

Science Centre Impact Project

An initiative supported by science centres and museums in APEC economies, in cooperation with the international networks of ASPAC, ASTC and Red-POP

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Saturday 13 May 2006 – Day 4 of the ASPAC 06 Conference

TACKLING CHALLENGING TOPICS

9.00 am – 10.30 am	<p>PLENARY SESSION</p> <p>Introduction to the APEC Science Centre Impact Project</p> <p>Panel Presentation and Discussion: Tackling Challenging Topics</p> <p>More and more science centres and museums are developing ways to engage their visitors with new breakthroughs in science and technology, with controversial S&T based issues, or with intrinsically complex and difficult topics. This additional focus has the potential to strengthen our relevancy, not only for our visitors, but also for our governments and other stakeholders. The presentations and discussions will provide valuable input to the APEC Science Centre Impact Project which has identified this area as a priority area to research best practice.</p> <p>Panel Speakers</p> <p>Dr Emlyn Koster, President & CEO, Liberty Science Centre, New Jersey, USA Ms Lesley Lewis, CEO, Ontario Science Centre, Toronto, Canada Dr Fiona Cameron, Research Fellow, University of Western Sydney, Australia</p>
11.00 am – 11.30 am	<p>PLENARY SESSION</p> <p>A challenging topic for the future – what can science centres do for International Polar Year (2007–08)?</p>
11.30 am – 1.00 pm	<p>ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS</p> <p>Join a small group to find out what other centres are doing – what has worked well and what has not? What innovative solutions have helped in overcoming hurdles in this area? How might lessons from these experiences be applied to International Polar Year activities?</p>
1.00 pm – 2.00 pm	LUNCH
2.00 pm – 3.00 pm	<p>PLENARY SESSION</p> <p>Hear summaries of all the group discussions from the previous session, and contribute your ideas on research priorities for the APEC Science Centre Impact Project – what information on the impact of science centres is most important for your institution?</p> <p>Where to next? – concluding remarks by APEC Project Leader</p>

This program will be followed by the ASPAC 2006 conference closing ceremony and closing reception.

Tackling Challenging Topics: Abstracts of Panel Presentations

Dr Fiona Cameron

Research Fellow, Centre for Cultural Research, University of Western Sydney, Parramatta Campus, Sydney NSW, Australia

Museums and science centres exist in an academic, cultural and social context of contest and controversy. A long-established practice of exhibiting 'the facts', 'truth', or unproblematic conceptions of science and technology is no longer wholly sustainable in an environment where the self-evidence of all these things is under question. Topics of global importance that challenge, upset, intrigue and attract are now legitimate areas for investigation. Fiona will examine the potential roles and positioning of museums and science centres around contentious topics and sensitive issues, drawing on qualitative and quantitative audience research findings from the international research project *Exhibitions as Contested Sites – the roles of museums in contemporary society* (funded by the Australian Research Council). Key questions to be considered include: What is the role of institutions, such as science centres and museums, as information resources? Should they act as provocateurs, leaders of public opinion and transformative spaces to challenge and change views? Or are they safe civic places for the exploration of a range of views? Can institutions take on a social activist's role, to assist in the resolution of issues on a personal or political level or should they be places for non-challenging social experiences?

Ms Lesley Lewis

Director General and CEO, Ontario Science Centre, Toronto ON, Canada

In 2004, the Ontario Science Centre (OSC) decided to bring *Body Worlds 2: the Exhibition of Real Human Bodies* to Toronto. Building on the experience of colleagues in Los Angeles and Chicago, the OSC entered into discussions with a broad array of community representatives – religious leaders, ethicists, academics, medical and professionals – to determine the best way of relating the exhibition to a diverse community such as Toronto. Lesley will speak about the rationale for selecting the exhibition, the community consultation process, the experience of hosting the exhibition from 30 Sept 2005 to 26 February 2006 and the long term impact the exhibition will have on the OSC. Included in the discussion will be a link between the *Body Worlds* exhibition and those elements of *Agents of Change*, the OSC's current transformation initiative, which also relate to potentially controversial subject matter.

Dr Emlyn Koster

President & CEO, Liberty Science Center, Jersey City NJ, USA

In the museum field, 'challenging' tends to mean controversial, an unusual community relations and marketing effort, and either a box-office boost, blockbuster or a bust. The world of today and tomorrow is full of challenging topics in the interactions between science, technology and society. There are lessons to be learned from the currently occasional readiness of science centres to tackle challenging topics that would increase both our relevancy and sustainability as institutions in service to society.