# **National Federation of the Blind & The Museum of the Blind People's Movement Understandings Report**

**April 28, 2023**

## Executive Summary

This document serves to establish a baseline understanding of The Museum of the Blind People’s Movement guest experience. It includes top-level summaries of benchmarking, relevant data, and metrics used to support concept development, as well as specific goals and metrics for success to be used giving forward.

## Museum Summary

The goal of The Museum of the Blind People’s Movement, as defined by the National Federation of the Blind, is to provide the guest with the opportunity to explore the advancements, struggles, and successes of blind people as individuals and as a movement. The museum will facilitate understanding of the past; stimulate awareness of the present; and encourage respect, determination, action, and equity for the future.

Fellow museums and other cultural organizations will look to The Museum of the Blind People’s Movement for best practices around inclusive design and accessibility. The museum will serve as a model for how to welcome the widest possible audience.

Additionally, it is understood that this museum will be the custodian of intangible subject matter such as stories and oral histories of the blind, as well as tangible subject matter, such as objects and artifacts central to the experience of blind people within the United States and beyond.

The museum will have a target annual attendance of 15,000 guests per year, averaging approximately 60 guests a day. The Museum will be free to the public and located in the Riverside neighborhood, situated between Federal Hill, Locust Point, and Port Covington.

The Museum of the Blind People’s Movement’s comprehensive Planning Documentation created by Prime Access Consulting in July 2022 sets the basic parameters for governance and the physical space and outlines the mission, vision, and values of the museum.

## Museum Experience Goals

The Museum of the Blind People’s Movement will be different - in content, inclusive accessibility, multimodal storytelling, and in its relationship with guests. The experience will be a result of conversations large and small, creative sessions, workshops, interviews, research, planning, testing, learning and unlearning, and cumulative decades of professional practice redefining museum and cultural experiences.

The museum experience will be welcoming, acknowledging that guests are all on their own personal journeys. It will disrupt expectations, inspire and redefine understanding, and celebrate people across the full spectrum of experiences.

The following four goals will serve as the touchpoints for the development of museum experiences. Internally, when making choices about what could or should be included, we can ask ourselves “Does this help us achieve one or more of these goals?” Externally, when asked “What makes this experience different?” we can answer with these goals.

1. **Dispel myths** and demystify assumptions and cliches surrounding blindness
2. **Empower action**, advocacy, and self-awareness in a safe and supportive environment
3. **Model radical accessibility** throughout the entire experience, a live state of testing, adjusting, and co-creating with a full spectrum of guests
4. **Normalize universal human emotions** like fear, joy, awkwardness, and curiosity

The conversations and benchmarking that defined the above goals also illustrated expectations for what would not be acceptable or desirable. With the clear and powerful goals of this museum, there is value in being equally clear in articulating what the experience is not.

The experience will not:

1. Be exclusively for blind people, avoiding visually compelling spaces
2. Seek to replicate or play-act the blind experience
3. Focus exclusively on NFB history and advocacy
4. Showcase typical shining star stories, such as Helen Keller
5. Use guilt or “talking at” guests to convey content
6. Provoke sympathy over empathy

## Museum Experience Outcomes

Outcomes are the ways by which the goal(s) are achieved. They serve as metrics to define and measure success. If the museum experiences realize these outcomes, then the goals will be accomplished. Specific gallery, modality, and user-type tactics will be developed to support each outcome. Outcomes are almost always an internal tool to define, build, and sustain guest experiences.

