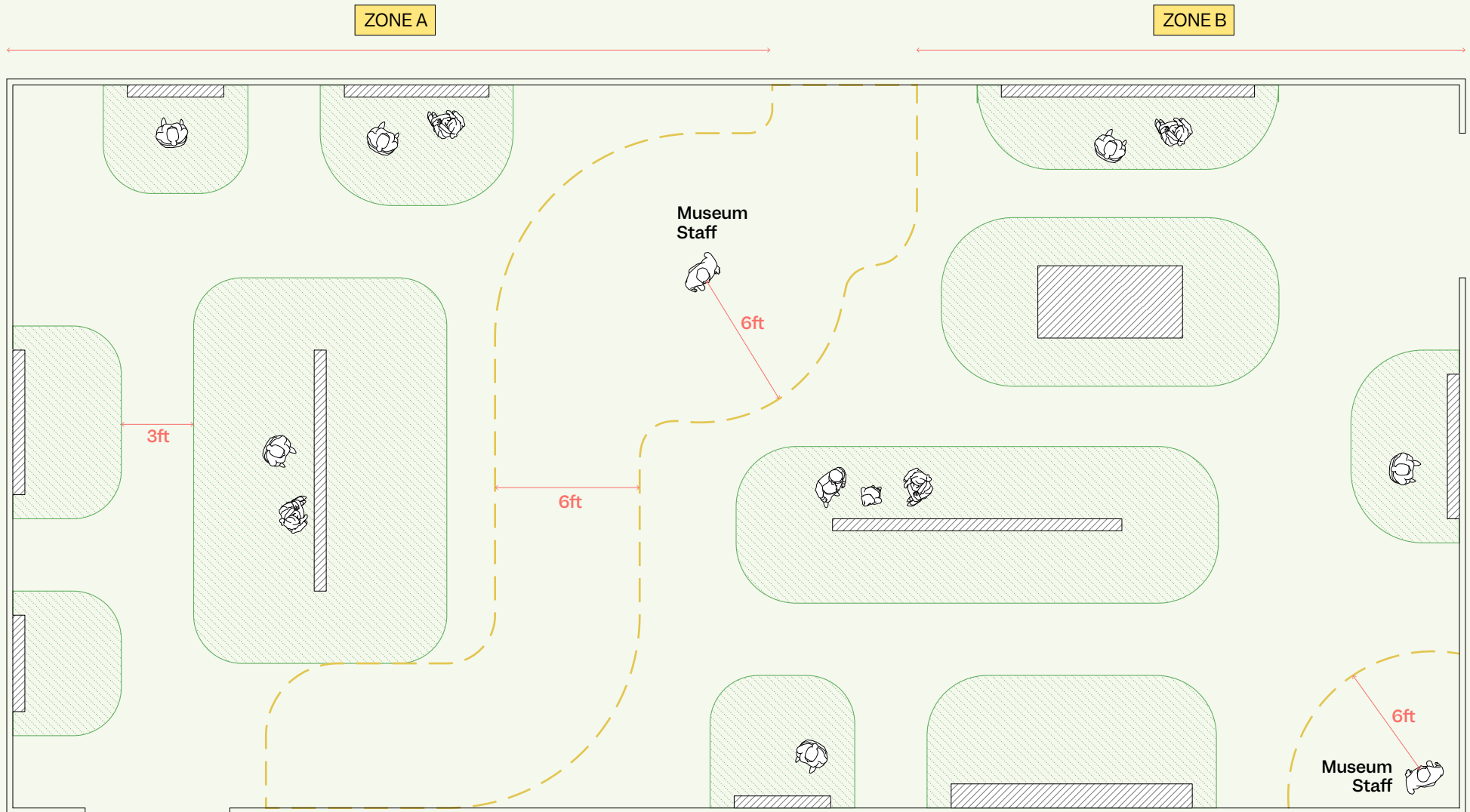
Customized for Exhibition – Example Layout 1



Customized for Exhibition – Example Layout 2

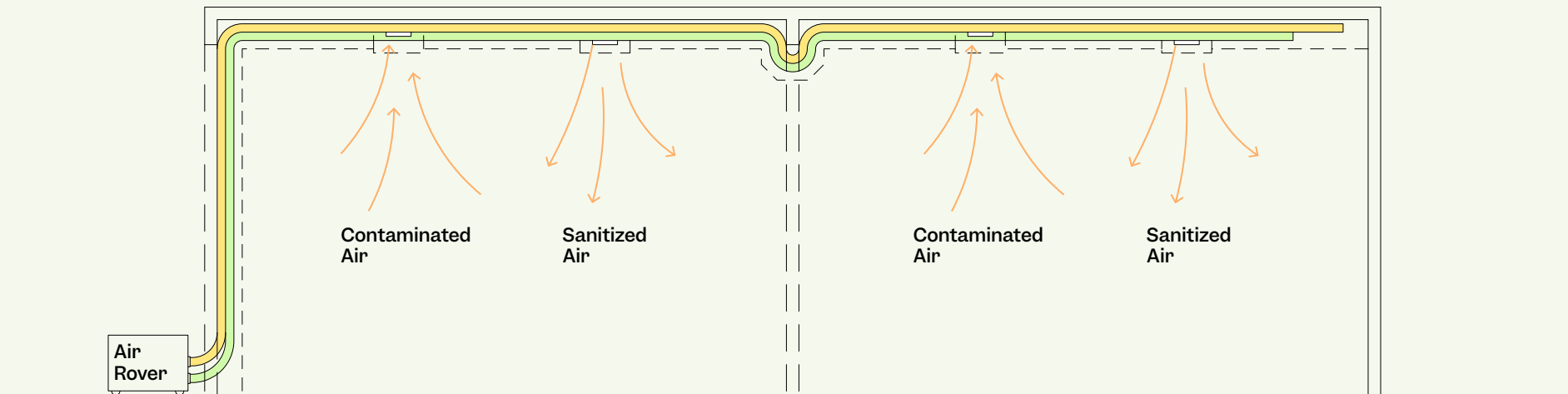
- Use a simple, intuitive, and clear floor marking system to indicate where groups can stand
- Customize the floor marking layout and design for each exhibition

# Example Gallery Layout



- Customize zones, circulation, and circle demarcation systems based on the needs of the exhibit
- Provide clear areas between and around zones for museum staff to guide visitors

# Air Circulation and Sanitization



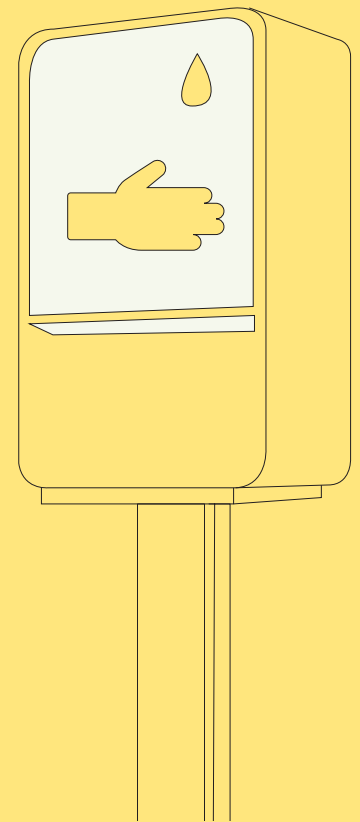
- Configure existing or install additional air safety systems to help remove and sanitize gallery air
- UV light and additional filters can be used to sanitize and replace the air several times in one hour
- A single mobile unit can serve spaces of up to 7,200 sq. ft. with custom-designed ductwork

# Facilitating Smart Visitor Interactions

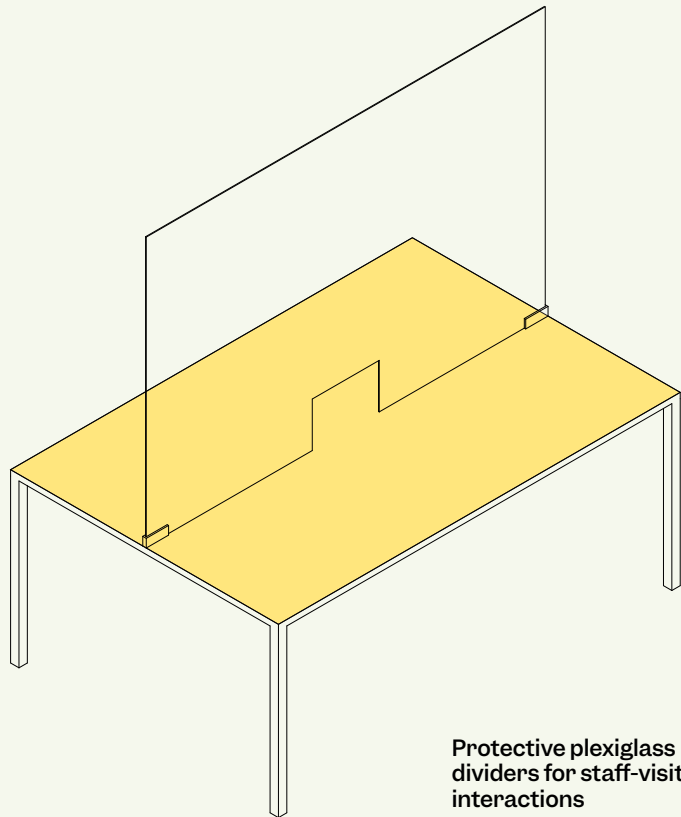
We go to museums to interact with artifacts and installations in a shared space. Sometimes we're invited to engage physically with installations; at other times, we peruse information on a tablet. These shared surfaces for interaction extend to A/V displays, seating, door handles, elevator push buttons, stairway handrails, and more. How do we ensure safe interactions without impacting the visitor experience?

## Design Recommendations

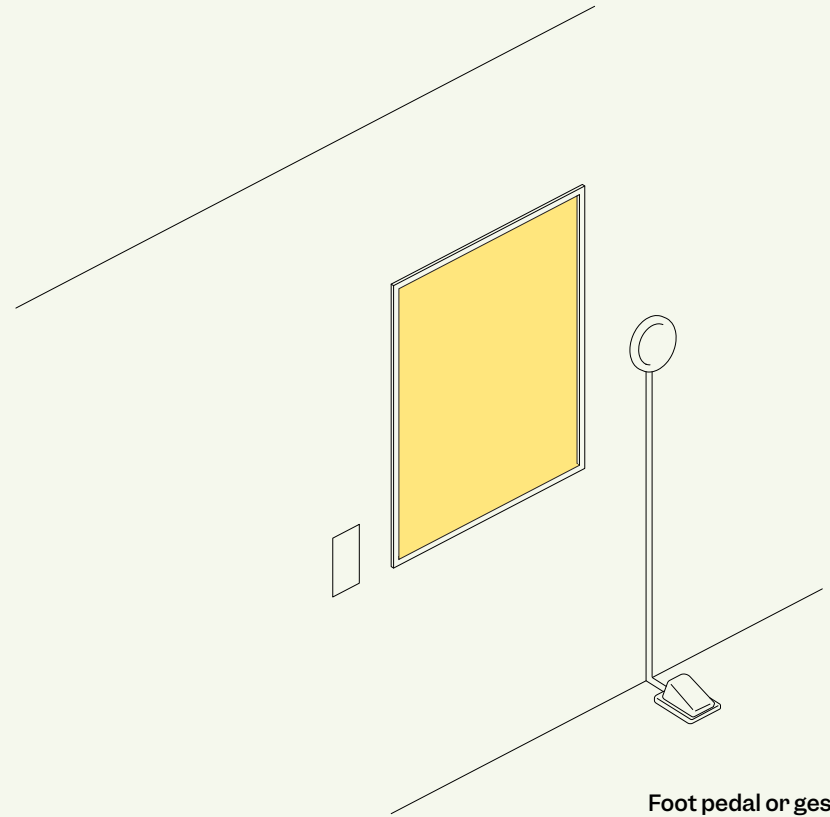
- Adapt exhibits to use touch-free or gesture-based interactions
- Present objects in a way that reduces the need to touch
- Set up stations that enable visitors to sanitize easily
- Communicate that high-touch surfaces are regularly disinfected



# Simple Practices to Reduce Contact



Protective plexiglass dividers for staff-visitor interactions



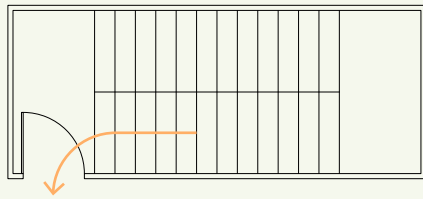
Foot pedal or gesture-driven interactions to minimize touch

- For ticketing, information, or welcome desks, design dividers to serve as protective barriers
- Use creative techniques to adapt interactive elements and eliminate the need to touch



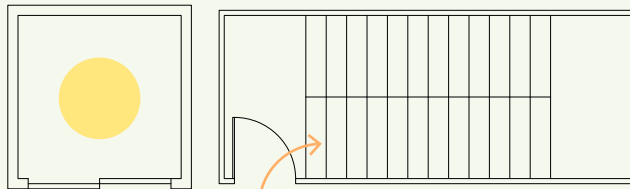
# Hallway, Stair, and Elevator Circulation and Graphics