The museum narrative will be organized into thematic galleries using multi-model techniques and affordances. Each gallery has specific outcomes including, but not limited to the following (note: all themes are currently under active development):

1. Theme: Introduction or Orientation
   1. Outcome: Acknowledge the full spectrum of guests’ experiences
2. Theme: Born and Becoming
   1. Outcome: Blow up low expectations of blindness
3. Theme: The Blind People’s Movement
   1. Outcome: Build respect for human agency
4. Theme Option 1: Expectations of blindness Theme Option 2:What did you expect?
   1. Outcome: Disturb the public perception of blindness
5. Theme: Taking up space
   1. Outcome: Inspire coming back for connection
6. Theme: Discovering potential
   1. Outcome: Celebrate the role of blind culture and innovation in daily life

## Documentation and Benchmarking

### Stakeholder Interviews

Interviews previously conducted by Prime Access Consulting were reviewed and integrated into the Discovery Phase to inform themes, goals, and outcomes. These included:

1. Trisha Kulkarni-National Association of Blind Students President
2. Rebecca Hoffberger-American Visionary Arts Museum Founder
3. Kathryn Webster-President of tenBroek Memorial Fund
4. Dan Goldstein-NFB Lawyer
5. Cayte Mendez-President of Blind Educators, Chairs National Scholarship
6. Carlton Walker-President of Parents of Blind Children
7. James Gashel-Longterm NFB Member, lawyer
8. Barbara Cheadle-Parents of Blind Children division
9. Georgina Kleege-University of Berkley Disability Studies Chair, writer, art and blindness expert
10. Kevin Day-Lead architect on last NFB renovation

Additional interviews to be conducted by TWG include:

1. Local NFB Chapter members / Baltimore & DC area and the greater Maryland area
2. NFB Facilities Manager
3. National Organization of the Blind - Board of Educators
4. National Organization of Parents with Blind Children, member(s)
5. National Association of Blind Students
6. NFB BELL Academy, staff
7. Neighborhood association leaders, as recommended by NFB
8. Representative from the local public school system
9. Representative from The National Great Blacks in Wax museum
10. Representative from the American Visionary Museum, from education or outreach
11. Representative from the Maryland School for the Blind
12. Representative from Port Discovery
13. Representative from National Aquarium
14. Representative from Baltimore Museum of Industry

Updated documentation will be provided upon the completion of this second round of stakeholder interviews.

### Materials Review

Thorough and insightful documentation was provided by Prime Access Consulting and the National Federation of the Blind to support a comprehensive understanding of the history, context, and considerations related to the creation of The Museum of the Blind People’s Movement.

The list of documents shared and reviewed includes the following:

1. NFB Museum Planning Documentation, 2022.07.01
2. NFB Style Guide - 2020 Refresh, 2020.05.19
3. NFB Oral History collection of recordings, 2022.07.12
4. NFB Museum Membership complete survey results, 2022.03.16
5. PAC Stakeholder Interview collection, 2022.03.17

### Workshops and Creative Sessions

As part of the Content Development Phase TWG facilitated the following workshops and creative sessions

1. Project Kick Off and Site Visit on March 29th, 2023
   1. NFB Attendees: Anil Lewis, Gary Wunder, Patti Chang, Carol Castellano, Nichole Chrissis, Denice Brown, Danielle McCann, Mark Riccobono, Sara Luna
   2. PAC Attendees: Sina Bahram, Corey Timpson, Robin Marquis, Ryan-Ashley Anderson, Maria Braswell
   3. Thinkwell Attendees: Anna Altschwager, Cynthia Sharpe, Samantha McIntyre, Sara Beil, Paige Luke, Michael Finney
2. Virtual Charrette on April 20th, 2023
   1. NFB Attendees: Anil Lewis, Gary Wunder, Danielle McCann, Nichole Chrissis, Lou Ann Blake, Mark Riccobono
   2. PAC Attendees: Sina Bahram, Corey Timpson, Robin Marquis, Maria Braswell, Ryan-Ashley Anderson
   3. Thinkwell Attendees: Anna Altschwager, Cynthia Sharpe, Lacy Campbell, Mariko Samejima, Paige Luke, Samantha McIntyre, Sara Beil, Zachary Bennett
3. In-Person Charrette on May 11th, 2023 (Upcoming)
4. In-Person Charrette on July 18th, 2023 (Upcoming)