Upstairs Only

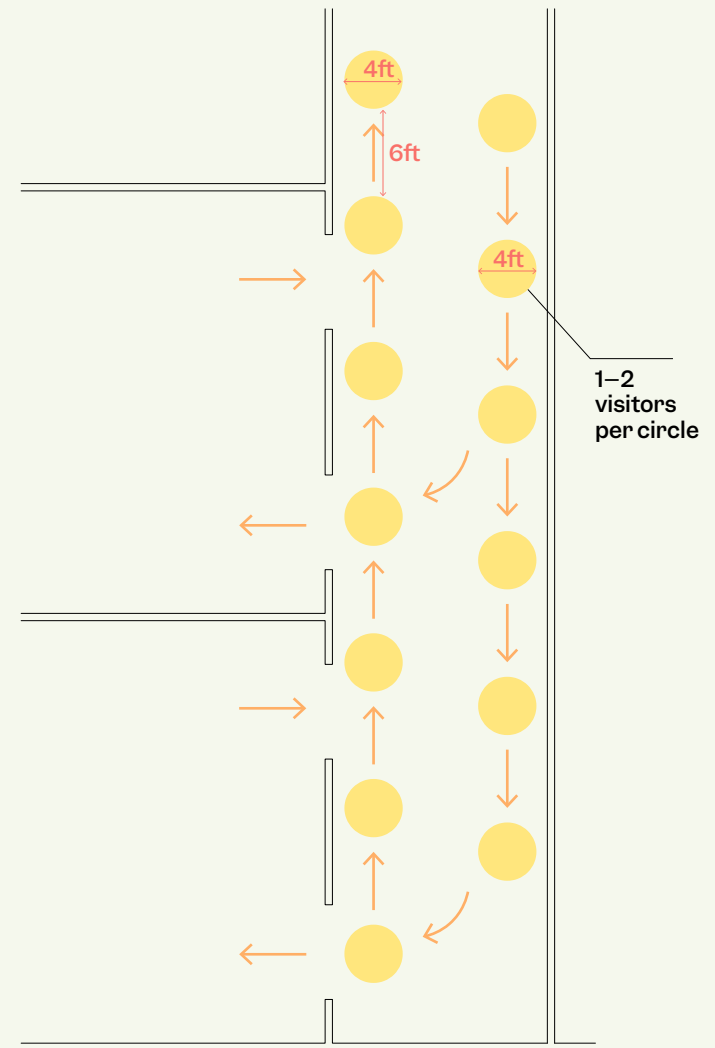


Keep stairwell doors open if allowed by fire safety code

Downstairs Only



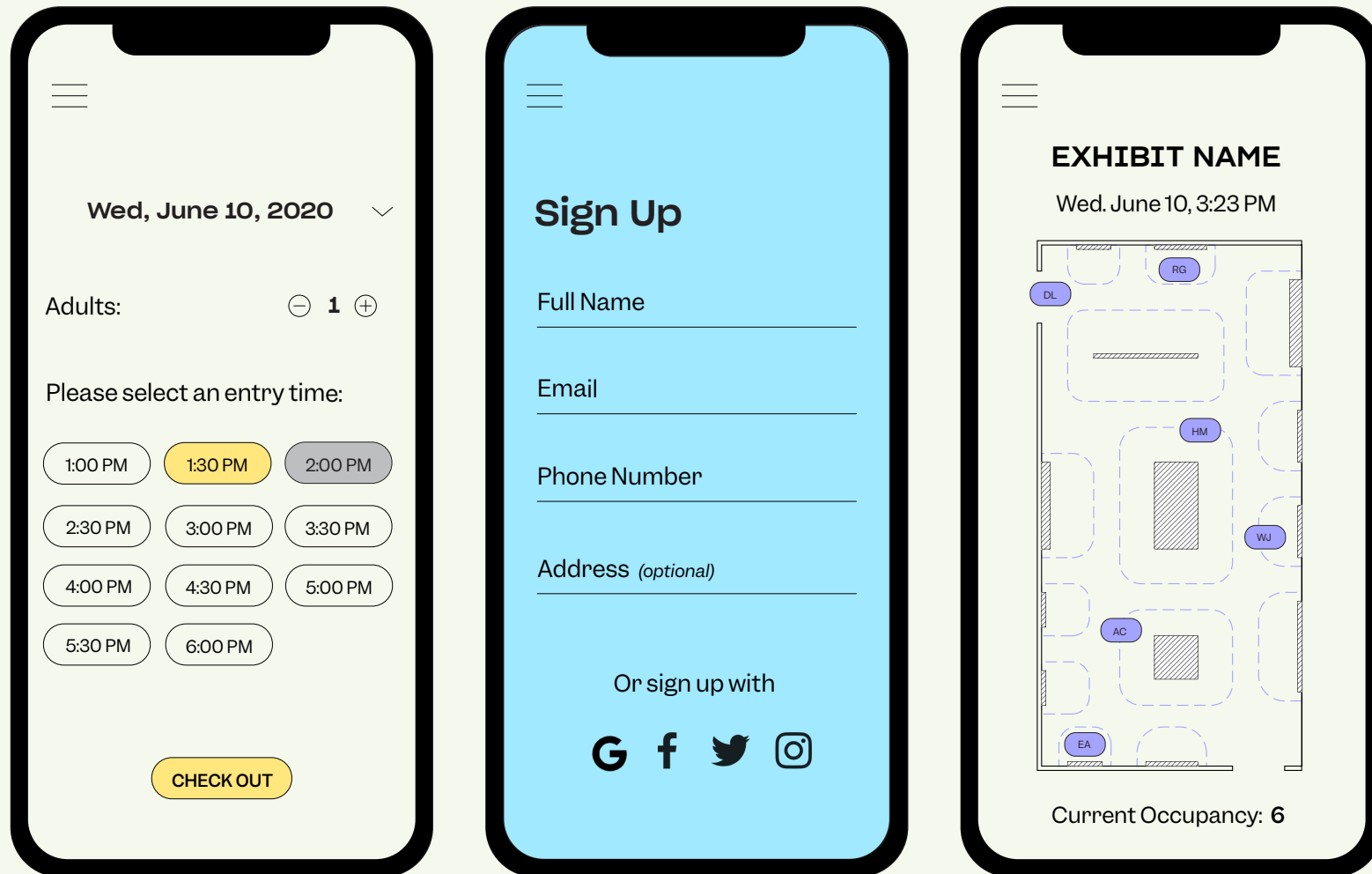
Elevator reserved for visitors who cannot use stairs



Hallway Circulation and Floor Graphics

- Designate stairs for single directional flows: only up or only down to allow social distancing
- Reserve elevator use for people who are not able to climb stairs, and limit to one individual or group
- If allowed by fire code, leave doors open; or install automatic doors activated by motion sensors

# Timed Entry and Contact Tracing



- Develop or adapt an app that can allow timed entry reservations for specific exhibitions
- To help with testing and tracing efforts, notify people if they should get tested and/or quarantine
- Use location services to help people see occupancy and wait times for galleries

# Encouraging Visitor Personal Responsibility

**Waiting in Line**  
Enjoy additional exhibition content within hallways as you wait in line. Stay within the yellow circles, and move in the directions shown on the floor.

**Exploring the Galleries**  
Move from one yellow circle to the next as you like, remaining within your group's zone for the allotted time period. If you need additional time, please let our staff know.

**After Your Visit**  
If you or someone close to you tests positive for COVID-19 within 14 days of visiting the museum, please use our app to let us know. We will notify people who you may have been in contact with.

**TIPS FOR A HEALTHY & SAFE VISIT**

## YOUR MASK IS YOUR MUSEUM TICKET!

Your mask is your ticket to enter the museum.

COVID-19 often spreads without any visible symptoms. We therefore ask that you wear your mask at all times while you are inside the museum.

You wear a mask to protect other visitors. And everyone else wears a mask to protect you.

- Make designed masks available and communicate the importance of protecting each other
- Create clear posters, signs, and/or an orientation video to watch before entering museum
- Make the mask a ticket to enter and create opportunities for visitors to customize their mask

## Thoughts from the Museum World

**“When museums and public spaces were shut down, notions of access moved to the forefront of how museums engage with audiences. I really think there’s no room to deny that cultural institutions have to change what they’re doing.”**

Lise Ragbir, Director of the Art Galleries  
at Black Studies, University of Texas

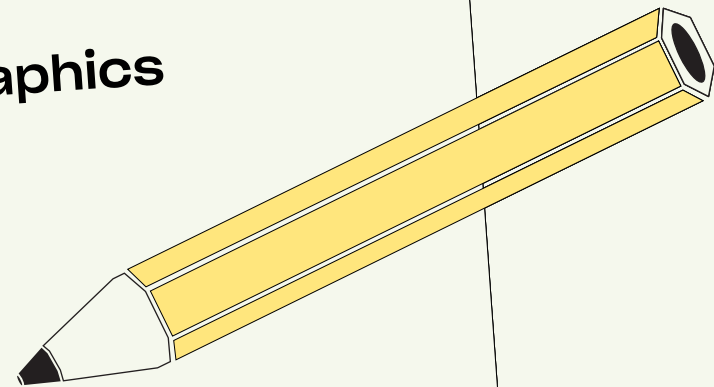
**“Not only have we been forced to grapple with the impact of a global pandemic, we have been forced to confront the reality that, despite gains made in the past 50 years, we are still a nation riven by inequality and racial division.”**

Lonnie G. Bunch III, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution

# Work with a Designer

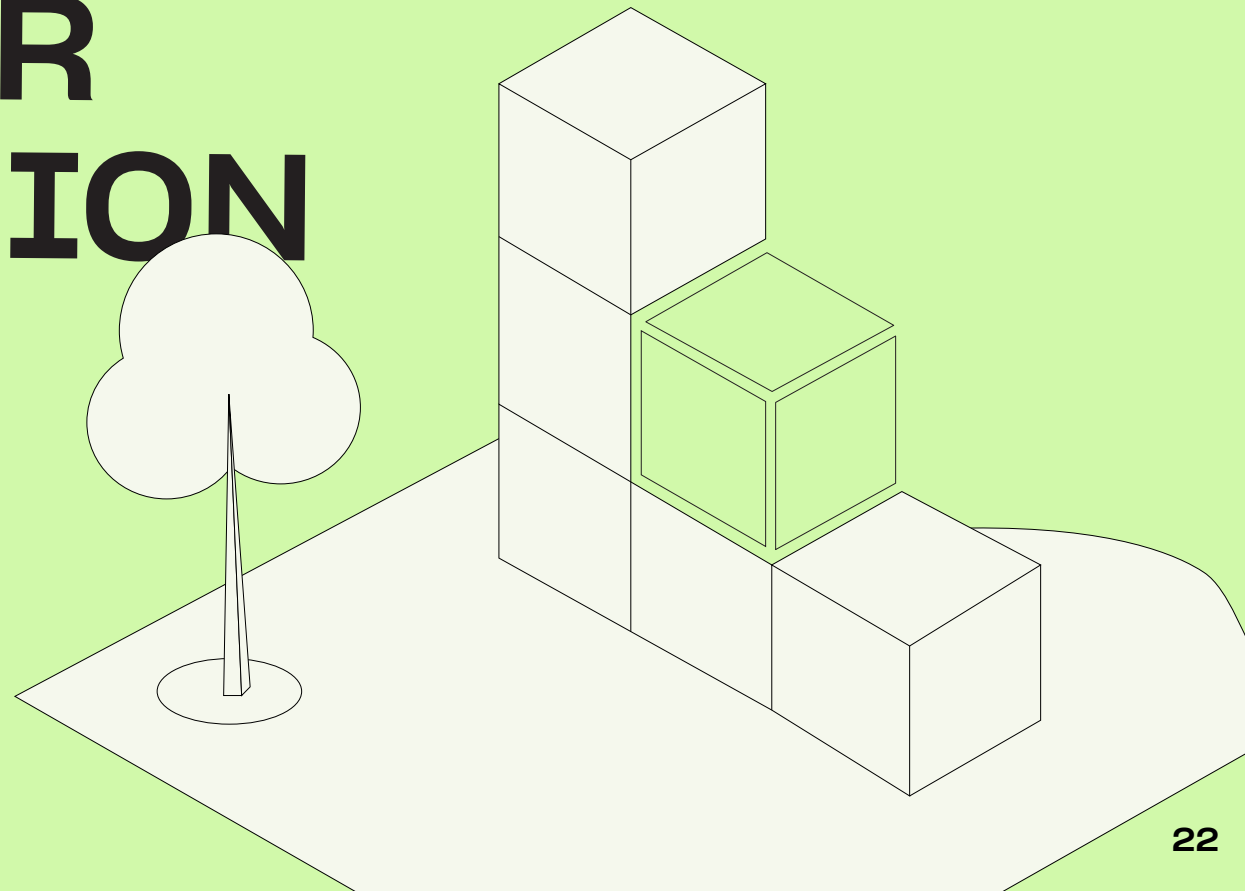
As museums reopen, new ways of engagement will be created and shared with visitors. A designer can help adapt existing exhibits or imagine new exhibits that guide visitors in navigating through familiar spaces in new ways. From signs directing circulation patterns to floor markers encouraging social distancing, design plays an important role in creating a safe and inspiring environment for all.

- **Gallery floor plan analysis and circulation recommendations**
- **Clear signage and wayfinding**
- **Aesthetically pleasing floor graphics for social distancing**
- **Timed entry and contact tracing app**
- **Posters and notices**



Many people have been turning to the outdoors for relief during the pandemic, and museums have an opportunity to shift and meet them there. With indoor capacity limited, thoughtfully designed outdoor exhibitions can provide visitors with a new kind of museum experience.

# OUTDOOR EXHIBITION DESIGN

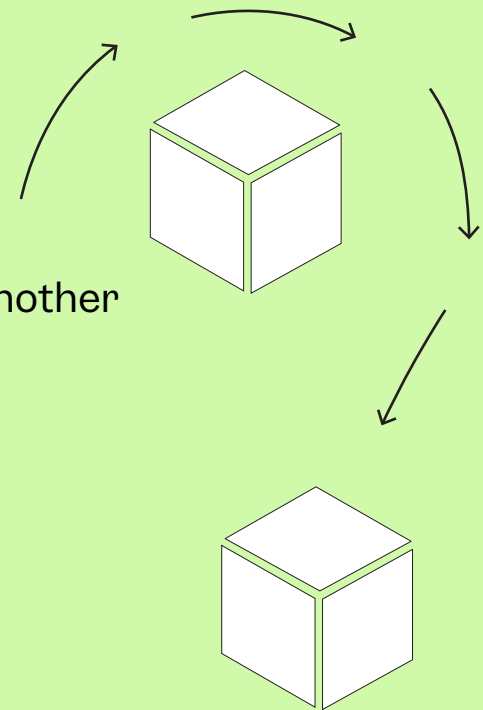


# Bringing the Museum Experience Outdoors

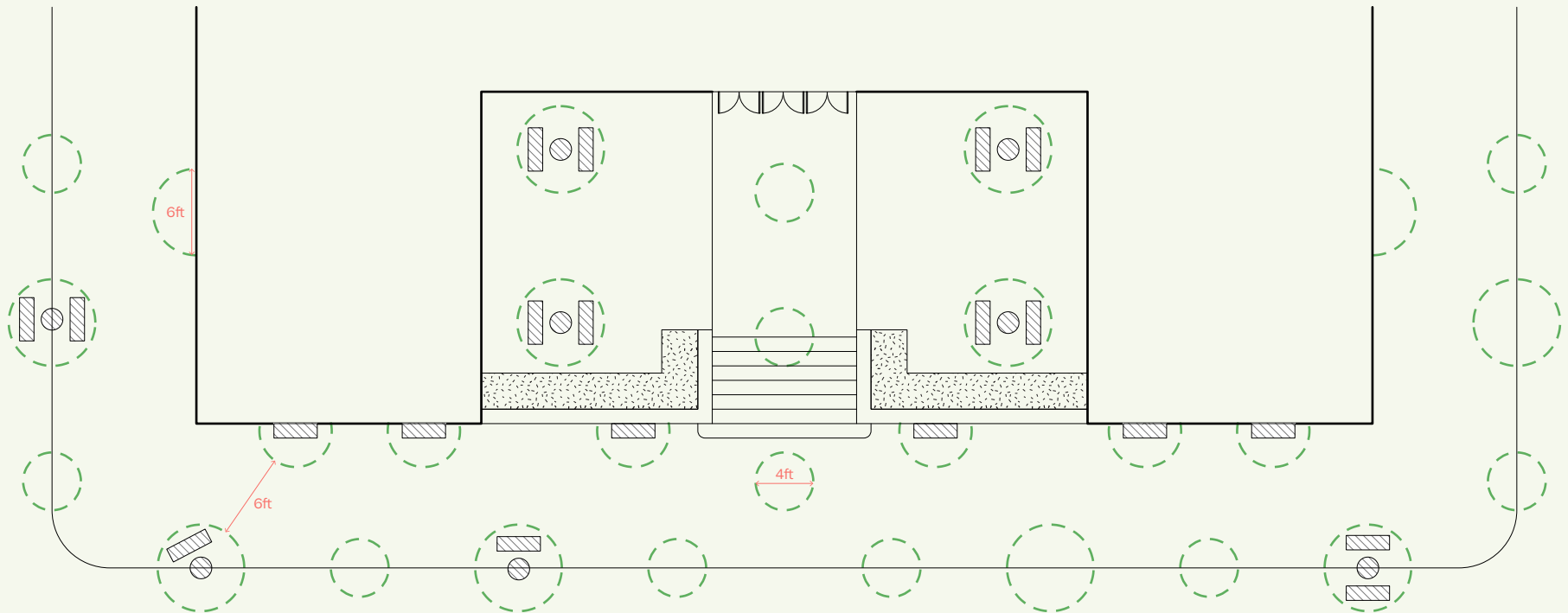
With outdoor exhibits, there is less control of the space than with indoor ones. Outside, people feel more free to wander around, and it can be challenging to guide the flow of visitors without rooms and hallways. Can we design flexible outdoor frameworks that accommodate the display of objects? How do we guide visitors to avoid crowding and while maintaining a meaningful community experience?

## Design Recommendations

- Identify, survey, and reserve a site on the museum grounds or elsewhere
- Establish wide circulation pathways to allow groups to move around one another
- Display multiple exhibit labels for visitors to view from different sides
- Design clearer exhibit labels that are easy to read from afar
- Maintain an exhibition scale that is socially distanced yet manageable
- Share maps that clearly communicate the layout of the exhibit
- Use timed entry to maintain social distance



# Sidewalk and Entrance Sequences

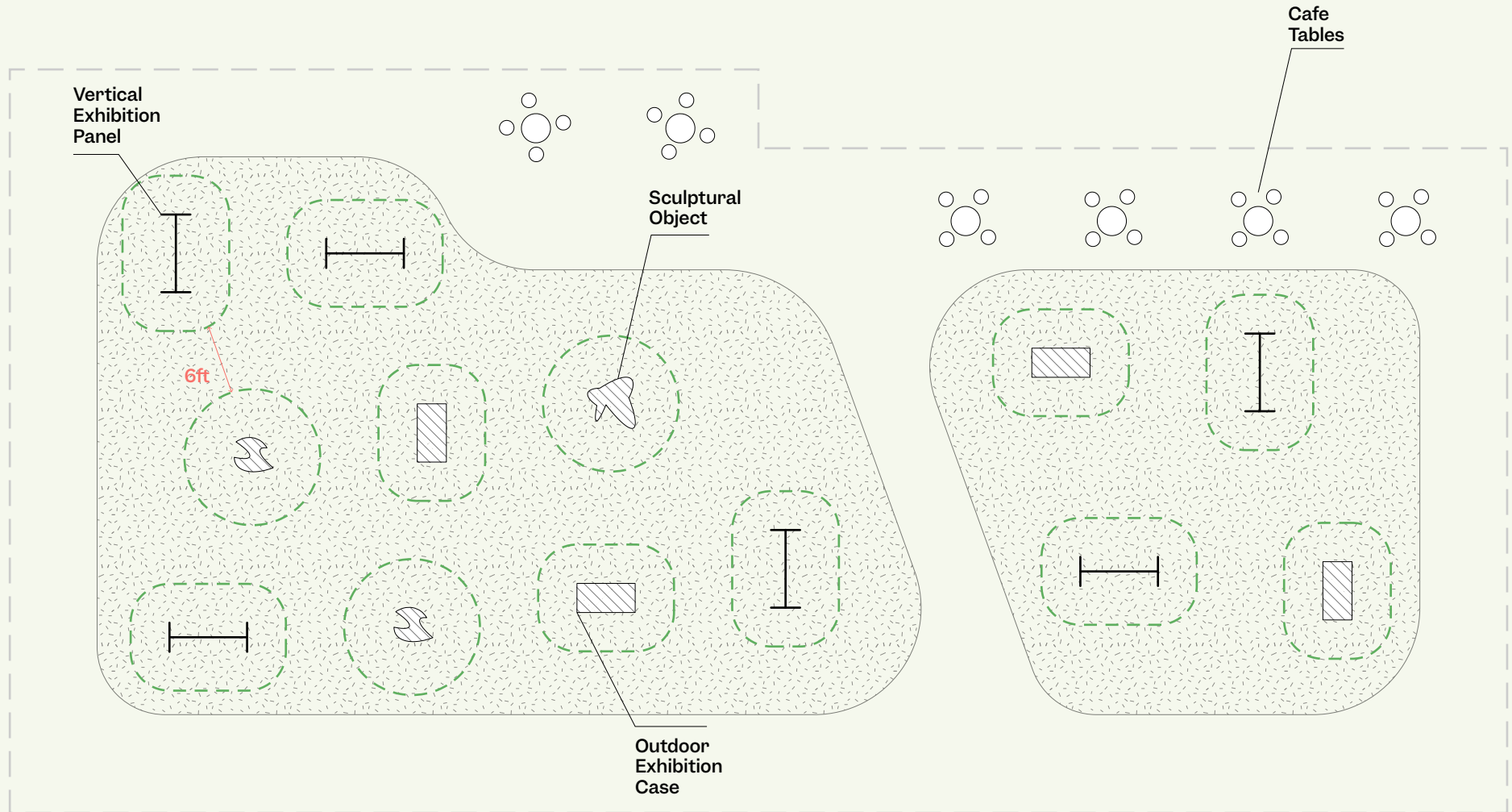


Plan view showing sidewalk and entrance spaces outside a museum

- If possible, designate different locations for museum entry and exit
- Allow 6 ft. of distance between non-affiliated visitors, providing outdoor seating and small tables
- Use a timed-entry or capacity-based system to let people in



# Outdoor Exhibition Experiences



Plan view showing an outdoor exhibition with informational panels, sculptural floor objects, and objects in cases protected by vitrines

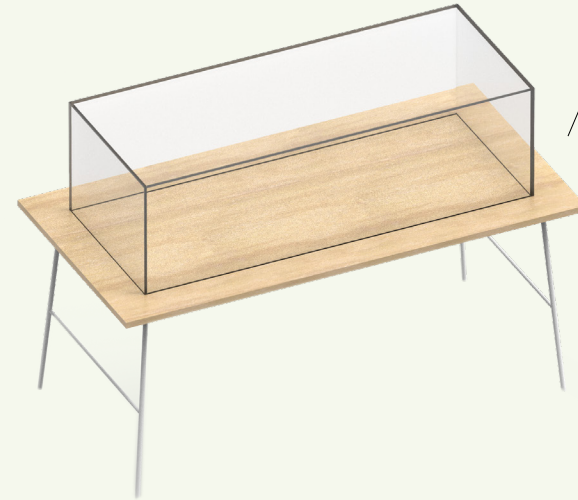
- Establish clear viewing zones that limit the number of groups at any given time
- Allow at least a 6 ft. distance between visitors; and plenty of empty space around the exhibit
- Families or friends can move together with adequate space around the entire group

# Movable and Collapsible Outdoor Frameworks

Exhibit panel with steel A-frames, in different sizes



Collapsible exhibit case with weather-proof plexiglass vitrine



Small, lightweight stool or table



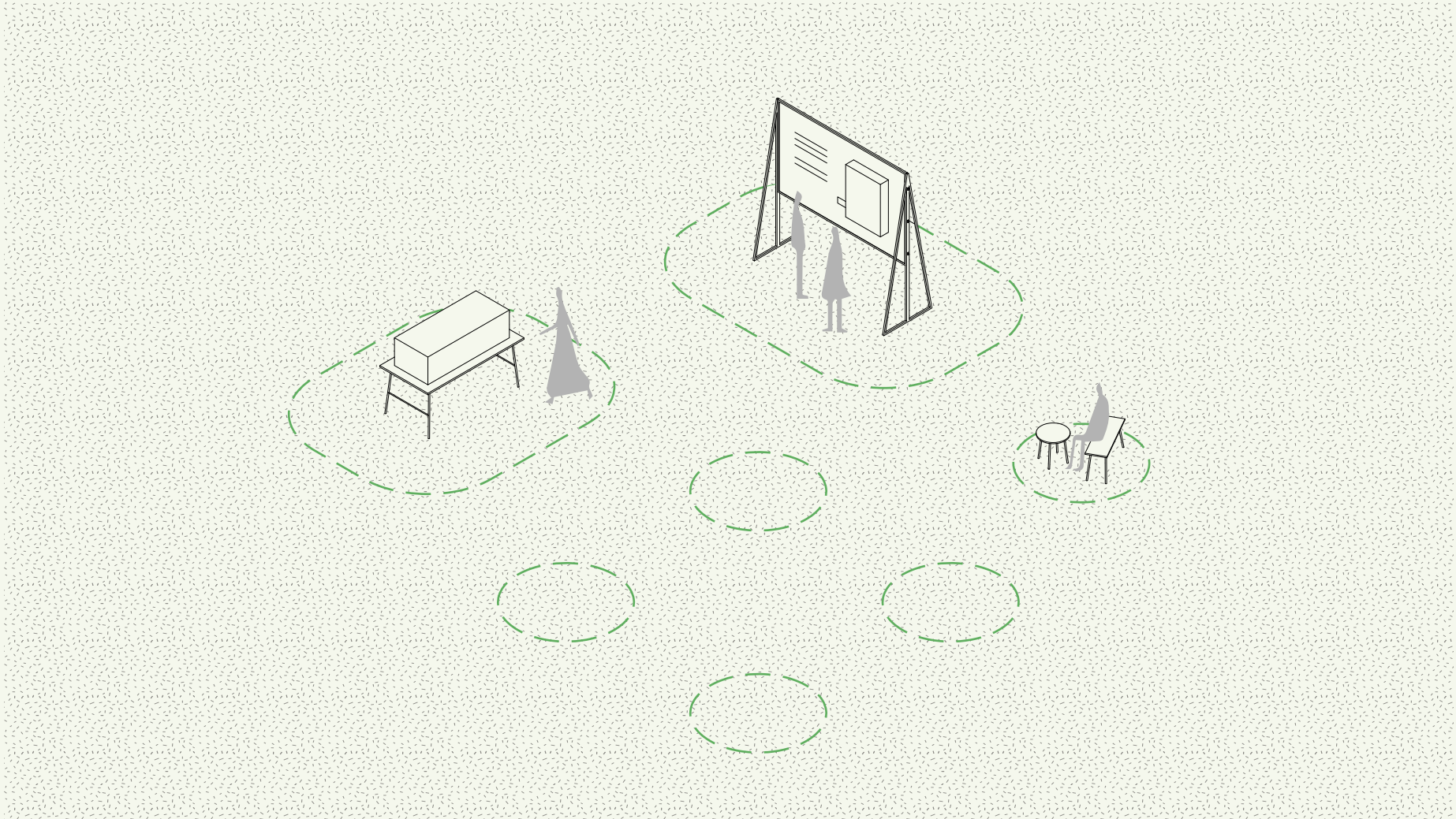
Small, lightweight collapsible bench



Sample outdoor exhibition frameworks that can help create a distinctive, flexible, sturdy, and easy-to-disinfect exhibition

- Design outdoor exhibitions for easy assembly and break-down
- Ensure that exhibits are weather-proof and can withstand accidental damage
- Maintain an inviting, aesthetically pleasing, and inspiring environment

# Social Distancing Outdoors



Axonometric showing outdoor exhibit in an open area such as a park

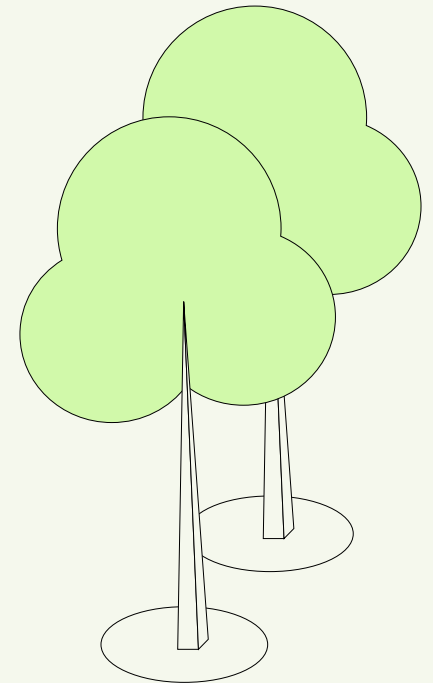
- Define areas of engagement, rest, and recreation within an open space
- Leave plenty of negative space around each element and the entire exhibit
- Engage visitors in multiple ways with a varied set of activities and types of content

# Preparing for Weather Conditions

Weather is one of the key differences between outdoor and indoor exhibits. There needs to be the appropriate infrastructure for visitors experiencing art outdoors. Art pieces, pathways, and signage all need to be weatherproof. Visitors, too, need to be protected from the elements. How might we use design to ensure that visitors have a pleasant experience, regardless of weather?

## Design Recommendations

- Create shaded areas that protect visitors from rain or snow
- Utilize trees and other natural shading on hot days
- Design senior zones that give elderly visitors a space to rest and recharge
- Lay out the exhibition intentionally to reduce rainwater buildup
- Explore weather-resistant materials in exhibit design

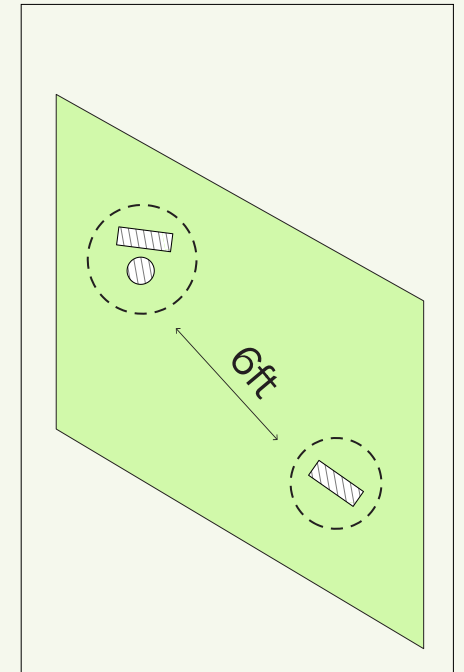


# Caring for Artworks and People Outdoors

Steel beams, bronze statues, granite figures. Because of the durability of outdoor artwork, visitors may feel more inclined to interact with installations. At the same time, some outdoor pieces may be harder to maintain and sanitize. How can we reduce physical contact in an outdoor environment? Many visitors also like to sit on benches or the ground to relax and enjoy the art. How might we ensure that this is done safely?

## Design Recommendations

- Design effective signage to encourage distance from art pieces
- Reserve specific seating for the elderly and others who need it
- Create labels to clearly communicate how seating should be used
- Establish areas for staff to help manage groups as needed
- Create audio guides that can be accessed through an app or website

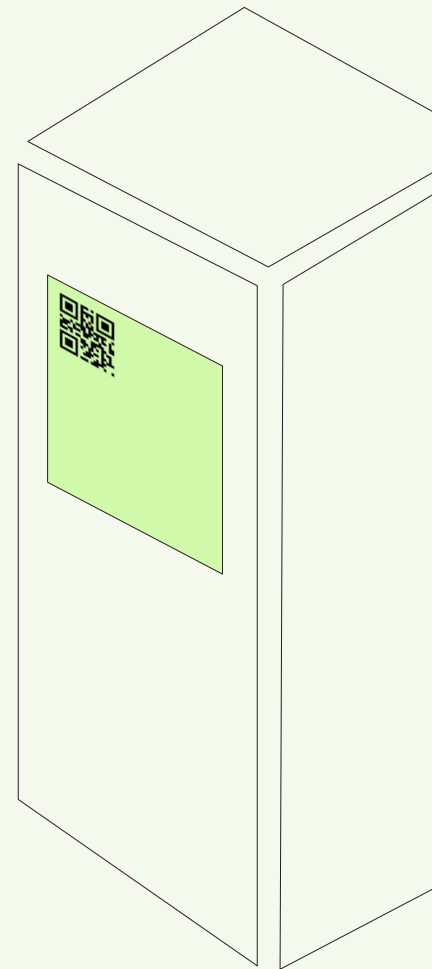


# Clear Communication to the Public

As with indoor exhibits, it can be helpful to inspire a sense of responsibility with regard to outdoor exhibits. Because there may be fewer staff members available to assist outdoors, there should be clear guidelines on how to navigate the space. How can we use signage and digital interventions such as QR codes to share information effectively with visitors?

## Design Recommendations

- Use posters and signage for basic guidelines on the outdoor exhibition
- Display QR codes for visitors to scan for information and a map
- Provide a phone number for questions or concerns
- Allow visitors to submit feedback through their mobile devices



# Thoughts from the Museum World

**“People are going to be coming to our museums to see how artists have responded in the past to the emotional, psychological, social, political realities over different periods of time, and to really be able to live in someone else’s shoes.”**

Jill Medvedow, Director of the  
Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston

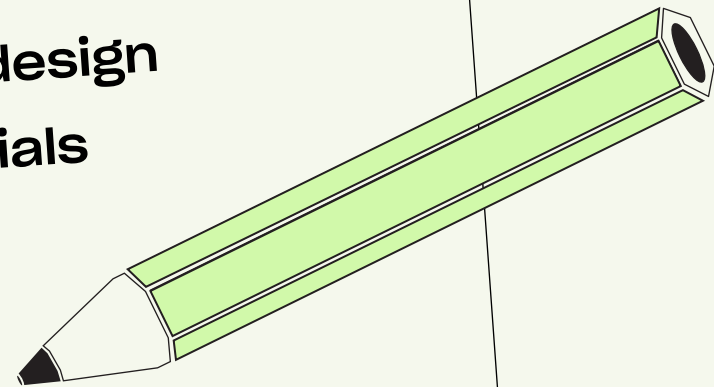
**“Museums are like parks; spaces in which the individual experience can intertwine with the public space of being together. In the coming months, as a society, we face the challenge to find a new, positive balance between personal freedom and care for our relationship with others. ”**

Bart De Baere, Director of M HKA –  
Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp

# Work with a Designer

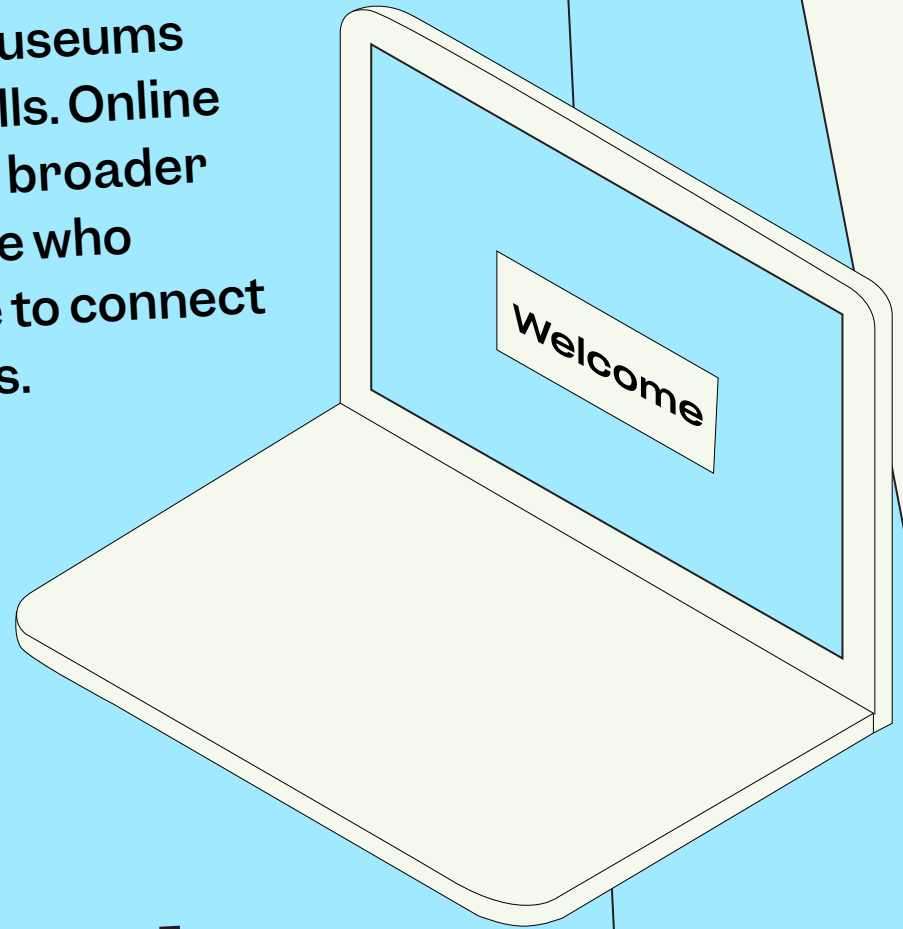
As you imagine a new kind of exhibition to bring your collections, your research, and your resources outdoors, consider partnering with a designer to imagine new ways of creating exhibitions. Designers are uniquely equipped to creatively imagine and thoughtfully engage with the challenges and possibilities in the creation of outdoor experiences.

- **Site survey and measurements**
- **Exhibition visual identity and graphic design**
- **Spatial design and circulation**
- **Outdoor panel and casework design**
- **Public communications materials**





By designing an online experience, museums can make an impact beyond their walls. Online exhibitions allow museums to reach broader audiences, increase access for those who cannot visit in-person, and continue to connect meaningfully with their communities.



# VIRTUAL EXHIBITION DESIGN

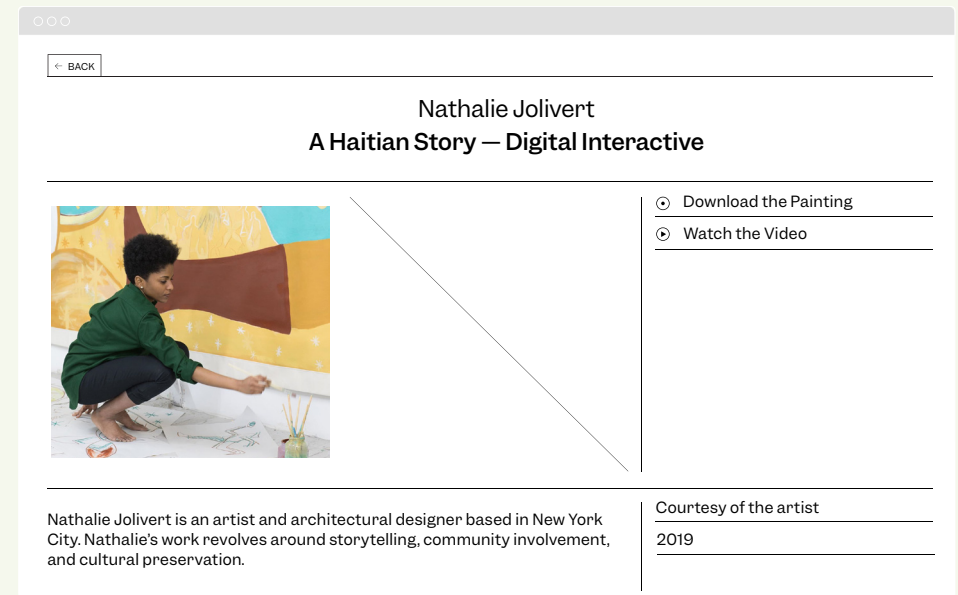
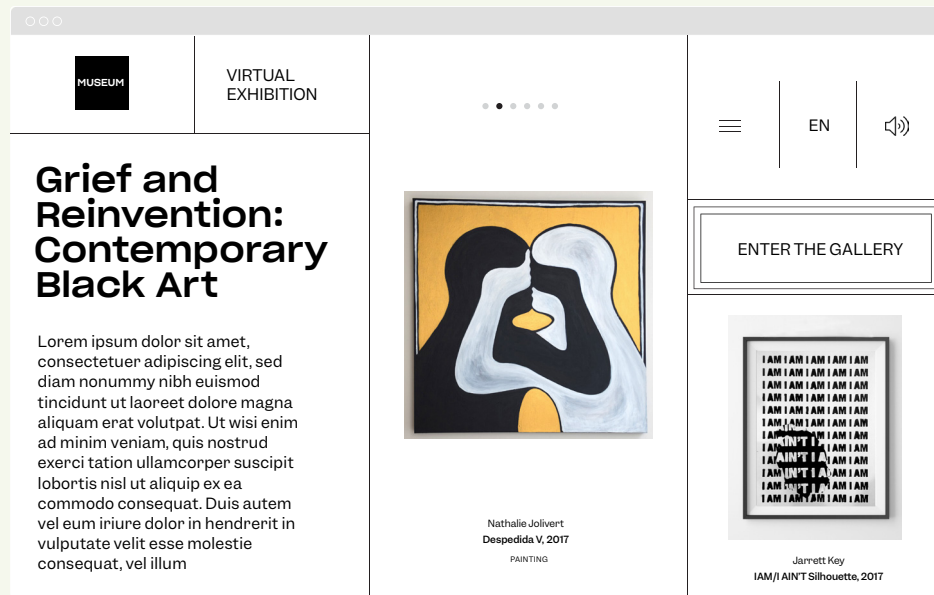
# Expanding the Museum's Capacity Online

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of museums in our communities. However, some community members, especially those in vulnerable populations, may be hesitant to return to public spaces like museums even after reopening. Virtual exhibits can increase accessibility, allowing anyone to engage with collections without the need for physical travel. How can we create online exhibitions that are as impactful as physical ones?

## Design Recommendations

- Design online exhibits that encourage visitors to explore as they would in a museum
- Select topics that are relevant to this moment in time
- Take virtual tours of museum collections
- Use multimedia storytelling to annotate and enhance pieces from existing collections
- Allow visitors to curate and share exhibits and to save their favorites

# Creating Immersive Online Exhibitions



Sample website screens showing an online exhibition

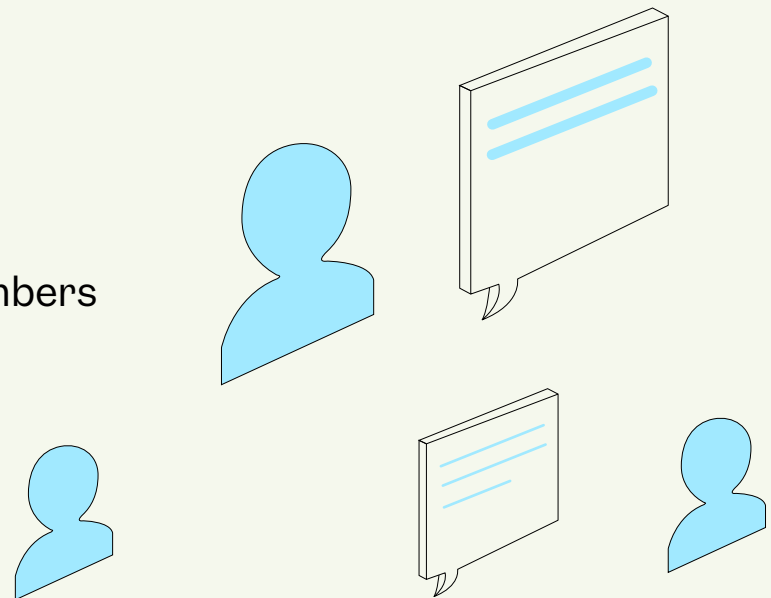
- Imagine creative and intuitive ways to activate the online experience with new technology
- Create custom web experiences with the same rigor as designing physical exhibitions
- Provide opportunities for visitor interaction, feedback, sharing, and collaborative creation

# Hosting Virtual Events

As social distancing has limited the capacity for in-person events, people have embraced virtual community-building. Talks about art, history, public health, and inclusion can be joined from anywhere, without the usual barriers to entry. Museums can play a role in leading and facilitating these conversations. How might online speaker series and discussions inspire insightful reflection within communities?

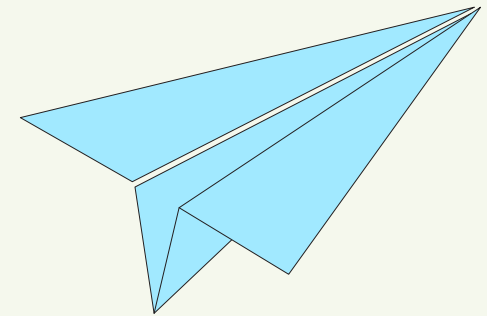
## Design Recommendations

- Organize talks with a diverse range of speakers
- Create forums to discuss complex themes
- Encourage conversation between community members
- Set up classes centered around helpful topics



# Staying Connected and Engaged

Having an online platform allows museums to engage with audiences in new, exciting ways. Articles, videos, and podcasts are mediums for creative content that can be explored further. As cultural and educational centers, museums have an opportunity to establish themselves as leaders in their communities and create spaces for public discourse. How might online tools enable museums to communicate meaningfully with community members?



## Design Recommendations

- Design an engaging newsletter for your audiences
- Share meaningful content and articles, relating collections to the current time
- Maintain a meaningful social media presence and community
- Establish a voice through podcasts and videos
- Amplify the work of museum professionals and community members

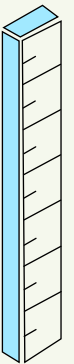
# Developing an Online Store

An online store can be a useful revenue generator to support your other work. It can also create excitement for your exhibits and programs.

People have been unable to visit non-essential retail stores, and have turned to online shopping for many of their needs. With online stores, museums can provide visitors with access to products inspired by their collections. How might we create online gift shops that align with the unique personality of each museum?

## Design Recommendations

- Produce prints, books, and other merchandise connected to exhibition content
- Curate shop offerings to express the specific identity of the museum
- Understand why your collections resonate with audiences, and cater accordingly
- Design artistic and functional gifts that express important cultural values



## Thoughts from the Museum World

**“One of our goals has been to provide information and data to help navigate the world. This [online] portal is a perfect example of where the work is headed. It’s a wonderful way to connect to the larger world. More people can access [our digital program] than can come to the museum.”**

Spencer Crew, Interim Director of the National Museum  
of African American History and Culture

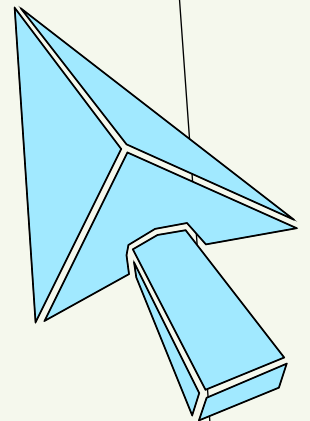
**“When all the discussion is just about all the boxes we have to check to ensure security and safety, sometimes we will be moving away from another set of much more emotional needs. The need to be encountering objects with others.”**

Arthur Cohen, CEO of LaPlaca Cohen

# Work with a Designer

Regardless of when museums decide to reopen and which safety measures can be implemented, audiences have already become much more comfortable with accessing content and resources online. We recommend thinking of your digital presence with the same care and consideration you give to your physical location. A well-designed website can help reach larger audiences and communicate values of inclusion and connectedness.

- **Making collections available online**
- **Curated storytelling**
- **Creating a digital events portal**
- **Timed entry reservations**
- **Online store**





# Thank you for reading.

## Please feel to reach out with any questions or feedback.

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